

# Narada Bhakti Sutras



*Swami Bhuteshananda*

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# NĀRADA BHAKTI SŪTRAS

Swami Bhuteshananda



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## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Swami Bhuteshanandaji, the 12th President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, was loved and respected for his saintly personality, his profound scholarship, and his lucid exposition of the scriptures. As a Vice-President, and later as President of the Order, he travelled extensively to propagate the message of Vedanta as propounded and practically demonstrated for the modern world through the lives and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. He visited the Vedanta Centre of Japan ten times, staying there for about a week each time. It was during these visits that he gave informal discourses on the *Nārada Bhakti Sūtras* to a group of about 75 Japanese students of Vedanta. Many of them who attended his classes all the ten years, later taped, transcribed, and sent the scripts to Belur Math. The devotees of Japan not being well conversant with English and also with Indian religious traditions, Revered Maharaj's talks were conditioned

by the circumstances there. Though these talks were published serially in *Vedanta*, the journal of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, U.K., Revered Maharaj initially rejected the idea of bringing them out in a book form, for he felt that the lectures were superficial. Impressed by reading the lectures in *Vedanta*, many, however, persisted in their request to Revered Maharaj to publish them as a book. When he was in the hospital in 1998, Revered Maharaj heard the entire script read out to him, and suggested corrections at some places. This editing continued till his last day at Belur Math. When he was hospitalized on the 5th August 1998, from where he never returned, Revered Maharaj was dictating the English translation of the aphorisms. The last aphorism he translated was the 62nd. Subsequently, the remaining 20 aphorisms were translated using Revered Maharaj's own words from his commentary by one of his trusted assistants in literary activities.

This book is now before the reader. What Revered Maharaj felt to be 'superficial' has appeared to us to be a work of great value. The readers, we trust, will find a study of this book highly rewarding.

1 May 1999

PUBLISHER

of God means is difficult. The reason is we do not know as to what kind of relationship we should have with God since we do not have any experience of that sort of relationship as we have with people here. We have had contact and can be perceived through our senses. That, however, is not of that type. The other reason is that we do not begin with realization of God. It is all more of imagination than reality when we think of love of God. Now we feel that imagination cannot be entertained without the basis of realization or experience. Therefore, their realization in our concept.

## INTRODUCTION

How to develop love for God? This is an important question. The answer is both easy and difficult. Easy because we often hear that if we pray to God, offer worship to Him, and try to lead a pure and good life, we can have love of God. Though it looks so simple, it is easier said than done. When we try to put these ideas into practice, we find great difficulty.

### ***What is love of God?***

First of all, it is difficult for us to understand what love of God means. We have an idea of love in our relation toward earthly things and living beings. We love our parents, children, and so on. The husband loves his wife and the wife, her husband. There is then the love for wealth, reputation, power, and such other things. We can understand all these types of love. But to understand what love

of God means is difficult. The reason is, we do not know as to what kind of relationship we should have with God since we do not have any experience of that sort of relationship as we have with people here. Everything we love is concrete and can be perceived through our senses. God, however, is not of that type. The other reason is that we do not begin with realization of God. It is all more of imagination than reality when we think of love of God. Now, we feel that imagination cannot be entertained without the basis of realization or experience. Therefore there is difficulty in our concept of love of God.

### *How to develop love for God?*

The difficulty is obvious, but then, those who have experience in this show us the way we can achieve the goal. For instance, Sri Ramakrishna says: 'A devotee must assume toward God a particular attitude.'<sup>1</sup> One must think of God as one's father, or mother, or child, and so forth. That sort of superimposition can be of some help. We have experience of love for all these earthly relations, and that is to be superimposed on God. It is said in the scriptures: 'You are my Father, my Mother, my Friend, and my Beloved. You are my wealth, my scholarship, my everything.'<sup>2</sup> Human beings can have that sort of conception

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1. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 957.

2. त्वमेव माता च पिता त्वमेव, त्वमेव बन्धुश्च सखा त्वमेव ।  
त्वमेव विद्या द्रविणं त्वमेव, त्वमेव सर्वं मम देवदेव ॥



with regard to God: that is, to think that He is our everything in this world. In the beginning, however, it becomes only a sort of preparation—a sort of imagination. Later on, with the gradual deepening of feeling, this very imagination becomes realization. What is imagination today will become realization tomorrow. That is how love of God can be cultivated. This love of God is called *bhakti* or devotion, and the path to attain God through *bhakti* is called Bhakti Yoga. In the *bhakti* aphorisms (*sūtras*) of Narada, we find that God is not defined fully: 'This devotion is the supreme love towards something or somebody.'

### *Sadhana to develop love for God*

The devotional path is not easy because nothing great can be achieved easily. Is it so easy to attain God who is the most precious possession in life? Practice is necessary. As Sri Ramakrishna used to say, one has to 'repeat God's name and sing His glories, and keep holy company'.<sup>1</sup> These are preparatory steps to devotion. Ritualistic worship, prayer and so on are called *vaidhi bhakti* or the way of devotion as prescribed by the scriptures. Developing love of God through preparatory devotion can be likened to children playing with dolls. When little girls play with their dolls, some of the dolls become their sons and daughters, and thus they establish a relationship with them. They feed them, dress them, put them to bed, and even cry if they break.

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1. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 81.

We will have to continue our preparatory devotion till we feel God's living presence. Even though we may assume some relationship with God and try to pray, worship and so on, there are several obstacles in the path—both internal and external. There are internal problems like lust, greed, etc., while lack of proper place, help, cooperation, and so on are external obstacles.

### ***Obstacles in the path and their removal***

Sri Ramakrishna said that all problems cease when love dawns in the mind of a devotee. The tiger of love swallows lust, anger, jealousy, and so on. In other words, intense love for God removes all obstacles from the path of God-realization. We say that there are terrible obstacles in this world. Such obstacles, however, are not in the world but they are in the mind. When love of God dawns in the mind all obstacles disappear.

How can we achieve this intense love for God? It can be achieved by regularly serving God with love and sincerity. The mind of one who leads a pure life gradually becomes tinged with divine love. Then, no worldly obstacles can stop that person's growth, as household duties could not stop the *gopis* from going to meet Sri Krishna. The *Bhāgavata* gives this example. While the *gopis* were busy with their household work they heard the sound of Krishna's flute coming from the forest. That call of God was irresistible. The *gopis* immediately forgot their work and rushed towards Krishna. The very call lifted their minds

from their household duties. It is mentioned in the *Bhāgavata* that once a gopi was confined to her room. She deliberated and realized that her body was the obstacle preventing her from going to see Krishna. So, she gave up her body and united herself with the Lord in a subtle body. Even her body could not stop that union! That is called real love.

Sincere love for God removes all obstacles from the life of a devotee. One day, M., the recorder of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, asked the Master as to what one should do if the wife becomes an obstacle to his spiritual growth. The Master told M. to convince such a wife initially. What if she threatens by speaking things like committing suicide? The Master said: 'Give up such a wife if she proves an obstacle in the way of spiritual life.'<sup>1</sup> Later on, Sri Ramakrishna added: 'If a man has sincere love for God, then all come under his control—the king, wicked persons, and his wife.'<sup>2</sup>

### *Sri Ramakrishna's suggestions*

Sri Ramakrishna gave a few suggestions so that the devotees may be free from obstacles in the spiritual path. One is prayer. If one prays to God sincerely, God removes all obstacles and makes everything favourable. The Master's second suggestion is to have the company of holy

1. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 126.

2. *Ibid.*

persons. He is a holy man who lifts others' minds to a higher realm of spirituality. Holy persons are exemplars of holiness. Their lives vindicate the existence of God; otherwise, human beings could not have faith in spiritual life. The third suggestion is to live in a solitary place occasionally. Sri Ramakrishna gave an example: Trapped by the fisherman's net, some fish hide in mud and think that they are safe. They do not realize that the fisherman will slowly pull the net and catch them, and they will lose their life. Just as fish are caught in the net, our souls are bound by the world. So, we should go into solitude and think about the goal of human life. If we experience that the world is not real and is full of misery, we will not be attracted to it. Spiritual disciplines remove our attachment for the world and create in us a longing for God. Longing is the only thing needed. 'Longing is like the rosy dawn. After the dawn out comes the sun. Longing is followed by the vision of God,'<sup>1</sup> says Sri Ramakrishna.

### *Devotional path is for all*

Lastly, one must remember that this path of devotion is for everyone. Anybody can practice it. Even the vilest man can start with it, and gradually improvement will take place. The nature of that love is that it not only purifies the person who loves, but the conception of his or her object of love also undergoes change. That purification, or that

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1. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 83.

transformation, goes on from the lowest rung of the ladder to the highest. This is the beauty of the path of devotion.

### *The Narada Bhakti Sutras*

The *Narada Bhakti Sutras* is a simple text on devotion. It contains 84 sutras or aphorisms. The date and authorship of the book are not quite clear, though it is considered that sage Narada is the author of this book. Sage Narada is well known for his devotion. Even Bhagavan Sri Krishna himself extols the qualities of Narada in the Śāntiparva of *Mahābhārata*. The Lord repeatedly says there that Narada is worshipped everywhere, by everyone. Though not much is known about the life of Narada, the *Bhāgavata* (1.5 and 1.6) gives a brief account of his childhood. About the father of Narada, we do not find any mention made; but, it is said that his mother was employed in a brahmin's house as a maidservant. It was a time when many saints had gathered in that brahmin's house as his guests and Narada was serving them. Narada looked after the comforts of the guests and also listened to their discourses. The guests also were very pleased with Narada as he attended on them with much devotion, though only a boy of five. So they taught him the path of devotion.

In the meantime, Narada's mother died of snake-bite. Early one morning, while it was still dark, she was going to milk the cows of the brahmin. On the way, she was bitten by a snake, and expired. After the passing away of his mother, who was the only earthly link with whom Narada

was connected, he felt completely freed of his obligations, and left the house of the brahmin. He retired into a forest and there yearned and prayed for the vision of God. God appeared before him and Narada was very happy to see God in his vision. But soon, the vision disappeared. Narada was sorry to be deprived of that experience. As he was crying and yearning for its repetition, he heard the voice of God telling him: 'You will not see Me anymore in this life. Now that you have had My vision, your life will be full of joy; go about singing the glory of God.' Thereafter, Narada moved around the world, singing God's name and teaching people the path of devotion, or the path of love. This is what gave rise to the *Narada Bhakti Sutras*.

What is a sutra? A sutra is an aphoristic or cryptic statement, which contains a vast idea within a few words. There is a verse in the *Padma Purāna*<sup>1</sup> which says that a sutra is one which, in a few words of no ambiguity or repetition, expresses in gist form a vast idea; such a sutra cannot be substituted nor does it contain any fault. A sutra also means a thread—a thread that binds the entire text together. Extremely important spiritual ideals were written in sutra form so that they could be easily memorized and retained for the benefit of posterity. In the *Narada Bhakti Sutras* also, the entire system of devotional path is explained in just 84 sutras.

1. अत्याक्षरं असंदिग्धं सारवत् विश्वतोमुखम् ।

अस्तीभमनवद्यं च सूत्रं सूत्रविदो विदुः ॥

In the following pages, we shall make a study of the path of devotion according to Narada. During my visits to the Vedanta Centre of Japan, I had given talks upon request to the devotees there about the *Narada Bhakti Sutras*. Those talks were transcribed from tape and published as a serial in the *Vedanta*, the quarterly journal of the Ramakrishna Sangha, published from our U.K. Centre. A thoroughly revised version, with translation of original sutras and notes, is placed before readers now.

In the following pages we shall make a study of the  
 nature of our notion according to Parada. During my visit to  
 the V. S. Institute of Japan, I had given talks upon several  
 of the devices there about the Parada Bhasitiliva. Those  
 talks were transcribed from tape and published as a serial  
 in the Japanese, the quarterly journal, of the Ranganatha  
 Sangha, published from our U.K. Centre. A thoroughly  
 revised version with translation of original Sanskrit notes  
 is placed before readers now. I will not say that word till

afterwards. I will say that the original notes of the  
 Parada Bhasitiliva were the work of the late Parada  
 himself. It was his desire to have the notes published  
 in the English language for the benefit of all.

What is a Parada? A Parada is an artistic or poetic  
 form, which contains a certain number of words. The  
 Parada is a verse in the Parada Parada which says that a  
 Parada which in a few words of no doubt of great  
 interest in just form a Parada. The Parada is a  
 substituted form of the Parada. The Parada is a  
 thread—a thread that binds the Parada. The Parada  
 is a form so that they could be easily understood by  
 the Parada of poetry. The Parada is a form of  
 the Parada. The Parada is a form of the Parada.  
 just a Parada.



## नारदभक्तिसूत्राणि

अथातो भक्तिं व्याख्यास्यामः ॥१॥

### 1. Athāto bhaktim vyākhyāsyāmaḥ.

*Atha* after acquiring the competence of mind to understand the path of devotion, *ataḥ* because that is the easiest path leading to the goal of God-realization *bhaktim* the path of devotion *vyākhyāsyāmaḥ* we shall explain (the meaning of devotion and) how it is to be attained.

### 1. Now, therefore, we shall explain devotion to God.

Sage Narada begins the treatise with this aphorism: 'Now we shall explain bhakti.' He is addressing a particular group of people who need this exposition. Any teaching is to be imparted to those who are competent enough to receive and assimilate it. It should not be spoken before

anybody and everybody because that will not be helpful; not only that, people who are reluctant will ridicule the teacher. Hence the necessity of selecting the right type of candidates to whom the teaching is to be imparted. Many aphoristic treatises begin in almost the same style.

There are four points implied in the first aphorism:

(1) What is the subject matter that is to be taught (*viṣaya*)?

(2) For whom is this teaching meant? Or, who has got the competence to receive this teaching (*adhikāri*)?

(3) What is the objective? Or, what is the desired goal? What is the benefit of learning this and going through this practice (*prayojana*)?

(4) What is the relation between the teaching and the objective to be attained by following the same (*sambandha*)?

These preliminary points or relations have to be understood before going into the study of the work.

First of all, what is the subject (*viṣaya*)? The subject matter is bhakti or devotion. Narada will explain what devotion is in the next aphorism. Secondly, for whom (*adhikāri*) is this teaching meant? Narada is going to impart this teaching to those who are desirous of following this path. It is not meant for mere curiosity-mongers, nor for intellectual speculation. Only those who want to shape their lives in accordance with this teaching are competent to know it. For, what is taught here has a special importance in life. This is an important point. Who are fit for the path of devotion? There are people who are not satisfied with

their present state of life, who feel that there is something lacking in life but do not know how that lack or imperfection can be removed; that is, they are seeking something but do not know how to get that. It is for such people that this treatise will be helpful. The idea is, if people are satisfied with their existing condition, there is no desire in them to learn. For them, any teaching is useless; so they are left out. This means that those who are not sufficiently competent to understand the teaching will not benefit by it. Only those who have got some sort of mental equipment which makes them competent to follow the teaching and benefit by them—the discussion is meant only for such people.

Therefore a particular form of mental approach is necessary. What are the conditions necessary to be competent to learn about the path of devotion? There is only one thing needed. That is a sincere desire, an earnestness, for the attainment of devotion. The only qualification necessary is the desire to attain bhakti. There must be real yearning for it. The aspirant must seriously think about how to attain bhakti. For such this treatise is necessary.

If people are engrossed in the enjoyment of sense-pleasures, naturally the desire for devotion will not arise in their hearts. Naturally too, they will not feel any inclination to hear about God. If one does not believe in God or if one is a rank atheist, this teaching will not help him or her. It has been stated in the *Gītā* that this teaching is not for those who have not gone through some sort of hard struggle for higher life, some sort of privation for the sake of attaining the ideal, or for those who have not got the least inclination

towards it.<sup>1</sup> It is clear then that only people of the right type of competence are eligible for going through this treatise.

There is another point. The person who is to be eligible for this teaching need not be an erudite scholar; he or she may be unlettered. One need not be conversant with the Vedas, or other scriptures, or philosophy. A person desiring to follow bhakti yoga need not have any kind of special status in society. The path of devotion is meant for everyone, of any status in life. Such distinctions do not either qualify one for, or disqualify from, the pursuit of devotion. One more thing: age is not a criterion to follow the path of devotion. Some people develop some sort of attraction for God since their childhood because of the impressions of their past lives. There are glowing examples of child-devotees like Prahlada, Narada himself, Shuka and others, who, from their very birth, were ardent devotees of God. To perform sacrifices certain qualifications are needed; not so is the case of the path of devotion. One need not be very moral either—it is enough if one is just an ordinary person. Desire for sense enjoyment may be there, but this desire should not be so strong as to debar the aspirant from the pursuit of spiritual life. This is what competence means.

In the *Bhāgavata* it is said: 'Who is a bhakti yogi? bhakti yoga is helpful to him who is attracted towards the

1. इदं ते नातपस्काय नाभक्ताय कदाचन ।

न चाशुश्रूषवे वाच्यं न च मां योऽभ्यसूयति ॥ —*Gītā*, 18.67

sport or the play of God.' By hearing about God, somehow his interest has been awakened in Him. This person is neither extremely engrossed in the enjoyment of sense pleasures nor has he the utmost spirit of renunciation. He is just in the midway, as it were. So, only one thing is needed and that is yearning for the life of devotion. For such people bhakti yoga is helpful.

This has already been implied when I said that a person engrossed in sense-pleasures will naturally not like to hear about God. If he is so pure as to be completely free from sense attractions, he may be fit for any of the other paths, like the path of knowledge, and so forth. Of course, bhakti yoga is not debarred from him, but he is not specially meant for bhakti yoga alone because he may go for the other paths too. When a person, however, is not pure to such an extent that he can eschew all kinds of attractions to the things of the world and devote his mind to the inquiry of the highest qualities of Reality—for a person of this type, bhakti yoga will be helpful.

A question may be raised: if a person has got that yearning, he has also attained devotion. Why then is a further discussion on bhakti needed? But then, such a deliberation on devotion is necessary because the person's yearning must be directed along the right path so that it should not be frittered away. Secondly, the seeker must not misunderstand the goal. Therefore, the aspirant must have a clear direction about how he should proceed, what the pitfalls are, and what the goal is. Hence the knowledge of bhakti yoga is necessary.

Bhakti yoga is not meant merely to satisfy one's intellectual curiosity. It is a subject which concerns our life. The most important thing is that it should not be taken lightly, as a speculative subject. Take, for instance, the case of a philosopher who studies philosophy. He studies for the sake of intellectual satisfaction. His life is not concerned with it. One's philosophy may be one, and his life may be a different one altogether. It is not that a person who talks high philosophy necessarily lives according to it. A professor of philosophy in a college or a university may be an erudite scholar, but this does not necessarily mean that he lives his life according to his philosophy. We know this because we studied under one such philosopher. He was an erudite scholar and could speak brilliantly on various abstruse subjects. His life, however, was even below the average so far as life's quality is concerned. Not that he did not have any reputation. He had reputation, but his life had nothing to do with his philosophy.

That is not the type of person who is addressed by Narada. He talks to those who wish to shape their lives according to the teachings given by him.

Until now, we discussed two points implied in the first aphorism: the subject (*viṣaya*) and the aspirant (*adhikārī*) fit for this discipline. Now, the third point is the objective (*prayojana*) of studying this scripture. The object to be attained by the study is supreme devotion. The fourth point is the relation (*sambandha*). In the case of a seeker of devotion, it is not merely the understanding of the path and the object, that is supreme devotion, which is important. A

mere study of the subject is not enough. After having the knowledge of the path of devotion, one has to practise it for the attainment of the goal. So far as the path of knowledge is concerned, it has been described that the knowledge of one's identity with Brahman is the goal and the path is discrimination. While we discuss the path, we may have an intellectual understanding of it. In the path of devotion, however, mere intellectual understanding is not enough. The practise of devotion is given greater importance because devotion is both the way and the goal. In the *Bhāgavata*<sup>1</sup> it is mentioned that through the practice of devotion one has to reach the state of supreme devotion. That is, a beginner has to begin with the devotion consisting of the ritualistic path but ultimately he reaches the supreme goal. Without some attraction for devotion one will not begin his journey which ultimately matures into the supreme love.

सा त्वस्मिन् परम प्रेमरूपा ॥२॥

2. *Sā tvasmin parama-premarūpā.*

*Sā* that (bhakti) *tu asmin* towards Him *parama-premarūpā* of the nature of supreme love.

2. Bhakti has been described as the supreme love towards Him (God).

1. भक्त्या संजातया भक्त्या विभ्रत्युत्पुलकां तनुम् ।

What is the definition of devotion? In this sutra, the definition is given in the briefest possible terms, that devotion is of the nature of supreme love towards God. It has a very significant meaning. First of all, it says that love is to be supreme. The qualification 'supreme' makes a lot of difference. It is not ordinary love but supreme love. What is the idea of this supremeness of love? It is supreme in the sense that it is not only quantitatively supreme, but qualitatively also. This love is not merely a very intense love—the deepest possible one—its quality also is different from ordinary love. How to distinguish the quality of love? Take for instance our love for earthly relations. There are several forms of it: love of the mother for the child, love of the husband for the wife, or vice versa, love towards one's parents, love towards friends, love for wealth, love for name and fame, and so on. All these can be brought under the term love, but they are not necessarily supreme love.

What makes love supreme? Except this supreme love every other type of love is self-centered; it is all selfish love to put it bluntly. Only this love for God is pure, unselfish love. There may be objections to this statement. People may say that there are instances of unselfish love in our earthly relations also. For example, a mother's love for the child is of course unselfish. A wife's love for her husband can be unselfish; the husband's love for the wife may be unselfish. So, it is all right to call such love unselfish love when there are instances at least—though may not be usually found—of unselfish love. The answer to this objection is, no. All these different types of love are selfish



at the core. This is because they are all centred around the person who loves. The mother loves her child not simply because it is a child, but because it is *her* child. So, love is centered around her own person. Everywhere you will find that even cases of unselfish love are tinged with some kind of selfishness. The question of 'I', 'me' and 'mine', comes first of all in such cases. Everywhere, except for this relation, love cannot persist. A child loves a beautiful doll not simply because it is beautiful, but because it is her own doll. This idea of possessiveness is always associated with such love. So we call it selfish love. Every other kind of love is selfish except divine love which does not have any relation with the Self. When we love God, we love Him not because He is my God and not someone else's God. Here that possessiveness is not there. When we think of love for God, it is obvious that we do not possess God, but we love Him because God is worthy of love. We love Him because God is the only object that is worthy of our highest love—therefore we love God. This is what is meant by 'Dear not for the sake of anything else, but dear for its own sake.'

God is dear to us because He is God, and nothing else. There is no other kind of selfish relation associated with this. Thus, since it is unselfish, it is supreme in quality as well as quantity. I said in quantity because we do not see any instance where earthly love makes one so much forgetful of oneself.

Is not the mother's love for the child unselfish then? Yes, it is. That love is unselfish to some extent. Perhaps

it is the best instance in earthly relations of unselfish love. The mother does not expect any return from the child, at least at the time when the child is young. When the child grows up and becomes a useful member of the society, the mother may expect some return. Even then, it is not unselfish because that idea of possession is there; 'my-ness' is there. That child is her child and so her love goes towards the child. In other words, it is love for herself which is finding expression in a transferred manner, because the child is only an extended personality of the mother. So, as she loves herself, she also loves her child, and thus it becomes selfish love. Everywhere, therefore, love is tinged with selfishness in our earthly relations. It may appear damaging; perhaps, it may disappoint many, but if we analyse and go deep into the matter, it will be found to be true.

The next doubt is, has this earthly love any similarity or comparison with divine love? No, it has not, because in our love for God the idea of possession does not arise. What about the instances of the lives of the gopis of Vrindavan who are examples of love? The gopis are used as illustrations of love. Even there we find that there is a sense of possession. That possession, however, does not limit the object of love to one individual alone. Everybody knows that God is not an individual's God only, but is the God of everyone. None will have the foolishness of possessing God all for himself or herself, though it gives a sweet coating to call Him one's own. This my-ness is not selfish, because everybody is aware that God is not one's own only.

Is it really true then, that all our earthly loves are selfish? If it is selfish, naturally, we cannot put such high value to it. If it is unselfish, then it is not love worth the name. If I do not consider somebody as mine, my love for that somebody will be only superficial—there cannot be depth in that love. The more the depth, the greater and more the idea of possession. That is all very obvious, but yet we do not see through the veil. The veil makes it appear very noble, very pious, and makes it, say, almost heavenly. But then, have we probed into the interior of the matter? The idea of my-ness is always there without which this earthly love cannot exist.

A corollary follows that. A mother loves her child not for the sake of her child, but for the sake of herself. A husband loves the wife not for the sake of the wife but for himself. A wife loves her husband not for the sake of the husband but for one's own self. What about God then? Do we not love God because it pleases us? No, we do not. We do not think of ourselves at all at that time. When we bestow our love towards God, we do not think that God will please us, but the idea of divinity is associated with all sorts of love because God is Love itself. We cannot help loving God because, having intimate relationship with that divinity, we know that God is the only object worthy of love, because God is Love. He is dear because He is dearness itself.

One more point, which we shall discuss later on, is about the awareness of the greatness of God. Even devotees who are ignorant, who do not know the scriptures, who are

not much conversant with the teachings of the bhakti path—even such people have some awareness that some special quality is associated with their object of love. When they love God, they know they are loving *God* and God means something very different from the things of the world. This awareness is what makes this love different from earthly love.

Let us look at it another way. When we love something purely for our sake, why not God also be loved in the same manner? I love this body. Why? Because it is my body. So, love is for the sake of something. When the body is ailing, I do not like it because it does not please me. So, my love is not for the body, but for the Self—for me. What is the difference, one may ask. The difference is this. Love becomes vitiated only when we think of ourselves not as the Self, but as physical, mental, intellectual beings. Going further, we see that the body is not dear to us simply because it is our body or that we possess it. It is we ourselves that is spontaneously dear to us, but the body is loved because it provides joy to us. The body is an instrument through which we get satisfaction from enjoyment. The same is true with our mind, our senses, and more so, with regard to other objects. So, myself alone is spontaneously dear to me. Everything else is dear to me only because of their association with the Atman.

What about God? God is Atman itself. God is our Self. Therefore, love for God and love for oneself mean the same. When the Atman is associated with things other than the

Atman, with the body, the senses, etc., our attraction for it is vitiated. When we love God, however, that sort of vitiating element is not there. One is vitiated, the other is noble. That is the peculiarity in regard to this.

The foregoing discussion may be briefly stated as: bhakti is of the nature of supreme love towards God. What is devotion defined as? Devotion is of the nature of supreme love towards God. Why is it stated that it is *of the nature of* supreme love? The idea is that supreme love cannot be described. Why can it not be described? Anything that is most elementary cannot be described. Therefore, supreme love also cannot be described. When we say supreme, it is *like* supreme love, or of the nature of supreme love. What supreme love is, we cannot know, we are familiar with intense love. So, we say that supreme love is associated with it in order to make it intelligible to others who have the experience of such love. So, supreme love is said to be like that intense love but it is not that itself. Supreme love is not intense love alone because the latter is impure and the former is pure. Pure love cannot be understood by many, so while bhakti is defined, it is said to be *of the nature of* supreme love and not simply supreme love.

We discussed *parama* or supreme-ness until now. There is another point. It is said that it must be love towards God, only then it becomes devotion. If the object is anything other than God, it is not real devotion. There may be attachment but not devotion. There may be attraction but not devotion. Real devotion will be only

towards God. The object of real devotion is only God, and when we say that there is devotion to the guru or some saintly person, it is only a sort of 'transference', since guru or saintly persons are associated with God. The only object of our devotion is God and God alone. Devotion is of the nature of supreme love towards Him; that is, towards God. Devotion means that one-pointed direction of the feeling of love. It should not be scattered this or that way. There should not be two objects of love—only one object and that, God alone.

The difficulty is, should we have no love for others then? Far from it. Other people may be loved insofar as they are related to God, or temples of God, or as representations of God. For a devotee, there cannot be any other object sharing the place in the heart—none whatsoever. It is said in the Jewish scriptures, 'I am a jealous God'. God sharing our heart, when the whole heart is filled with God, and God alone—then alone is this bhakti said to have dawned there. Not otherwise.

One more important thing concerning the path of devotion is that there should not be any kind of selfish idea associated with it. That means, a devotee will not make God an instrument for gaining something else. God is dear simply because He is God and for nothing else. We should not expect anything from God—not even happiness. God alone is the object and nothing else. We must not expect wealth, prosperity, name or fame, and so on through His grace. We must seek only Him. If thereby we have to have unhappiness, it is welcome. If thereby

there is discontent, it is welcome. We want to love God not because He will give us anything. Absolutely nothing is expected of Him. Joy, happiness, peace and so on may come spontaneously; that should not be our seeking. We should not think of liberation also. We should not think of being saved from this going through births and deaths also. Where there is love, there is no seeking of even liberation.

Then, why do we love God? A counter-question may be asked: why do we love ourselves? We love ourselves because we cannot help it. For a devotee also, the same answer is true: a devotee loves God because he cannot help it. God is the only object worthy of love. A devotee does not love God so that he may be loved by Him. The joy of a bhakta is only in giving and not in receiving anything. He does not expect anything from God. That God will free us from births and deaths, that He will make us immortal—all these ideas are associated with devotion, no doubt. They are, however, only some lower forms of love. When we give the definition of devotion, the highest form of definition has to be given. One can think of lower forms later on.

Finally, is such a devotion possible? It is possible, though for only a few. Very few are there who can rise to that height. For others, of course, wherever they are, they will have to make a beginning from there. So, even if it is selfish, it is not debarred. We shall gradually go higher and higher and ultimately will reach the goal. This definition describes the goal.

### अमृतस्वरूपा च ॥३॥

#### 3. *Amṛta-swarūpā ca.*

(*Sā* that bhakti is) *amṛta-swarūpā* immortal, *ca* also; that is, unlike worldly love, it does not undergo change. (It also means that it is undying in nature.)

3. This (devotion) is also of the nature of immortality.

We have completed the first two aphorisms. The first was just an introduction, and the second gives the definition of bhakti. Continuing the definition of devotion, the third sutra speaks further about bhakti. This sutra is connected with the second, that is, with the nature of devotion. The earlier definition was that bhakti is of the nature of supreme love towards God. Now, by way of further definition, it is said that devotion is undying love. That is, this love is undying. So, first of all it is called *parama-prema-rūpā* and secondly, *amṛta-swarūpā*.

The word *prema* has got a wide significance. It means something to us, and something different to people who have experienced that divine love. They use the same vocabulary, but the meanings are entirely different. Why different? It is because, we have not had that experience. Our experience is limited to the body and the senses, whereas divine love is an experience unique in this respect, which transcends both the body and sense objects. Thus,



though it is entirely different, there is no other expression by means of which we can communicate the idea, and therefore the expression is given like that. It is called 'of the category of love' because the expressions of a person in divine ecstasy are very similar to those of a person expressing earthly love. The outward expressions are similar, but there is a vast difference. Hence it is called *amṛta swarūpā*.

Bhakti is therefore supreme love and also immortal. It is not only *parama prema*, it is also *amṛta prema*, of the nature of immortality. That is, it never comes to an end. Now, any kind of earthly love that we can think of has a beginning and an end. There is no earthly love which can continue uninterruptedly, forever. There is no such thing possible. This is because, for one thing, the person who experiences it is limited and the person towards whom this love is directed is also limited. So, it is bound to be a temporary thing, limited by time, circumstances, and by the objects towards which love flows. That is the reason why ordinary love is not interminable. This is a very important point which distinguishes divine love from any other kind of love that we can experience. All our earthly experience of love has got a beginning and an end. There are also limitations of intensity, duration and quality. Divine love, on the other hand, is unlimited in all these respects. Once that love is realized, it continues for ever. The reason is, such a pure love does not depend on any extraneous circumstances. Our love is awakened when we come into contact with somebody or something in the world. In divine

love no external contact is implied because that divine love is within us and the object of love too is within us. Therefore it is interminable. That love or that experience is not something which we as subjects experience against an objective entity. It is identical with ourselves and though it is directed towards God, that God is also not external to ourselves.

Even a bhakti yogi will not consider himself absolutely different from the Supreme. He may have a feeling of duality, but that duality is not of earthly nature. So, this kind of love is interminable, inasmuch as the object of it is that supreme love. *Parama prema* is bound to be *amṛta rūpā*, of the nature of immortality. There is another word, 'also' in the definition. This shows that the second definition is a part of the first definition and not a separate one.

We have seen how devotion has been defined as supreme love towards God, and again that it is of the nature of immortality. In these two aphorisms, devotion has been defined. We have discovered how it is of the nature of supreme love. We do not simply say it is supreme love, but of the nature of supreme love. This is because when we say supreme love, it means the love with which we are familiar, and when it is said to be of the nature of supreme love, it means that our familiar experience has been cited as an example since it has some similarity with love for God. Our earthly love is not exactly the same as love for God. There are various differences, which will be brought out later on. Here it is only mentioned that it is similar to our earthly love which is of the highest type. Firstly, earthly

love is mentioned, then the highest degree of the same is mentioned, and later, it is said that it is not exactly that, but similar to that. And lastly, it is directed to God.

So, every part of the definition is useful in clearly stating what is meant by the term devotion to God. Another part of it is brought out in the next aphorism—it is of the nature of immortality. The idea is that earthly relationships are terminable. At some point or another they have to come to an end for the obvious reason that either the lover is eliminated, or the object of love is eliminated. Apart from that, there may be circumstances which come between the lover and the beloved and terminate the relationship. So there are three factors which make supreme love lasting; the object of the love is imperishable, which is God Himself. The lover—the devotee—is also imperishable insofar as he is part and parcel of God Himself. And thirdly, there cannot be any extraneous circumstances intervening between him and the object of love to bring about the termination of that relationship. So this is *amṛta swarūpā*—it can never come to an end. Here the lover, the Beloved and the relationship are all immortal.

There is much similarity between our earthly love and the love directed towards God. Much similarity in that we have a feeling of pleasure, a feeling of joy, a feeling of happiness, etc. in both cases. The difference is that in the case of earthly love, it is perishable; secondly, its intensity may go so far, but not reach the highest state; thirdly, it is directed towards objects which are not permanent. So these are the three factors in our experience of earthly love, and

none of these factors are there in our experience of divine love, which is free from all the three qualifications we have just mentioned. This is how divine love is described, so as to give a clear idea of what is meant by bhakti.

Very often we hear that our ordinary love, when directed towards God, becomes divine love or bhakti. This is not necessarily so, because direction is an effort on our part, and very much depends upon our effort; whereas devotion is not our effort, it is our essence. So, that is another very distinguishing feature: bhakti really does not mean that we are trying to direct our attention towards God. That may be in the lower stages but, when bhakti becomes mature, it is not a question of direction of the mind. It is the mind permanently settling down in God, and not mere direction. Why settling down in Him? Because God is its essence. The devotee, the object of devotion, and the feeling of devotion, all merge into one. So this is the real bhakti which we are discussing. We have dealt with this before, but this time we are making the implications clearer.

How do we understand real devotion? This is explained in the next aphorism. By attaining it a person becomes a *siddha*, perfect, *amṛta*, eternal, and *tr̥pta*, fully satisfied. These again are very significant expressions.

यल्लब्ध्वा पुमान् सिद्धो भवति, अमृतो भवति, तृप्तो भवति ॥४॥

4. Yallabdhvā pumān siddho bhavati, amṛto bhavati, tr̥pto bhavati.

*Yat* which *labdhvā* by the attainment of *pumān* the devotee *siddaḥ bhavati* has his desires fulfilled (or, becomes perfect) *amṛtaḥ bhavati* becomes immortal, *trptaḥ bhavati* becomes ever-satisfied.

4. By attaining which the devotee's objects are fulfilled, he becomes immortal and becomes ever-satisfied.

First of all, by attaining this devotion a person becomes perfect. This *siddhi* is not the same as that which is wrongly understood as *siddhi*, that is, supernatural powers, although that also is called *siddhi*. *Siddhi* is the attainment of the desired goal. If one becomes a *siddha*, he has attained the desired goal. But then, that desired goal must be only devotion, and nothing else; or, only God and nothing else.

Supernatural powers are also called *siddhi*. These are special powers which are attained sometimes by a devotee following the path of devotion. These may come occasionally in the life of a devotee, but he never aims at them. This is to be borne in mind because it is a common belief that a devotee must have some supernatural powers, and everywhere we find people running after those who have, or are supposed to have, these powers. It must be clearly understood that these powers have nothing to do with devotion; sometimes they are contrary to it. If there are powers, it means there is no devotion. Or, if there are powers and yet the person possessing them never makes use of them, for him they are as good as non-existent; but this is

never the case of a devotee who consciously makes use of them. A devotee has to be therefore aware that he is not misled by pursuing these powers. They will sidetrack him and make him miss the goal. It invariably happens like that. But a difficulty arises here. There are occasions in the lives of great religious people and prophets when we find expression given to the supernatural powers in them. Take for instance, the life of Jesus. It has many stories related to supernatural powers; you will find a lot of them in the *Bible*.

In the life of Sri Ramakrishna we find that once a visitor to the temple at Dakshineswar came to his room and asked him, 'We hear there is a Paramahansa here who effects some cures. Where is he?' Sri Ramakrishna was much disturbed at this, and said 'No, no, not here. Go to such-and-such a place. There is a person there who does such things.' Why did he say this? Even the idea of a holy man having such powers was disturbing to him. Sri Ramakrishna felt uneasy at the mere mention of it. On many occasions, he said that as long as one has even one of the eight *siddhis*, one is far from the goal.

Then why is it that mention is made of supernatural powers of Jesus and others? That is because we common people love these powers. We are always desirous of having these powers or, through these powers, we like to gain something of an earthly nature. Just as we seek great medical men to be cured of diseases, in the same way we seek holy men for the same purpose. This has nothing to do with devotion. It is said that there was a holy man, or at least that was what he was called, who could say what the

number of the winning horse would be in the Derby. There used to be a great rush of people to see him. People would come, he would tell them something. They might win or might not, but the desire was there, and so there used to be a big crowd. He was living near Bombay and just in front of his ashrama there would be rows of cars with people waiting, just to know the number of the winning horse and so get some money.

Has this anything to do with devotion? Not at all. Various other things are there. All these are illustrations of our failure to understand what real devotion is, and what we should really expect from a true lover of God. This is human frailty—we always try to take advantage of a holy person to gain some worldly ends.

The *siddhi* we are discussing is not of that type. This *siddhi* means attainment of the ideal, which is perfection, or complete absorption, or complete resignation in God. This is the kind of *siddhi* that is meant here. And the person who has got such devotion becomes a *siddha*. He becomes a man of perfection. Perfection in what? Perfection in his love of God. Not perfection in any other sense, not in any kind of supernatural powers, but perfection insofar as divine love is concerned.

The idea is that there cannot be any kind of limitation after the attainment of love. The devotee's love for God is unlimited. Just as God is unlimited, so his love is unlimited. This is what *siddhi* means.

Secondly, *amṛtaḥ bhavati*: he becomes immortal. This immortality does not mean continuance of the physical

existence. That is obviously impossible. It does not mean that this body, which we are anxious to preserve, will be made permanent. We think of immortality as meaning that we shall be eternally alive as we are now. Even if not in this physical body, we imagine that we shall have some subtle body with which we shall be enjoying immortality and be like deities and angels in heaven, who are immortal.

This is a myth. Such immortality is not desired by the devotee. For him the attachment towards the body completely disappears, and along with it, the fear of death. He is freed from the fear of death. After all, what is death? Death means separation from, or deprivation of, the body, the senses, our usual and familiar ego, etc. The absence of relationship with the body, the senses, and the ego is death.

The devotee becomes immortal in the sense that this kind of attachment towards earthly things completely disappears. So mortality ceases to be there and he becomes immortal. The fear of death is completely removed. Not because he has become physically immortal, but because he becomes a pure spirit and has no attachment to any of things that limit it, that make it impure, that girdle it, and make it appear something limited, something low, something having attachment towards these earthly objects. So, that aspect completely disappears and he therefore becomes immortal.

Sri Ramakrishna once asked Swamiji (who was Narendrakrishna then), 'Suppose there is nectar of love in a vessel; how will you enjoy it?' Narendrakrishna replied: 'I shall sit in the corner of the vessel which contains nectar and then sip



from there.' Sri Ramakrishna smiled and said: 'Why not from inside, from the depths of it?' Narendra replied: 'Oh no! For, then I shall die.' Sri Ramakrishna laughed at this, and said: 'It is not of that nature. When one drowns in that love, one never dies because it is *amṛta*, immortality itself.'<sup>1</sup> Bhakti is immortal and it makes one who tastes it also immortal. The object is immortal and he who tastes also becomes immortal. This is because that love can never be taken away from him. He enjoys that love eternally. Why so? The reason is, this love is not distinguished from the person himself. As long as he is there, his love is there for him.

There are various implications of this. One implication is that whatever is gained by effort—as a result of our actions—becomes perishable. The illustration the Upaniṣads give us is this: a farmer cultivates some crops, there will be some yield, and whatever is produced will be consumed and used up. The implication is that the products or fruits of our actions are bound to be temporary, bound to be exhausted. Love is not an effect of our activity, or result of action (*karma phala*) and so, it cannot be exhausted as other fruits of actions are. Is love not a fruit of action then? No, it is not. It only removes from us the impurities, the obsessions with which we are pre-occupied and because of which we are debarred from the experience of this love. All these impurities and imperfections are removed and love is revealed. Love is never an effect. It is

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1. cf. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 675.

ever-present. We are only unable to experience it. And because it is not an effect it never perishes.

Any sense object that we love and enjoy will not have a lasting effect on us. When we are separated from it, the feeling disappears. Suppose we like sweets. When we are enjoying sweet things we feel joy. This feeling, however, is limited to the time that the sensation continues because of the contact of the senses with the external object. Take away either the sense organ or the external object—the feeling also disappears.

Divine love is not of that nature. That is why I said that it is not born of any extraneous circumstances to die a natural death. It is there; it is our very nature. Just as I am eternally present to myself, this love also remains in me, identical with myself: because, it is of the nature of love that I am. It is said in the scriptures: 'From that supreme love, or joy, comes this world, in it the entire world exists and ultimately, into that joy is this world dissolved.'<sup>1</sup> Now, this joy is God Himself—it is divine love.

This is the Reality—and my essential nature—and therefore I can never be separated from It. How is it that I am separated from It now? I am not separated, but I am pre-occupied with other matters and therefore I have forgotten it. In deep sleep we forget ourselves; does that mean

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1. आनन्दाद्धेव खल्विमानि भूतानि जायन्ते ।

आनन्देन जातानि जीवन्ति, आनन्दं प्रयन्त्यभिसंविशन्ति ॥

—*Taittirīya Upaniṣad, Bhṛḡuvallī, 6*

we are lost? No, it cannot be so. For, if we were lost, our continuity would be lost, whereas I remember that the same 'I' which was experiencing objects in waking life was experiencing dream objects, and the same 'I' continues in deep sleep without experiencing either the objects of waking state or of dream state. No one can experience one's own annihilation. No one can, because that is an event which will require some witness—some experience to know. Thus, deep sleep is not annihilation. It is only a condition. What happens is that I am conditioned in the waking state, conditioned in the dream state, and conditioned in the dreamless state. Remove the condition, and 'I' will continue. That 'I' is the eternal Self; it is the same as eternal love. That is the deduction to be understood philosophically.

This love is therefore not an extraneous entity but the Self of the experiencer. That is what is very important, and this implication is to be understood from the third aphorism, that it is of the nature of immortality.

Once the taste of this love is acquired then there is nothing in comparison to it which the soul desires to have. There is no other experience to add to this experience. This joy is unlimited, and it cannot be further augmented or decreased by anything.

The third point is *tr̥ptaḥ bhavati*. He becomes satisfied. What is the meaning of this? This means that he becomes free from all desires. Immortality has been mentioned before, and then, as a corollary comes the statement that he is free from all desires. That is what is meant by *tr̥pti* or satisfaction. Suppose we have desire for a

particular kind of food. When we get the food, we become satisfied. This means that the desire to have it has been fully satisfied and we say we have become satisfied. The desire disappears. By the phrase *tr̥ptaḥ bhavati*, it is meant that the aspirant becomes free from all desires.

As long as there is desire, there cannot be total satisfaction. However much we may have in terms of wealth, prosperity and other things, if the mind is filled with desire we are never satisfied. Only when desires have left our mind do we become satisfied. When a person attains love of God, he becomes satisfied because there can no longer be any desire in him. It is said in the *Gītā*<sup>1</sup> that after attaining it, one does not consider anything worth having anymore. This is what is meant by satisfaction. We may have satisfaction in regard to one thing, but we may be dissatisfied with other things. In this case, however, the devotee becomes completely satisfied. He has no other desire to disturb his satisfaction. That is why this phrase is used here.

The following characteristics are mentioned in this aphorism: firstly *siddhaḥ bhavati*, then *amṛtaḥ bhavati*, and then *tr̥ptaḥ bhavati*. Perfection comes first, then permanence, so that the attainment of *siddhi* may not be temporary. I may be *amṛta*, but still may have discontent in me, so the third thing is satisfaction. Such devotion makes one perfect, makes one immortal, makes one fully satisfied.

1. यं लब्ध्वा चापरं लाभं मन्यते नाधिकं ततः ।—*Gītā*, 6.22

When we see a man of God, what do we find in him? That he is perfect, that he is immortal, that he is satisfied. I have explained what is meant by perfection, immortality and satisfaction. A soul absorbed in devotion should have these characteristics, and not simply be concerned with the supernatural powers we hanker after, nor the temporary satisfaction of a thousand desires which can never bring happiness.

यत् प्राप्य न किञ्चिद् वाञ्छति, न शोचति, न द्वेषि, न रमते,  
नोत्साही भवति ॥५॥

5. *Yat prāpya na kiñcid vāñchati na śocati na dveṣṭi  
na ramate notsāhī bhavati.*

*Yat prāpya* having obtained which *na kiñcit* nothing *vāñchati* desires *na* does not *śocati* grieve *na* does not *dveṣṭi* hate *na ramate* does not rejoice *utsāhī* encouraged (to do anything else) *na bhavati* does not feel.

5. After obtaining which [devotion] the devotee does not desire anything else, does not grieve, does not hate anything, does not enjoy anything else and does not feel encouraged to do anything else.

As we have already seen, once the taste of this love is acquired, there is nothing in comparison with it which the soul can desire to have. There is no other experience which

can add to this experience. This joy is unbounded, unlimited. It cannot be further augmented or decreased by anything.

Having attained this love, the experiencer does not desire anything, does not grieve for anything, does not have any hatred towards anything, does not feel attracted towards anything. He does not find any kind of enthusiasm for any other type of activity. This is important in the sense that, when we have had our utmost desire fulfilled, what more desire can there be? It is said in the *Gītā* that when we have everything, when every desire is satisfied, no further desire can arise. By attaining it, one does not regard any other object as worth having—as something for which the mind will have a craving. When all desires are fulfilled, one does not have any more desire. The devotee does not grieve. Why? Firstly, he has attained everything, there is nothing more to be attained. Secondly, what he has attained is never going to be lost. There is therefore no grief. Our desire comes from our feelings of imperfection, and our grief comes when there is a loss of something we hold dear. For the person who has realized this love, there is nothing more to be desired. And he does not grieve, because this love cannot be lost. Therefore he is not going to lose anything. Suppose he has to lose many things in this world. Even his body will be lost at some time. That does not matter to him, because these things are nothing in comparison to what he has got, and so there is no grief. He is satisfied—eternally satisfied; there cannot be any grief in him.

Hatred arises in our minds towards things which are obstacles to the attainment of the objects we desire. We hate someone when we find that he stands in the way of our attaining what we want. Because the devotee is permanently one with that love, there is nothing that can create any disturbance or any gap between him and his love, and therefore there is no hatred against anyone. There is one more reason why this type of a person does not hate anyone. He does not have antipathy towards anybody or anything. This is because, obviously he sees God's hand in everything and also sees that it is God who is residing in all beings. Therefore, whom will he hate, since he does not have any kind of feeling of antipathy towards anyone?

Further, he also has no kind of feeling of elation. That feeling of elation comes when we get something which we have not got, and which we wanted to have. Now that sort of experience is not to be seen in the case of this man, because he has got everything and there is nothing else to give him that feeling of elation.

And lastly, he does not feel enthusiastic about anything. Enthusiasm means that which inspires us to do something. Do something for what? Achievement—we do something so that we may have some achievement. But the bhakta has attained everything and so there is no further enthusiasm for the attainment of something else. There may be a doubt in this regard. If a person has got all these characteristics, then what is his life worth? He is just like a piece of stone. No, it is not. This is not the case because his absence of enthusiasm does not originate from his being an inert

object but because of his being full. When he is full, there is no movement, no enthusiasm. Suppose a pot is full inside and outside. Imagine a pot immersed in an ocean—there is water inside it and outside it. Can we imagine any movement in that water? No, we cannot. Movement would mean that the water is flowing to a place where there is no water. Movement always means that: emptying from one and filling another. Now that he is immersed in that love, both inside and outside, there cannot be any movement. That is why he does not feel enthusiastic about attaining something or doing something. This is very different from the state of inertia. The state of inertia means that energy is not generated there. But he is full of energy, although there is no movement. So he is full of that love and, therefore, there is no movement. That is the idea behind this absence of enthusiasm.

These then, are the characteristics of a devotee: or, in other words, these are the indications of a man of devotion. Again, these are the qualities that one has to attain by way of sadhana or devotion. This is called sadhana because the characteristics of a *siddha*, a perfected being, are the same as the practices that he has to undergo. That is, he has to remove from his mind all other desires except for devotion. When that is completely attained, he will not desire anything. He will not have any kind of attraction for things other than God; therefore he does not grieve for the loss of anything. Now this is also a form of sadhana, practice. He does not hate anything because other things become insignificant and, therefore, he does not have that feeling



of elation as any other person will have for the attainment of a desired object. This person does not value anything other than his devotion. Therefore he does not have any kind of enthusiasm for the attainment of anything. He does not feel encouraged to do anything.

This is what people do not understand, generally. They consider everything from the angle of only their earth-bound existence. Therefore they think that the opposite of these are the traits which are expected of a living being, and this devotee, without these traits, may be considered as not living at all. He is more dead than alive. But, if we consider it from the point of view which has been described above, we can understand how the devotee, being full, does not have any kind of feeling which is perceived in an imperfect soul. The imperfect soul, and his behaviour accordingly, will be different from the perfect soul and his behaviour. People do not understand this, and therefore they think it is useless.

I was reading a drama which depicts a man of enlightenment and his sadhana. It is said that he spent nine years looking at a wall. It has been described in a funny way. Two friends went to see him; one was familiar with him, the other was not. The man who was familiar with him said to his friend: 'Strike him, but he will not respond.' So, the friend struck him, but there was no response. Then this man told the other friend: 'You can also try.' The other friend tried; still there was no response. 'Shall I hit harder', he asked. 'Yes, do that,' replied the other. So both of them hit the man with all their might, but no response was

forthcoming. All that they enjoyed was the sound of their own blows. Ultimately the man regained consciousness and said: 'I am not deaf, not blind, not an inert thing; but I have attained enlightenment.' Now, this is a peculiar way of testing a man of enlightenment. I do not know how many of you would like a test like that!

The idea simply is that the reactions of a man of enlightenment are not like those of an ordinary person. He does not have any feeling of imperfection in him, but that does not mean that he does not see any imperfection anywhere. He does. And when he sees an imperfection, his one thought is, how to make it perfect. He has attained everything for himself, but his only thought is how he can help those who have not attained it. It is then that he may engage in activities which are meaningless for himself. When a jar is full of water, it does not make any sound; but when that water is poured into another jar, then sound comes. So a man who is full within himself does not need any activity for his own sake,; but when he sees the miseries of imperfect souls around him, he cannot remain quiet. He does engage in activity then, and that activity is not for himself but for the sake of others.

Thus all these things are mentioned: that a devotee does not desire anything, means that he does not desire for himself; he does not grieve for the loss of anything means loss to himself; he does not enjoy or feel elated at any kind of gain for himself; he does not feel interested to act for his own personal gain. So, all these must be qualified as being characteristic of himself.

It is not that he invariably becomes inert like stocks and stones. No, but he remains without any kind of selfishness in him. Therefore he works for the sake of others, and not for himself. All sorts of problems will come in the life of a bhakta but these will be understood from a different angle altogether.

यत् ज्ञात्वा मत्तो भवति, स्तब्धो भवति, आत्मारामो भवति ॥६॥

6. *Yat jñātvā matto bhavati, stabdhaḥ bhavati, ātmārāmaḥ bhavati.*

*Yat* which *jñātvā* knowing *matto* intoxicated *bhavati* becomes *stabdho* silent *bhavati* becomes *ātmārāmo* finding joy in one's own Self *bhavati* becomes.

6. After knowing which [that] the devotee becomes like an intoxicated person, becomes free from all activities like an inert object, and finds all joy in his own Self.

In the previous sutra, the expressions were all negative, like the devotee does not hate, does not feel elated, does not feel enthusiasm for achieving anything, etc. In the present sutra the expressions are all positive: by knowing which the aspirant becomes completely absorbed, madly engrossed in that joy, and so on. It is madness in the sense that he becomes completely engrossed. Just as a

person who is completely intoxicated does not have any kind of cognition of the external world, so also the enlightened soul becomes mad-like, becomes absorbed in his joy, so much so that he cannot take any note of the world around him.

Suppose a devotee is sort of intoxicated and mad after God, does he become violent? Not at all! He becomes full, and therefore, inert, without any expression of activity. Why should he wish to be like an inert object? This because he becomes absorbed in his own joy. That is, his joy is derived from his own Self. His happiness is not derived from, or is dependent upon, any extraneous circumstances. It issues from his own Self. Therefore this is a necessary attribute.

In the Upaniṣads this point has been expressed in a different way. When sage Yājñavalkya was explaining the condition of an enlightened person in the path of knowledge, that state being described as having no awareness, Maitreyi became confused: 'What is the fun in having it? I do not see any good in such a state. You become just like an inert being or an inert object. What is the good of it?' Then Yajnavalkya explained what it meant when there is no awareness of things. The awareness of objects means that the objects are important, and awareness is dependent on them, but this particular state is not dependent upon anything.

Now Yajnavalkya had to further explain this position to Maitreyi, to make her realize that this is not merely the loss of consciousness in the sense of loss of the ideas which

come and go, but the perceiver of the ideas is not lost. So, when we speak of awareness, it is awareness of objects or limited bits of consciousness. That is what is meant by this awareness.

Here it is bhakti yoga, so we are considering things from another angle. When a devotee attains to this state, his joy does not depend upon any extraneous circumstance and, as such, that joy becomes eternal. If joy or happiness is dependent on any extraneous circumstance, when the circumstance changes, the joy also disappears. But, in this case, the joy does not depend upon anything extraneous, and therefore there is no condition which can limit his joy. This joy is unconditional, therefore uninterrupted, unlimited. This is what is implied by the word *ātmārāma*. If that word is not mentioned, then it might be construed as ordinary inertness, or inertia, or simply as a state of stupor, or even madness. So, to distinguish it from all such, the expression, which means deriving joy from the Self, is mentioned.

A devotee has to remain completely absorbed in the joy of his realization of God. This is the greatest attraction that a devotee can have. But then, more than that, if it is a very desirable state for him and if he has got feeling for others, then naturally he desires to share the joy with others also. And not only is he happy that he has got that state for himself, but he is unhappy that others have not got that state, and he devotes his time and energy to helping others to realize that state. It is not always that a devotee will be like that, though Sri Ramakrishna often mentioned that the

more one goes towards God, the less his external activities will become. And then, when he has realized the Truth, he remains absorbed in that experience. That is for a lesser type of people, but there was a greater type in Sri Rama-krishna's mind, which he did not speak about before ordinary people because they will not have the qualification to rise up to that level. It is meant for some extraordinary souls only. It is enough for a person to work out his own salvation, but it is a greater achievement to help others attain it. That is a greater condition, a still higher state.

It is said in the life of the Buddha that, after attaining nirvana, he remained absorbed in the joy of it for seven days. After that the experience of the outside world came to him. It was then that he saw around him the miseries which prompted him to search for nirvana, but having attained nirvana, he became so much absorbed in it that for seven days he could not get out of that absorption and the thoughts of the miseries of the world had also disappeared from his mind. After seven days, when that absorption became normal to him, he looked around and saw the misery with which he was already familiar, and then tried to teach others.

That is how activity begins. There is, however, one fundamental difference between the activities of an enlightened soul and those of an unenlightened soul. The activities of an enlightened soul are for the sake of others and not for himself, while those of an unenlightened person are for selfish reasons—for his own sake. This is the fundamental difference.

There is yet another point. It is not that an enlightened being will always perform activities for the sake of others. Not necessarily. If a person remains absorbed completely in the realization of that perfection in himself, he may not take to the life of activity again. He 'may not'. But there is no such thing as 'must not'. He may come down and try to help others, or he may remain absorbed in his own realization. Sri Ramakrishna would give greater credit to persons who come down for the sake of others. A person who has attained perfection and does not come down to the consciousness of the external world is also praiseworthy. He commands respect as one who has realized the goal; but then, according to Sri Ramakrishna, the man who even deprives himself of the joy of that perfection for the sake of helping others is a greater soul. But all cannot be of that greater category; so it is all right for an aspirant to work out his own salvation. If he stops at that, that also does not take away from him any creditable quality. He becomes all the more praiseworthy if he deprives himself of the joy for the sake of others.

Such great souls are rare, and it is because of them that the highest spiritual ideal has not been lost. If the great souls were not to come down and help the unenlightened, then the idea would be lost completely, because the man or woman who has realized God becomes dead to the world, so much so, that the world would not be in a position to judge such. Only when they come down and explain their own condition to the people, and the way to attain to that condition, that realization of the greatness of such a condition can be appreciated by others. Not otherwise.

He who renounces his own joy for the sake of others and he who strives for his own realization—both are great. The former, however, is greater. There is a famous incident in the life of Swami Vivekananda. Swamiji (then Narendra) wanted to remain absorbed in *samādhi*—to enjoy the bliss of it. Sri Ramakrishna scolded him. He said to this effect: ‘I thought you were a greater person and would be like a big banyan tree, spreading its branches and casting a shade so that weary travellers can come and rest.’<sup>1</sup> That is, he said that instead of helping suffering humanity so that they can get rid of their miseries, Narendra wished to remain absorbed in his own bliss, which according to Sri Ramakrishna was not a creditable attitude. Sri Ramakrishna used to appreciate Swamiji, judging him from that highest level. Swamiji also understood the attitude of his master, and later on, he himself said that he did not want to be liberated until the last person in bondage was freed. That is why he was the worthiest disciple of Sri Ramakrishna.

सा न कामयमाना, निरोधरूपत्वात् ॥७॥

7. *Sā na kāmaya mānā nirodharūpatvāt.*

*Sā* that (devotion) *na kāmaya mānā* does not require anything else *rūpatvāt* being of the nature of *nirodha* control.

1. cf. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 986.



7. Devotion does not require anything else because it is attained through complete control of the senses.

We have completed six aphorisms. We shall start with the seventh now. This deals with the further characteristics of devotion. Earlier, Narada was mentioning the characteristics of an aspirant who has acquired devotion. He now elaborates on the nature of devotion. Devotion is not something that is used as a means for the attainment of any desired object. This is because, it is of the nature of *nirodha*, that is, the elimination of desires. When real bhakti dawns in one's mind, all the desires are completely eliminated. Such being the nature of devotion, it cannot be an instrument for the attainment of any desire. The very meaning of devotion is the negation of all desires and therefore the two cannot go together. Desires and devotion going together, or devotion for the attainment of any desired object—this is not possible.

We usually pray to God for the attainment of some objective. We pray so as to get something through the grace of God which we cannot get otherwise, or which we find it difficult to acquire by our own efforts. It may be wealth; it may be any kind of earthly object that we like to possess; it can be name and fame; it can be a prominent position in society, and so forth. Our desires are unlimited in number, and we cannot conceive of the rapidity with which they are increasing. It is but natural for ordinary human beings to pray to God for the attainment of such desires. But then that sort of devotion is not the type that we are discussing

now. Devotion has been described here as supreme love (*parama prema*). This cannot go with any kind of desire. That is why it is said that devotion is not for the attainment of any desired object, because it is of the nature of negation of all desires. This is very important in so far as the understanding of the real type of devotion is concerned.

In the *Gītā* we find that devotees have been divided into four categories:<sup>1</sup>

1. The man who is in trouble (*ārta*). He prays to God to be saved from that.

2. One who desires to know the secret of creation, the mysteries of the universe, the mystery about himself, etc. which he cannot know by himself: so he prays to God. That type of devotee (*jijñāsu*) is called one who is inquisitive, one who desires to know. He is also a devotee.

3. One who desires for something worth attaining (*arthārthī*). He prays for the fulfilment of some need. He wants to achieve something through the grace of God, through His blessings.

4. The devotee (*jñānī*) who has known that God is the only object worth attaining, and his devotion goes towards Him spontaneously.

These are the four categories of devotees. In the *Gītā*, it has been mentioned that they are all great because they have devotion towards God. But still, the man of knowledge who has realized God as the only one object worth attaining,

1. आर्तो जिज्ञासुरर्थार्थी ज्ञानी च भरतर्षभ । —*Gītā*, 7.16

who knows that God is the fulfilment of all our knowledge, etc.—for him, of course, there is no comparison. ‘The man of knowledge is My own Self’, God declares, ‘He is identical with Me and, therefore, he is dear to Me as I am dear to Myself’.<sup>1</sup> That means the highest in the scale is the *jñānī*, and the others belong to the lower level. In this aphorism it is put in a different manner. So long as we seek God as a means and not an end, we cannot be called true devotees. A real devotee does not make God a means, but for him God is an end in itself. The right type of devotion is not a means but an end in itself, since devotion and desire never go together. This is because one is the negation of the other. When there is devotion, there will be no desire any more. That is what is stressed in this sutra that devotion is not a means to the attainment of any desired object, because it is a negation of all desires. That is the point.

This is the criterion by which we can judge the genuineness of our devotion. If our devotion is genuine, we shall not seek anything from God, to the extent that we do not seek even salvation from births and deaths, that is, liberation. These things are not sought by the real type of devotee; and, even more than that, he does not seek happiness from devotion. If we would like to have devotion to experience joy and peace, then such a devotion is not the end in itself; it becomes a means. Not so for a true devotee. So, even happiness and peace which we often talk about,

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1. *Gītā* 7.17,18

like, 'I can have peace only with devotion', and so on is all right, so far as it goes. But that devotion is at a much lower level than the highest type of devotion. For the right type of devotion, the devotion itself is the goal, and Swami Vivekananda has stressed this point in his *Bhakti Yoga*, the Path of Love. If there is any trace of desire, even of the highest kind, it is desire and therefore a negation. But what about the statement of Sri Ramakrishna, when he says, 'The desire for bhakti can't be called desire.'<sup>1</sup> It is simply a sort of logical quibble, as it were. Desire for bhakti is no desire because devotion is the negation of desire. Desire for devotion means desire for the negation of desire. This shows that such desire is no desire at all.

Devotion, therefore, can be divided into two categories: one is the path, and the other is the goal, the destination. We loosely cover the whole gamut by the word devotion. So long as we are on the path, it is but natural for us to desire the attainment of some objective we have in mind through devotion. It is natural, but when we have reached the goal, even the desire of the highest order will cease to be.

So, this characteristic, that devotion is the negation of desire, has to be remembered. It is of the nature of cessation of desires. The cessation or absence of what? That will be described in the next sutra.

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1. cf. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 612.

निरोधस्तु लोकवेदव्यापारन्यासः ॥८॥

8. *Nirodhastu loka-veda-vyāpāranyāsaḥ.*

*Nirodhaḥ* control *tu* means *loka* public opinion, *veda* the injunctions of the vedas *vyāpāra* all activities *nyāsaḥ* renouncing.

8. Control or cessation means discarding public opinion, the injunctions of the Veda and all activities.

Cessation here means abstention. That is, abstaining from activities suggested by the Vedas or the norms of worldly conduct. Vedic injunctions, to do this and not to do that, have got to be eschewed. We have to eschew the pursuit of worldly goals. The different goals set before us by the Vedas, such as salvation, liberation, or the attainment of various objects—all these are to be eschewed. The physical activities that we do for the attainment of things desired to please people, or to be in conformity with people's judgements, such as, 'One should behave in this manner, or in that manner, or be under the dictate of public opinion'—these will have to be eschewed. This is because, following those dictates always has an ulterior motive. We follow the dictates of the Vedas to obtain the fruits of action that are mentioned by them. We obey public opinion so that we can gain popularity or that we can gain the approval of people. Now all such things have to be eliminated from the life of a devotee. This is very important because usually

we are slaves of these do's and don'ts, whether they are dictated by the Vedas or by the public blindly. We go for these things. By following them, either we gain merits that have been mentioned in the Vedas, or we gain public approval. We enjoy the admiration of people and raise ourselves in their estimation. All these will have to be eschewed.

A man of devotion is not influenced by such things. His behaviour will not be influenced by the dictates of the scriptures or public opinion. The idea is, when he does something good or something prescribed by the scriptures, it is not because it has been prescribed by the scriptures that he does it, but he does it merely by habit. It is his habit to do things in that manner and therefore he does it, and not because it is dictated by the scriptures. Or, when he does something which is popularly acclaimed as good conduct, he does that not because it is popularly approved, but because it is his habit. He has lived in this manner for such a long time that good behaviour has become natural to him. It is not through any definite judgement, or with the object of gaining some reward either from God or from human beings, that he does such things.

It is not that he will go against the dictates of the Vedas. However, he will not be following them slavishly as a slave follows the master's orders, because that is not spontaneous. A person who is spontaneously good does good things not because he wants to do those good things, but because they flow from the goodness of his Self. There is no personal effort in doing good in this manner. That does not

mean he will not do good things, but he will not strive for good things prescribed either by the Vedas or approved by the people. That is what is important to remember.

It has been beautifully stated in the *Bhāgavata* in one verse. When the gopis went to meet Sri Krishna, responding to the call of his flute, in order to test them, Sri Krishna asked: 'Why have you come at dead of night into this deep forest? Firstly, you have come away from your homes; your people will criticize you and find fault with you. You should have been loyal to your people, and should have remained engaged in doing household duties. Instead of that you have neglected your duties, which is condemnable. And, secondly, here in this forest there are wild animals, it will be full of danger for you. So go back and keep yourselves engaged in your household duties.' The gopis replied: 'Our minds were engaged in our household duties all right, but you have stolen our minds. Our hands were engaged in the performance of our duties there. They have lost their power now. Our feet have lost the power of movement: so how shall we go back? Our feet do not move, our hands do not move; so how can we perform our household duties? Therefore how shall we go back to our houses and, even if we go back somehow, what shall we do there?'

This is narrated very touchingly. When the mind becomes fixed in God, it becomes impossible for one to engage oneself in duties prescribed either by the scriptures or sanctioned by public opinion. It becomes impossible, not that one wilfully neglects those duties. The aspirant becomes unfit for the performance of these duties. He will

have no competence to perform them. The mind that is to be exercised for such purpose is absorbed in God and so, when the mind is absorbed in God, other sense organs also cease to function normally. That is what the Gopis wanted to convey to Sri Krishna.

तस्मिन्ननन्यता तद्विरोधिषूदासीनता च ॥९॥

9. *Tasminnananyatā tadvirodhiṣūdāsīnatā ca.*

*Tasmin* in that (devotion) *ananyatā* cessation of everything else (or one-pointedness) *ca* and *tadvirodhiṣu* in things opposed to it *udāsīnatā* indifference.

9. In that (devotion) there is cessation of everything other than devotion (i.e., one-pointedness) and indifference to things opposed to it.

It was said earlier that devotion is of the nature of *nirodha* or abstention. Abstention from what? A further implication is being drawn here. It is *ananyatā*, one-pointedness towards God. It is total absorption in God. That means, having nothing in mind except God, or absence of everything else other than God. This is one part of it. The other one is whatever is contrary, whatever is an obstacle or whatever is a hindrance to the flow of devotion to God—all such obstacles including loss of interest also disappear. Our mind has a tendency to flow towards the objects of



enjoyment. This kind of attachment to objects of enjoyment is antagonistic to the mind's flowing towards God. Therefore there should be indifference towards anything which is an obstacle to the flow of the mind towards God.

Sri Ramakrishna gave the description of *vairāgya* in this manner. Vairāgya apparently means detachment from things of the world; but that is not a complete meaning of the term. Along with detachment to sense objects, there should be attachment or love for God. If our detachment is not simultaneously associated with love for God, that detachment is not of the right type. An individual may be frustrated in life and, therefore, can have detachment from, or distaste for, the objects of enjoyment. That is not real renunciation, insofar as the mind is not absorbed in God. Suppose the mind is drawn to God, and yet there is no indifference towards sense objects; that means, to that extent the mind's flowing towards God will be obstructed.

Therefore, these two must be taken together. One is the positive attitude and the other is negative. Firstly, the affirmative idea in the sense that our mind should flow one-pointedly towards God and, secondly, it should have complete indifference towards things which take the mind away from God. That is what is called renunciation, that is what is meant by abstention. Abstention is apparently a negative term, but it should be associated with the counterpart, which is positive—the love of God. One-pointedness towards God and detachment towards things which are contrary to it is the idea then. In most books you will find that *vairāgya* means renunciation. Renunciation means

indifference to, or rejection of, the sense pleasures. But Sri Ramakrishna says that it is not merely the rejection of the sense pleasures that makes for genuine renunciation. Genuine renunciation will invariably have the association of a positive element, namely, the mind will flow towards God and God alone.

These two must be there side by side, without which neither will be genuine. Neither will devotion be genuine without renunciation, nor will renunciation be genuine without devotion.

This one-pointedness is the only qualification needed for the attainment of God-realization. It is true that it is said in the *Gītā*,<sup>1</sup> 'Whoever thinks of Me with one-pointedness, worships Me, meditates upon Me without the mind being diverted to anything else, I shall give him whatever is required for him.'<sup>2</sup> That means, God will take care of him. But does anyone become a devotee so that God will take care of him? No, he will not. A true devotee does not expect anything from God, not even His protection. Then what kind of devotion is it? It is devotion in giving, and not in receiving. He gives his love to God, and does not want any return for that. Swami Vivekananda says in his Bhakti Yoga lectures: 'If there is an expectation of return, it is merely business.' There is no business negotiation in

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1. cf. *Gītā*, 12.8

2. 'I shall give everything and also maintain all that he has got.'

devotion. It is not a matter of business, exchanging something for something else. A devotee only gives his love for God and does not expect any return for it. It is a one-way affair: only giving, without expectation of any return. Such devotion is of the highest type.

This absolute selflessness is the hallmark of devotion. A devotee does not expect anything in return from God. Maybe it is very difficult not to expect anything from Him, but unless one has raised oneself to that level, one cannot be called a true devotee. So long as there is expectation, there is a little debasement, a falling from that highest order. That will be stated later on categorically.

Thus bhakti is being described here in several aphorisms. First, in devotion, there is no desire because it is of the nature of cessation of all desires. Then, as a corollary, *nirodha* means giving up all activities actuated by public opinion or dictates of the scriptures. Dictates of the scriptures means such dictates as are meant for the achievement of certain desired objects. The discarding of all such things is *nirodha*.

अन्याश्रयाणां त्यागोऽनन्यता ॥१०॥

10. *Anyāśrayāṇām tyāgonanyatā.*

*Anyā* other *āśrayāṇām* supports (resorting to everything else other than God and devotion) *tyāgaḥ* discarding, or renunciation *ananyatā* one-pointedness.

10. Discarding the resorting to everything else (other than devotion, or God) is one-pointedness.

लोकवेदेषु तदनुकूलाचरणं तद्विरोधिषूदासीनता ॥११॥

11. *Lokavedeṣu tadanukūlācaraṇam tadvirodhiṣūdā  
sīnatā*

*Lokavedeṣu* in regard to public opinion and Vedic injunctions *tadanukūla* in conformity with *ācaraṇam* conduct *tadvirodhiṣu* views that are against it *udāsīnatā* indifference.

11. The devotee's conduct should be in conformity with public views and the Vedic injunctions, and indifferent towards views that are against it.

भवतु निश्चयदाढ्यादूर्ध्वं शास्त्ररक्षणम् ॥१२॥

12. *Bhavatu niscaya-dārḍhyādūrdhvam śāstra-  
rakṣaṇam.*

*Niscaya-dārḍhyād* firmness in faith *ūrdhvam* until *bhavatu* there should be *śāstra-rakṣaṇam* conformity with the scriptures.

12. There should be conformity with the scriptures until one's faith is firmly established.

अन्यथा पातित्याशङ्कया ॥ १३॥

13. *Anyathā pātityāśamkayā.*

*Anyathā* otherwise *pātityā-śamkayā* fear of fall (from the ideal)

13. Otherwise there is the fear of falling from the ideal.

The above four aphorisms have been taken up together for discussion.

What does one-pointedness mean? That is further explained in this aphorism. Renunciation of all other objects and all other pursuits, renunciation of resorting to things other than God is called one-pointedness. Discarding the dictates of the Vedas, and also discarding public opinion, have been mentioned. But then all these are not to be discarded in toto. Of whatever the scriptures say, those which will be conducive to the growth of devotion are not to be discarded. Whether they are dictated by the scriptures or known through public opinion—if such things are for the growth of devotion, they are not to be discarded. But if they are a hindrance to the growth of devotion, they are not welcome. Further, we should remain indifferent towards them. There should not be any kind of attachment towards them. So, when we say that a man of devotion should not follow the Vedas, that does not mean that he is to go against the Vedas at all times. No, he should not. Such instructions

as are conducive to the growth of devotion will have to be observed, whether they are dictated by the Vedas or by public opinion; but, if they are opposed to that growth of devotion, we should remain indifferent towards such teachings, i.e., we need not follow them.

The idea is that the Vedas speak of many things: how to go to heaven, how to acquire wealth, how to have progeny, how to get various amenities, even how to have rains by propitiating the rain-god, etc. Such things do not interest a devotee. These are things in which a devotee will not take any interest, or any note thereof. They are not necessary for the growth of devotion, and so they are not to be observed; but such dictates as are helpful to the growth of devotion, whether they are scriptural injunctions or public opinion, are to be followed; they are not to be discarded.

This is a guarded expression. The non-performance of the Vedic rites, or non-conformity with the public opinion is mentioned here in a guarded manner: that they are to be conformed with only when they are helpful for the growth of devotion. There is a further note of caution. The observance of the injunctions of the scriptures should be continued until one has got established in devotion. Until an individual has got established in devotion, he should follow the scriptures because they will be helpful in generating devotion in him. However, when he has already got devotion, dictates of scriptures are useless. They have served their purpose and there is no more need for such observances.

Scriptural injunctions, whether directly helpful for one's spiritual growth or not, are better adhered to, because they may help a devotee in protecting him against impurity. Otherwise, by not observing them, he may commit sin or be defiled. By failing to observe their dictates one degrades oneself. To avoid such degradation one should follow them. Otherwise there is the danger of one's incurring sin. So, one should observe the dictates of scriptures in so far as they are helpful. One should not treat Vedic teachings lightly. One cannot discard them with impunity. They have to be given due deference. That is about scriptural injunctions. The same may be said of public opinion also. Public opinion should be respected until one is established in devotion.

In the *Gītā*<sup>1</sup> it is said that nobody can remain without activity even for a moment. So there are activities which will have to be continued. But certain activities are to be chosen which are conducive to one's spiritual life, and other activities which are harmful to it will have to be discarded. What we should do and what we should not is to be judged only from this standpoint.

लोकोऽपि तावदेव; भोजनादिव्यापारस्त्वाशरीरधारणावधि ॥१४॥

14. *Lokopi tāvadeva; bhojanādivyāpārastv-  
āśarīradhāraṇāvadhī*

1. *Gītā*, 3:5

*Lokaḥ api* public opinion also *tāvat* till that period *eva* alone *bhojanādi* food etc. *vyāpāraḥ* activities *tu* but *āśarīra* till the body *dhāraṇāvadhī* lasts.

14. The public opinion should also be followed and activities like eating etc. should be continued as long as the body lasts.

As regards natural activities such as eating, sleeping, physical exercise, etc. which are gone through for the upkeep of the body—they are to be continued as long as the body lasts. One has to eat. As long as the body lasts, it has to be maintained. So the eating goes on. Other natural activities also go on. The idea is that they need not be neglected or discarded. So long as the body is there, its maintenance will need all such activities, without which life cannot go on. But it may be said: ‘Why should we bother about the continuity of life? Let the body go. What does it matter?’ It does matter, because the body is an instrument through which one can practise devotion. So, if the body goes, how can one practise devotion? Therefore, whatever is necessary for the maintenance of the body should be continued and not discarded. The idea is that one should not commit suicide. Discarding all activities means committing suicide.

Therefore, we should not neglect the rules for the preservation of the body. It has been found that sometimes people are negligent about the observance of certain physical conditions necessary for the maintenance or upkeep of the



body. That is not prescribed by bhakti yoga. One must observe hygienic rules and all the conditions that keep the body in good shape. This will enable him to devote his time without any interruption to practice of devotion. If the body is diseased or weak due to his negligence, he will have to suffer. His spiritual life will also suffer to that extent. So, naturally, the maintenance of the body must continue carefully. Swami Brahmananda says that a devotee should take care of the body the same way a prostitute maintains her physical condition. Because she knows that if the body deteriorates, her trade will go. In the same manner, if a devotee's body falls sick, then his spiritual practice suffers. So we should not be negligent about our observance of physical rules. They are to be carried out with utmost care. The body is an instrument with which we have to work for the attainment of realization. So the body is not to be treated as lightly as we like. Often people go on fasting thereby spoiling their health. They undertake various kinds of privations. That is not good, because it affects the maintenance of the instrument with which we are to practise devotion. So the body is not to be neglected.

Therefore, when one-pointedness is mentioned, it is further specified here. One-pointedness means living in God and God alone.

तल्लक्षणानि वाच्यन्ते नानामतभेदात् ॥१५॥

15. Tallakṣaṇāni vācyante nānāmatābhedaṭ.

*Tat-lakṣaṇāni* the characteristics of it (devotion) *mata bhedāt* owing to differences in views *nānā* many *vācyante* stated.

15. The characteristics of devotion are being stated because of different views (according to different exponents) in this regard.

In this section, the different viewpoints of several masters of the path of devotion are being elaborated. The various definitions of devotion are being given. They are many because of difference in opinions. Different teachers give different definitions of devotion. All of them are helpful in one way or the other in making the idea clear to us, as we shall see.

पूजादिष्वनुराग इति पाराशर्यः ॥१६॥

16. *Pūjādiṣvanurāga iti pārāśaryaḥ.*

*Pūjā* worship *ādiṣu* and in such other acts *anurāgaḥ* love or attraction *iti* thus *pārāśaryaḥ* the son of sage Parāśara (Vyāsa) (*manyate* feels).

16. According to Vyasa, bhakti means attraction to worship etc. (as prescribed by the scriptures).

Vyasa is the author of the Purāṇas, of which particularly important is the *Bhāgavata*. In the scriptures attraction

towards the ritualistic form of worship is given importance so that through such actions love towards God can be generated. For a beginner, these ritualistic observances are of utmost importance because the devotee cannot think of the higher expressions of love. These higher expressions cannot be his starting point in the path of devotion.

कथादिष्विति गर्गः ॥१७॥

17. *Kathādiṣviti gargaḥ.*

*Kathā* stories of God's play *ādiṣu* and so on *iti* thus says *gargaḥ* Sage Garga.

17. According to Garga (bhakti is the) attraction for stories of God's play as incarnations.

One of the exponents of devotion, sage Garga says that the liking for *kathā*, that is God's name, His character, His life-history and so on is devotion. Here, we find that love of God is increased through our singing of God's praise, through our hearing of His various forms of divine play and the life-stories of various incarnations.

आत्मरत्यविरोधेनेति शाण्डिल्यः ॥१८॥

18. *Atmaratyavirodheneti śāṅḍilyah.*

*Atmarati* love for the Self *avirodhena* without prejudice *iti* says *śāṅḍilyaḥ* sage Sandilya.

18. According to Sandilya, bhakti is devotion to God as one's Self, and renouncing everything prejudicial to the path of devotion.

Sage Sandilya has a set of bhakti aphorisms to his credit. He gives a different definition of bhakti. Sandilya says that attachment or love for the Self is what is called bhakti. By Self here the limited self is not meant. God is the Self of all; therefore, love of the Self, or love of God is what is devotion: this is a simpler statement. That is, our love of God will show in our conduct. When that conduct is such that nothing is done by us which is opposed to the acquisition of that love, then we are being true lovers of God.

What is the difference between this aphorism and the previous one? The previous one is attachment towards the means. Here, in a negative way, it is mentioned that our attachment to things which are not hostile to, or detrimental to, our attachment to God is bhakti. This is a negative statement.

नारदस्तु तदर्पिताखिलाचारता  
तद्विस्मरणे परमव्याकुलतेति (च) ॥१९॥

19. *Nārada*stu *tadarpitākḥilācāratā*  
*tadvismaraṇe paramavyākulateti (ca).*

*Nārada* sage Narada *tu* but *tad-arpita-akhila-ācārata* (devotion is) surrender of all activities to God (*ca* and) *tad-vismarane* if He is forgotten *parama* extreme *vyākulatā* anguish *iti* thus *manyate* holds.

19. But Naradā feels that devotion is surrender of all activities to God and extreme anguish if He is forgotten.

The present sutra gives Narada's own statement. Differing from the three earlier definitions, Narada says that all our conduct, all our activities are to be dedicated to God. This is what bhakti is: dedication of all our activities to God. And another point is also mentioned: supreme discontent when we forget Him. These two aspects are included in the definition given by Narada. First one is that all our activities are to be dedicated to the feet of God; that is, whatever we do should be by way of service to God.

Even our ordinary activities are to be dedicated to God. Everything has to be offered to God. The second one is, it is not enough to say that we are dedicating all our activities. So a caution is there: If we forget Him, we shall feel extreme agony, the mental agony that is caused by our forgetfulness of God. That is what devotion is.

This intense suffering that comes when we forget God, that we feel we are away from Him, is elaborated in *Bhāgavata* in the conduct of the gopis. There it is said that the gopis had not seen Sri Krishna for the whole day during the time he had gone out for the grazing of the cows. When

He returned, they just wanted to keep Him before their eyes so that there might not be a moment even when they lost sight of Him. It is said that when there was a winking of the eyes, they would be annoyed with the eyes. That was because if the eye winks, a moment is lost. They felt that the Creator who created this winking must be absolutely without any idea of how much suffering it may cause to a devotee; a moment looked like a *yuga* (cycle). That losing sight of God even for a moment appeared as if the sight was lost for an age. That is the intensity shown there, and that intensity of love is the true test of devotion.

So two things are mentioned: As long as we live, all our activities are to be directed towards Him: to serve Him and to please Him. In the absence of His thought in mind, we feel intense pain. That is what bhakti is. Bhakti, therefore, does not mean all happiness. We wrongly think that bhakti will give only joy. No, it will give intense pain also. There is not merely joy, but pain is also there. The pain, the suffering, is so intense that it cannot be compared to any other suffering. Of course, the joy also cannot be compared to any other joy. So both joy as well as suffering are of an extreme nature for a devotee. When he is in contact with God and his activities are directed to Him, he is happy; but the moment the mind forgets Him, it causes him intense pain. And it is not unnatural that such moments may come in the life of a devotee. So, when such moments come, his suffering is inexpressible, incomparable with anything else. The life of a devotee is a mixture of joy and sorrow, but of extraordinary intensity. That is Narada's definition of devotion.

Now for such a devotee it is not necessary to practise japa or meditation in the formal way. His whole life is immersed in God, so the question of formal practice of religion does not arise in his case. Certain forms of spiritual practice have been prescribed in the *Bhāgavata* by the sage Kapila, in the form of his spiritual instructions to his mother, Devahūti. There he says: 'One's own duties are to be performed, and the duties may be the daily duties or duties that arise on special occasions. Hymns are to be sung; there should be observance of activities that do not cause harm to others. We should think of God as residing in all beings. We should seek the company of holy men. We should show great respect to people who are spiritually great. Towards those who are inferior in this regard we should have mercy, sympathy and compassion. Towards people who are equals there should be friendship. A devotee should observe restraint of his passions, and control of his mind. He should devote his time to hearing God's praise and singing His glory. He should be straightforward. He should be unattached to things of the world. He should be free from pride.' And when, through the practice of such things, the mind is purified, then when he hears God's name, immediately his mind gets merged in God.

अस्त्येवमेवम् ॥२०॥

20. *Astyevamevam.*

*Asti* there are *evam evam* such forms (of devotion).

20. There are examples of such forms of devotion.

In the previous four sutras, we saw that many great teachers have independent opinions about devotion. Narada too gives his own idea of bhakti. For him, all the actions of a devotee are to be directed towards God, and if at any moment his mind fails to be absorbed in Him, he feels intense pain, intense suffering.

Narada emphasizes all this by adding that it really happens like this. It is his experience; it is more than a statement or theory. He confirms his statement by his own personal experience.

यथा ब्रजगोपिकानाम् ॥२१॥

21. *Yathā vrajagopikānām.*

*Yathā* as it was *vraja* Vrindāvana *Gopikānām* of the gopis.

21. As found in the lives of the gopis of Vraja.

All one's actions are to be dedicated to God, and any moment the mind deviates from that dedication, the devotee suffers intense pain. This has been illustrated in the lives of the gopis of Vrindavan. The entire lives of the gopis were dedicated to God. So, if they did not think of Him even for a moment, they suffered pain owing to the feeling of separation from God.



तत्रापि न माहात्म्य-ज्ञानविस्मृत्यपवादः ॥२२॥

22. *Tatrāpi na māhātmya-jñāna-vismṛtyapavādaḥ.*

*Tatrāpi* even there *māhātmya* greatness *jñāna* knowledge *vismṛti* forgetfulness *apavādaḥ* blame *na* not (*āsīt* was there).

22. Even there, there was no blame of forgetfulness of the greatness of the object of love.

The illustration cited in the previous sutra is unique. That is where devotion has been illustrated. Mere theory will not help one to understand truths. Only when a proper example is presented, which fully depicts the condition, can one understand better. So, the gopis are cited as an example.

That is what devotion should do to us. It should make us feel like the gopis of Vrindavan. In the *Bhāgavata* it is explained how the gopis do not see anything except Sri Krishna; their whole lives are immersed in Him. They do everything for the sake of Sri Krishna, and to them, a moment's separation from Him would be worse than death.

However, there may be an objection: in the devotion of the gopis, there was no awareness of the greatness of the object of love. They loved Sri Krishna, but never thought of His greatness as such. They regarded Krishna as their beloved, and it ended there. The allegation, therefore, is that the gopis did not have awareness of the greatness of God.

तद्विहीनं जाराणामिव ॥२३॥

23. *Tadvihīnam jārāṇāmiva.*

*Vihīnam* without *tat* that (knowledge of greatness) *jārāṇām iva* like paramours.

23. Without this knowledge (of the greatness of God) the love will be like that towards paramours.

Narada says in this aphorism that such an allegation cannot stand at all. One cannot raise this objection towards the devotion of the gopis; one cannot say that they were not aware of the greatness of Sri Krishna, the sole object of their love. Narada affirms that if that spiritual awareness is not there then it becomes merely a sort of earthly love, just as women may have towards their paramours. And that is not an example of a true devotee, according to Narada. It would be like the sort of love mentioned above.

नास्त्येव तस्मिन् तत्सुखसुखित्वम् ॥२४॥

24. *Nāstyeva tasmin tatsukha-sukhitvam.*

*Tasmin* in that (baser form of love) *tatsukha* the happiness of the beloved *sukhitvam* happiness *na asti eva* is not there at all.

24. This is because, in that baser form of love there is no idea of being happy in the happiness of the beloved.

The question of the knowledge of gopis about Sri Krishna's divinity is taken up. The idea is that, it cannot be said that the gopis did not have the awareness of the greatness of God, though they did not give importance to it. They considered Him as their own and therefore the greatness of Sri Krishna was not uppermost in the minds of the gopis. Just suppose a mother may have a son who is very high in position in the eyes of people. He may be a great man so far as others are concerned, but the mother does not think of the greatness of her son. That does not mean that the mother is not aware of his greatness. She does not give importance to that greatness; she loves the son as a son, and not because he is great.

This is what happened in the case of the gopis also. They knew Sri Krishna was great, but did not give importance to that; they did not love Him because He was great. That is the point. That does not mean that they were not conscious of His greatness, because it is seen that the gopis sang in this manner: 'You are not an ordinary person. You are not merely the joy of the gopis; You are the Inner Controller of all beings. It is as the Self that You are controlling all beings. For the protection of the earth the Creator invoked You, and that is why You have been born in the dynasty of the Yadus. But really, You are that supreme Reality—the supreme Truth—and so we consider you as the apple of our eye owing to our love.'

Another objection is now raised: all attachments are to be discarded, because attachment brings about bondage. If the gopis had attachment for Sri Krishna, that also should be causing bondage and therefore should have been discarded. So, how can it be extolled? How can it be considered as an ideal attitude for a devotee?

A very pertinent question! It is a simple fact of experience that attachment binds a person. To whomsoever that attachment may be, it binds. If that attachment of the gopis was towards Krishna, then the gopis must have been in bondage. And that is not an ideal state. Now, this objection is from the viewpoint of people who have not tasted this kind of love. They just generalise that all forms of attachment cause bondage. Narada says that attachment towards God is not to be discarded; it is not to be avoided. Why? You may say that it is also a cause of bondage. But no, it is not. The object of the attachment here is very different from ordinary forms of attachment. The gopis had attachment for Sri Krishna, and Sri Krishna is not an ordinary person. So, this attachment does not bind as usual attachments in an earthly sense do. But then, let the argument be put forth like this: if it happens in the case of other forms of attachment, why not here also? A further reply is given in the form of an illustration. Take the case of attachment towards holy men. What happens when we get attached to holy men? The holiness of a holy man elevates the person who has got attachment towards him. That is the experience of ordinary people. That is what happens in the case of a person who keeps company of holy men. That attachment does

not bind, but, it brings about salvation. Forgetting that Sri Krishna is the divine Being, even otherwise, His greatness will elevate the gopis and will not bring them down—just as the company of holy men elevates a person.

The gopis may not have particularly in mind the greatness of Sri Krishna, but He is great, and, therefore, the effect of attachment towards Him will be an elevating factor. It will elevate the gopis, just as we know that in the company of holy people, we imbibe that holiness. Goodness is as infectious as badness. If we keep bad company, we imbibe their wickedness. If we keep company of good people, we imbibe their goodness. This is because of the propriety of the object to which attachment is directed. Even if we do not consider Sri Krishna as God or incarnation, if we consider Him as the greatest of men, will not attachment towards that personality elevate us? That is how the gopis had attachment towards Sri Krishna. It made them free. Free from what? Free from the bondage of the senses; free from the bondage of this world; free from various kinds of temptations that ordinary people are subject to.

What is the ideal for a devotee? If it is an attachment, what is the characteristic there that brings about, not bondage, but freedom? What is the characteristic of that attachment? Narada says that there is a special characteristic which is lost sight of, unless you go deep into it. In any kind of degrading forms of attachment, you will find that the attachment that a person has towards somebody is not for the sake of the object of attachment, but for the sake of

himself or herself, as the case may be. If we love a human being, that attachment, or that love, is not because we want to make him or her happy, but because we find pleasure in such company. So, here the object is not unselfish; the object is selfish. Any kind of earthly relation will smack of this selfishness. We want to be happy, and that is why we want to keep company with a particular person, because we feel happy in his or her company.

Narada says that the criterion for devotion is not satisfied here. What is the true criterion then? The true criterion is not seeking one's own happiness, but making the other happy. This is the characteristic of divine love.

Any earthly love or attachment changes into hatred when there is some dissatisfaction in that relationship. Take the case—and the illustration is very apt here—of the love between a man and a woman. Let us say a woman who is supposed to be very emotional loves a person; but then, if it is unrequited love, to that extent it changes into hatred. What is the idea? The idea is that the lover does not want to make the object of love happy, but rather seeks to derive pleasure for himself or herself. The joy is personal, is selfish. That is why it can degenerate into an extreme form of hatred when something goes wrong.

That never happens in the case of divine love. This is because the motive is not one's own joy, but to make the other happy. Absolute self-abnegation is the prime condition for divine love. When a devotee loves God, he does not want any return from Him, but wants to give everything instead. That is the criterion that makes divine love

absolutely different from any kind of earthly love—even the most intense or the highest form of earthly love.

It may be said that some amount of self-sacrifice is also found in some cases of earthly love. O yes, there is! If, however, we go deep into it, we will find that, whenever love is persistently unreturned or unreciprocated, it becomes a source of hatred. That shows the danger of its deterioration into an opposite kind of feeling: attraction then becomes repulsion.

Does this not show that there is something missing here, something which we do not find in the case of divine love? A devotee only gives and never expects any return from the Beloved. He will give everything, but never want any return.

One day, Sri Ramakrishna visited a religious society where *kīrtan* and other forms of devotional music had been arranged. The songs centered round the Vrindavan episode of Sri Krishna's life. The theme was Radha's pique because of Sri Krishna's having visited Chandravali, another of the gopis of Vrindavan. Radha's friends tried to console her and said to her: 'Why are you piqued? It seems you are not thinking of Krishna's happiness, but only of your own.' Radha said to them: 'I am not angry at His going to Chandravali's grove. But why should He go there? She doesn't know how to take care of Him.'<sup>1</sup> Take the above case of Sri Radha, who is supposed to be the highest

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1. cf. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, pp. 221–22.

example of unselfish love. She says: 'I do not begrudge Sri Krishna's going to Chandravali. But my sorrow is that Chandravali does not know how to serve Him. As she does not know how to serve Him, Sri Krishna may be suffering. That is why I feel sorry.' Look at this attitude! Sri Ramakrishna repeatedly pointed this out. (Please excuse me, for these illustrations may appear vulgar in some cases, but they are to be understood as an illustration of a very sensitive feeling in human beings.)

That is a very fine sentiment, and is to be properly understood in its setting. We are discussing here about things which require very delicate handling because, we have no direct experience of them. And therefore, we have to talk about them in earthly terms. It is to be, however, remembered that there is nothing earthly at all in this relationship; therefore, it has to be comprehended with great caution.

Such expressions will be found not only regarding the relation of the gopis with Sri Krishna, but in all mystic literature. It is found not only in Indian mystical literature but in those of other countries also, specially in Christian literature. Such a vocabulary is used because that is the only means by which such ideas can somehow be conveyed. Beware of the possibility of abusing the language. Therefore, we shall have to be careful about the import of the vocabulary. These expressions are only by way of illustration, and they imply ideas with which we are not familiar; so the idea has to be conveyed and therefore the usage of such terms which are indecent in



common parlance. For a man of God there is no such indecency at all. There is an illustration where there is no such indecent hint. Sri Ramakrishna was travelling by horse-carriage. On the way he passed by a wine shop where some people were behaving in a drunken way. The very sight of this made Sri Ramakrishna go into ecstasy. He did not think of the wine or their drunkenness. The very sight awakened in him the idea of the 'drunkenness' of a holy man, who is drunk with divine love, and at once he went into ecstasy. This is why when the instrument is fine and pure, the earthly suggestions will also make one rise up to divine love; so such vocabulary has been used in dealing with these sentiments because they do not convey any indecent meaning to such. However, those who are to study them will have to guard their minds against the senses being debased. I speak of this because a very important point has to be borne in mind. We are talking about God, and not of earthly love, and that is the point which is to be noted.

Sri Ramakrishna speaks of several kinds of love: *sādhāraṇī*, *samañjasā*, *samarthā* and so on. 'In the first, which is ordinary love, the lover seeks his own happiness; he doesn't care whether the other person is happy or not. That was Chandravali's attitude toward Krishna. In the second which is a compromise, both seek each other's happiness. This is a noble kind of love. But the third is the highest of all. Such a lover says to his beloved: "Be happy yourself, whatever may happen to me." Radha has this highest love. She was happy in Krishna's happiness.

The gopis, too, had attained this exalted state,' says Sri Ramakrishna.<sup>1</sup>

In divine love, there is absolutely no selfish motive because, in cases contrary to this, there is not the attitude of being happy by producing happiness in the object of love. In this case, nothing is required for oneself; one's concern is only to make the object of love happy. That is the criterion of this pure love. As Sri Ramakrishna says, using the illustration of the gopis, that they had that supreme love. There are two things in this supreme love: myness and ego. 'I love God' and 'God is mine'—these two aspects. The devotee considers his very existence as inseparably connected with the Divine. His 'I' means, as Sri Ramakrishna says, the ripe 'I' which feels, 'I am God's devotee,' and myness means, 'God is mine'. The first thing is ego, that divine ego: 'If I do not serve God, He will be unhappy'. A devotee is egotistic not in the ordinary sense but because he thinks in this way. And, secondly, his feeling that God is his own. So, as we give all attention to the happiness of things that we consider ours, there the attention is focused on the happiness of the object of love. Sri Ramakrishna says that if the awareness of divinity is always there in the mind, then He cannot be served, particularly with the attitude of filial affection and with the affection of the lover. These two very tender forms of affection cannot run side by side with the awareness of divinity. That awareness reduces the intensity and closeness, therefore it

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1. cf. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p.766

is kept in the background. It is not that the awareness is not there—as we find in the case of the gopis also. This tender relationship between God and the devotee is a very delicate matter because it is a sentiment which is never exemplified anywhere else, and those only who have had the experience can understand it. None other than a devotee will be able to understand it. To the extent that we tune our minds to this state of experience, it will be intelligible to us. Otherwise, people will simply taunt the idea; the very idea becomes an object of ridicule.

In the *Bhāgavata*, the play of the gopis with Sri Krishna is full of very earthly vocabulary and that is why it has become a source of ridicule; particularly so from people who have no idea of the sentiments that are described therein. People think that it is only a debased form of earthly love, extolled as a spiritual condition for realization; but that is because of lack of understanding, a lack of sympathy.

I have already said about how mystics express their relation towards God. In the Christian vocabulary mystics consider themselves as women and God as their Lover. Soul is in the feminine gender always, and in the books on mysticism this divine love is described as love between a man and a woman. This is perhaps the strongest sentiment of love that exists in the relative level and can be explained to an ordinary person too who has some experience of it.

It has to be carefully understood and remembered, however, that divine love has nothing physical about it, nothing in comparison with physical love. It is always the finest

sentiment, which is absolutely spiritual, and has nothing in common with our fleshly feelings.

Without this idea ever present in us, to study such scriptures as dealing with love will be degrading rather than elevating. That is why Swami Vivekananda did not encourage ordinary people to study such stories of divine love because they might awaken in immature minds the earthly love with which they are familiar, which is uppermost in them. Only when the mind has been purged of all such base ideas, and it has become absolutely pure, does one become competent to understand them and to discuss these things at length.

For the ordinary seeker, there are other ways. To be on the safe side, it is better to think of God as one's father, or mother, or friend, or master. To go beyond brings in difficulty. To avoid pitfalls, therefore, it is better to think of God as our father or mother. It is better to start from where we are, rather than trying to jump at the highest. Unless we are so pure that no earthly sentiments will be awakened by discussions on the love of God as one's beloved, unless we have that inviolable purity, we cannot understand these things and therefore Swamiji forbade us to follow that course.

There are various attitudes one can have towards God: the attitude that Sri Ramakrishna has mentioned as the safest of all is the attitude of the master and the servant. 'God is my master; I am His servant.' That is a very simple attitude. Or, if one can rise still higher, one can think of God as one's friend, or as one's child. When one thinks of God

as the friend, He is almost on the same level, as it were. Friendship is always between equals. If one can go still further up, he can think of God as a child—when a child needs protection from his or her parents. Thus, that is how relationships become different. And last, and most difficult, is the *madhura bhāva*, the relation between two lovers that unites the two minds together, and makes them one. That is what is called the highest. It is enough to have the complete manifestation of any of these attitudes—it will suffice for God-realization. As master and servant, or as friend, or God as child and oneself as parent—these relations are capable of producing the deepest realization of God, and the attitude need not be changed. It is not the idea of the scriptures, or in practice, that one change one's attitude: go from the relation of the master and servant to the relation of friendship, then to the relation of filial love (that is, affection between the parents and children), and then to that between lovers. Such a gradation is not necessary, but any one of them will bring about complete realization of divine love. It is safer for an aspirant to start with the sentiment which he or she can understand and which can be felt readily, so that all energy may be directed wholeheartedly towards that. This is better than imitating another. As a matter of fact, we are all born with some innate tendencies, to make it suitable for us to follow one or the other of these attitudes; so, it is not that we can choose any one of them. It is ingrained in us; it becomes our constitutional necessity to follow one of these, and any one is sufficient to give us the highest realization.

सा तु कर्म-ज्ञान-योगेभ्योऽप्यधिकतरा ॥२५॥

25. *Sā tu karma-jñāna-yogebhyopyadhikatarā.*

*Sā* that (devotion) *tu* is *karma-jñāna-yogebhyaḥ* *api* then the paths of action, knowledge and yoga *adhikatarā* superior.

25. That devotion is superior to the paths of action, knowledge and yoga.

फलरूपत्वात् ॥२६॥

26. *Phala-rūpatvāt.*

*Phala* effect (goal) *rupatvāt* being of the nature of.

26. Because, it is by itself of the nature of effect (goal).

We have discussed three important topics until now. The first one was the definition of supreme devotion. The first six sutras dealt with the meaning of supreme devotion. The next eight sutras were regarding renunciation of everything else for the sake of devotion. The next ten sutras dealt with various interpretations and examples of supreme devotion. Thus, we have discussed twenty four aphorisms, dealing with definition of devotion and its special

characteristics. We now take up the fourth topic, comparing bhakti with the other paths of enlightenment.

Bhakti is superior to the path of action, the path of knowledge, and the path of yoga (mental exercises, etc.). Why? That, briefly, has been stated in the twenty-fifth aphorism. Bhakti is not merely a path; it is the goal also. Bhakti has been treated both as a means and an end. When we start the practice of devotion as beginners, bhakti is the path; and the ultimate goal which we reach through this path is also bhakti. It is, as Sri Ramakrishna puts it, *vaidhī bhakti* and *rāga bhakti*. That is, bhakti according to the injunctions of the scriptures or as advised by the followers of the path, and the goal, which is of the nature of supreme love, *prema bhakti*. In the beginning it becomes a duty, but in the end it becomes the ultimate realization. Bhakti is both the way and the goal. Is bhakti of the nature of the fruit of action? It has been specially characterised, not as a fruit or as a result, but as being of nature of the result. This is because it is not something which is produced, but something which is the very essence of our being. Anything that is achieved by some means is bound to be lost at some time. Whatever is not permanent can be lost again; that is a common law. Anything that is produced must be lost also. Bhakti is not of that nature. That is why it is not said to be the fruit or result of our actions, but *like* the result of our action, *like* the effect of the things that we perform for the attainment of the goal. They say, it is the goal itself and therefore not something to be achieved; it is already there. This love of God or devotion is inherent in us; it is eternal. What we try to do through our practices is to manifest it.

Just as God is eternal, love of God is eternal too, only we are not aware of it, as we have not realized it. So, through the purification of mind, which is attained by our various religious practices, we remove the imperfections, the impurities that are covering up the devotion in us, and thus devotion stands revealed. If the love of God is something that originates from our spiritual practice, then it will disappear at some point in time; that is inevitable. Therefore, we do not consider this love of God as having been attained at a particular point in time. We have this in us always, only other things are keeping us preoccupied and so we are not aware of this love of God within us. Therefore it is said to be of the *nature* of an effect, but not an effect. That is the implication of the words 'of the nature of an effect.'

Now, all these various paths of karma, jnana and yoga produce a certain effect. That of course, is as viewed from the angle of a devotee. Otherwise, it will be found that the path of knowledge also claims the same thing. The knowledge that we aspire after is attained as a result of the pursuit of the path of knowledge. Through various practices we try to manifest our true essence, and when that essence is revealed, we realize our true Self. Now knowledge is not something which is an effect, which manifests or is produced at a point in time. The knowledge that we acquire through our sadhana is inherent in us; only the obstructions that had been covering that knowledge have been removed, and then the knowledge stands revealed. So knowledge also is considered to be both a path and a result.



In other words, true knowledge is never an effect, but it is the revelation of our real nature. We know that Self-knowledge is eternal and therefore this state of enlightenment is not likely to disappear at any moment. This knowledge itself is the ultimate Reality. It is not knowledge of something, but Knowledge itself. Sri Ramakrishna says that one can attain the goal of the path of knowledge through devotion.

It is superior to the path of karma—as distinguished from the path of knowledge. Karma or action, as a path, leads to the result which will be freedom from all imperfections. Karma itself is not identical with imperfection or perfection. It is something that we take recourse to. By the practice of actions done with unselfishness, we realize that ultimate goal which is freedom from all impurities, and reach the highest level, which is the same as that of a man of knowledge. That is, we remove our bondage and it liberates us. The action itself is not liberation, but liberation is the result, and action is the cause by means of which the result is attained. Bhakti, however, is not used in that sense; it is both a path and a goal. Sri Ramakrishna has remarked several times that the path of devotion is superior to the path of karma. ‘...in the Kaliyuga the path of devotion prescribed by Narada is best. The path of Karma is very difficult.’<sup>1</sup>

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1. *Gospel*, p. 584.

Then there is yoga, which is having control over the senses and practising concentration of mind. Here also, those actions are themselves not the goal. Compared with bhakti, the path of yoga definitely will be inferior because it can only go up to some degree. It cannot operate when we have already reached that state where yoga has produced its desired result. It remains only a path, nothing more than that. Therefore, bhakti is definitely superior because it covers the whole course, from the beginning to the end. That is why it is said that it is superior to karma, superior to yoga and superior to jnana also. Unfortunately, from the point of view of a devotee, knowledge means the pursuit of knowledge only, and not the effect of knowledge. We distinguish between the pursuit and the ultimate goal that is to be reached. Now, that is not what is subscribed to by the person following the path of knowledge. We are not going to discuss that point and give importance to the difference, but let us see how a devotee views the Path of Knowledge. According to him, the path of knowledge has recourse to discrimination; that is what it limits itself to. Discrimination between the real and the unreal is an effort. By means of the effort the aspirant reaches the Real and discards the unreal. That is the state of liberation. Definitely the period of discrimination is very different from the period when he has attained the result of this discrimination. From that point of view, a devotee says that jnana is inferior to the path of devotion because from the very beginning the path of devotion is leading us to the ultimate goal. Both the path and the goal are connected by

the word devotion. Maybe the devotion is not so prominent, unselfish, and pure in the beginning; but, as we proceed, gradually the imperfections go, intensity increases, and the quality and quantity increase. Ultimately, when there cannot be any further progress, we have reached the goal. This same devotion is present from the beginning to the end.

Sri Ramakrishna puts it in a different way. He says that the path of knowledge rejects certain conditions, whereas a devotee does not reject anything. 'To the jnani this world is a framework of illusion,' he says.<sup>1</sup> The bhakta does not negate the world.

The world is not to be rejected but simply taken as an expression, as a sport, of the Supreme. Let us compare this position with that of a jnani. According to a follower of the path of knowledge, the world is to be negated to reach that which is beyond the world. This negation, according to a devotee, is the negation of a portion of Reality. He gives the illustration of a fruit which consists of pulp, seed, shell, everything. Now, if you reject any one of these, what is actually the fruit? If you say, it is not the shell, not the seed, but only the pulp, you are rejecting those things which are constituents of the fruit. Therefore, rejection means that the fruit loses some portion according to the path of qualified monism (*Viśiṣṭādvaita*). As Sri Ramakrishna puts it, if you want to know what is the weight of the fruit, you will have to take into account the seeds, the shell and the

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1. *Gospel*, p. 478.

pulp—everything. But a jnani, at the time of his discrimination, rejects the non-essentials and says that the pulp is the main thing. That is how rejection gradually leads to the ultimate Reality. A devotee says: 'That is not my way. I take everything as the sport of God, as His *lila*, and therefore everything has to be taken into consideration. My God is the sum-total, everything is my God. My path is taking me to God who has got this world from out of Himself as a sport.'

What is the difference between this way of thinking and the way of thinking that a jnani, a man of knowledge, follows? The jnani discriminates and rejects the world in the beginning. Ultimately, when he has realized the highest, what does he say? He says that the Highest remains, and these other characteristics are non-existent. That is why they are called *anitya*, unreal. The unreal must be rejected, and then only the real thing can be ascertained.

The bhakta says that nothing is to be rejected by him; that is because, he thinks in this way: 'This world of appearances also is my God. Everywhere it is my God only. He fills my being, He fills the whole of the universe. Without God nothing can exist.' This is the devotee's position. According to the jnani, this world is, in reality, Brahman, the ultimate reality. The appearances are many, but the reality, it is only One. This expression and that of a bhakta are apparently the same, but very different in actuality. A devotee says that all this is God, and a man of knowledge says, all this is nothing but God; that is, all this is non-existent, only God exists. This is very often wrongly

interpreted as God in everything, as Swami Vivekananda mentions, when he was corresponding with an admirer. Mary Hale wrote to Swamiji: 'Your Vedanta is only this: that everything is God.' Swamiji replied: 'You have not understood Vedanta at all. According to Vedanta, God is, all are not. All are non-existent, only God is. It is not that everything is God. God is, and everything else is non-existent.'<sup>1</sup> That is the position of Vedanta. The expressions are, more or less the same. This illustration comes handy here: We see a snake. When we bring light, because it is semi-dark, we find that it is only a rope. Then the expression we use is that the object which we took to be a snake is really a rope. That means the rope alone exists and the snake does not: it has no existence. Similarly, when we say the world is God, that means God is, and the world does not exist. That is the jnani's way of thinking. Whereas a devotee says that everything is God, which means that it is God who appears as everything, and means that everything is *not* non-existent. Everything has existence, and that existence is inseparable from the existence of God.

That is the fundamental difference of expression. These different expressions have, or the same expression has, absolutely different meaning for a devotee and for a man of knowledge. That has to be remembered.

According to a bhakta, his bhakti, starting from the position of a beginner to the ultimate culmination, is one

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1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 8, p. 165-66

and the same. That is why bhakti is considered to be superior to other paths. According to Sri Ramakrishna's interpretation, in the path of knowledge something has to be negated; whereas in the path of devotion, everything has to be accepted. One can have everything and transmute it. That is the wonderful sublimation. In the beginning, the world appears to be dissociated from God; yet, ultimately a devotee realizes that everything is actually eternally related to God.

Now, the three paths have been mentioned: the path of knowledge, the path of devotion, and the path of action. Yoga also is mentioned here. Yoga is the path by means of which we try to control our nature, control our sense-organs. The path of self-restraint, which we call yoga, becomes a means towards the attainment of purity of mind, and therefore this is necessary for all the yogas. That is why we find that in some places yoga has not been separately stated as a path. It is only an auxiliary which will be helpful for following all other paths.

In the *Gītā* the word yoga has been used only in the sense of karma. The word yoga popularly means the process of self-control: physical control, mental control, control over the breath, control of the sense-organs, etc. This control is necessary for all the paths. The *Gītā* mentions the paths of devotion, knowledge, and action. The path of action means selfless activity. No separate mention is there of the path of yoga or of the control over the sense-organs, *prāṇāyāma*, the control of breath. Though such control is mentioned in the *Gītā*, that is only as a subsidiary to the

paths of knowledge, devotion and action, and the word yoga is used in the *Gītā* only in the sense of karma yoga or the path of action, that is, selfless action. There the word yoga does not have the other meaning by which it has become popularly known. Everyone says that he or she is a yogi. If one does some physical postures, some exercises of the body, one is called a yogi. Now that yoga is very different. That may be a yoga in the sense that it makes one more fit physically. If it is a mental exercise, that makes one more fit mentally; but that is never, by itself, a spiritual path. So the word yogi must be used in a different sense. The path of action is selfless work, or activity done with the idea of pleasing God; it then becomes a part of devotion.

ईश्वरस्याप्यभिमानद्वेषित्वात् दैन्यप्रियत्वात् च ॥२७॥

27. *Īśvarasyāpyabhimāna-dveṣitvāt dainya-priyatvāt ca.*

*Īśvarasya* of God *api* even *abhimāna* pride *dveṣitvāt* hatred *ca* and *dainya* humility *priyatvāt* love.

27. (Devotion is superior to other paths) because even God hates pride and loves humility.

The 25th aphorism places bhakti above all the other paths, namely karma, jnana and yoga. Bhakti is superior to all of them. The first argument for this is that devotion is

of the nature of the effect to be produced by means of bhakti, while the other paths are only paths and not the goal. Bhakti is not only the path, it is the goal also.

The next argument as to why bhakti is superior is in the implication that the devotee is free from egotism, and is a picture of humility. As God hates egotism and appreciates humility, it is bhakti alone that can fully satisfy Him. Now, this is a sort of casting aspersions against the other paths for the obvious reason that a man of action may be proud, that a follower of the path of knowledge may think he is supreme, that he is God himself, and therefore there is no question of humility in these cases.

The person who does good deeds or observes sacrifices and rituals is often found to cherish some sort of egotistical ideas such as being a great religious man. His ego becomes inflated because he thinks too much of himself in comparison with others. The path of knowledge may be more obviously so. Even when Swami Vivekananda used to talk about the path of knowledge, people would consider him egoistic. One is naturally afraid of the individual who has an inflated ego when he says, 'I am Brahman'.

So other paths are seen to generate in people a sort of egotism. Whereas, in the case of devotion, a bhakta is always humble and free from egotism, so it is taken for granted that God loves him more. This is what is particularly mentioned as the characteristic of a devotee—that he has no egotism. Among the great teachers of the path of devotion, stress is always placed upon these two aspects, namely, that one should be free from ego and that one



should be humble. One of the great teachers of the path of devotion, Sri Gauranga, often used to repeat this verse: 'The glory of God is to be sung by a person who is humbler than the grass that is trampled under foot, who is more patient than a tree, and who does not seek any honour or respect from anybody, but gives respect to everybody.'<sup>1</sup> Such are the qualifications necessary for a person who is to sing the glories of God. Obviously, this will be the attitude of a devotee in comparison with the followers of the other paths.

Therefore Narada states that to be a favourite of God one must be humble. Swamiji, however, sometimes used to ridicule this attitude of humility on the part of a devotee. He used to say, 'Oh, you are of the Vaishnava cult (the cult followed by bhaktas). You are the humblest of the humble!' He ridiculed it because he felt that the attitude of most of the adherents was not sincere. He would often note that the humility sometimes becomes too much of a show—that they are nobodies, they are nothing. So, if there be humility, it should be sincere. When I say I am the humblest of the humble, and still look down upon others, that is not sincere humility, it is a mere show of it. To be a sincere devotee one should continue to lie low, and never again exert superiority at any time. One should be more patient than a tree. Why so? A tree gives fruits to people, it

1. तृणादपि सुनीचेन तरोरपि सहिष्णुना ।

अमानिना मानदेन कीर्तनीयः सदा हरि ॥

—Śrī Chaitanya, *Śikṣāṣṭakam*

gives shade to people, and what do people do? They cut its branches. Even then the tree does not retaliate; it is patient and forbearing. One should remember that this is only an illustration. It does not mean that the tree knowingly bears all this behaviour of people. It is only an illustration of the ideal of the devotee: that one should do good even to those who harm him; one should never return hate with hate, or take any reprisal. Whatever may be the behaviour of people towards him, he must bear it patiently without taking the slightest offence. That is the forbearing attitude of a devotee which is liked by God. A devotee expects no honour from others, but he gives honour to everybody. If one has these qualifications, then only will his praising God be sincere and fruitful. These, then, are some of the characteristics of a devotee.

तस्याः ज्ञानमेव साधनमित्येके ॥२८॥

28. *Tasyāḥ jñānameva sādhanamityeke.*

*Tasyāḥ* of that (devotion) *jñānam* knowledge *eva* only *sādhanam* means *iti* thus *eke* some

28. According to some, devotion can be generated through knowledge only.

The next aphorism says that according to some teachers, bhakti is attained through knowledge. The knowledge

of what? Knowledge of the means as well as the end. Bhakti is an emotional attitude, but in order for this attitude to be correctly directed towards God, discrimination and knowledge are needed. Sri Ramakrishna once pointed this out to younger Naren who said that all he wanted in spiritual life was pure devotion. While he rejoiced at that, Sri Ramakrishna said that if one does not know about God, to whom is the devotion to be directed? How can one have devotion? So, knowledge is necessary. If I am to have devotion to God, I must know about Him; I must have some idea about what and who God is. If I have no idea of what God means, how can devotion be directed towards Him? So, according to this theory, knowledge is necessary. To quote Sri Ramakrishna's own words: 'But how can you *love* someone unless you *know* him.' Again he added, 'There is another kind of bhakti called jñāna-bhakti, which is love of God based on reasoning.'<sup>1</sup>

There is another thing needed: one must know how to reach the goal and of the means towards the attainment of it. One must have some idea of the end and the means. Without that how can one travel along that path? Without knowing the path how can one take it? Without knowing the goal, how can one make progress towards it? So, according to some teachers, knowledge is a pre-condition for following the path of bhakti.

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1. *Gospel*, p. 718.

अन्योन्याश्रयत्वमित्यन्ये ॥२९॥

29. *Anyonyāśrayatvamityanye.*

*Anyonya* mutual *āśrayatvam* dependence *iti* thus *anye* others.

29. According to some others they (knowledge and devotion) depend upon one another.

‘According to some—’, i.e., it is not the view of Narada. He mentions what some other teachers say about the means for the attainment of bhakti. Others say that bhakti and knowledge are inter-dependent: for the attainment of bhakti, knowledge is necessary, and for knowledge to be properly cultivated, devotion is necessary. They are mutually inter-dependent. This naturally seems to be a balanced view.

स्वयं फलरूपतेति ब्रह्मकुमारः ॥३०॥

30. *Svayam phalarūpateti brahmakumārah.*

*Svayam* of itself (bhakti is) *phala* effect *rupatā* nature of *iti* thus (*manyate* feels) *brahmakumārah* the son of *Brahmā* (Narada)

30. According to Narada (Brahmakumara) bhakti is itself the effect (of the practice of devotion).

Narada himself says that bhakti by itself is the result. In other words, bhakti is not the result of something else. It is independent of everything. It does not depend upon knowledge or action or anything else. It is self-sufficient. That is what is the nature of ultimate success. It is of the nature of the goal, so it can be independent of everything. This is the attitude of Narada. Bhakti is the nature of a devotee, and the attainment of the ultimate result is only the culmination of the process of devotion. Premā bhakti, or parā bhakti as Sri Ramakrishna used to call it, is the supreme expression of devotion for God. That is the result, and the path is also devotion. Therefore it is not through knowledge that bhakti is reached. One reaches bhakti through bhakti itself—devotion reaches what is called mature devotion. So, it is through devotion itself, or through the grace of God, that bhakti is attained.

राजगृहभोजनादिषु तथैव दृष्टत्वात् ॥३१॥

31. *Rājagr̥ha-bhojanādiṣu tathaiṣa dṛṣṭatvāt.*

*Rājagr̥ha* the palace *bhojana* food *ādiṣu* and so on *tathā eva* in the same way *dṛṣṭatvāt* it is seen.

31. Even as it is seen in the case of the mere look of the royal palace or dainty food, (the mere knowledge of bhakti does not satisfy anybody).

न तेन राजपरितोषः क्षुधाशान्तिर्वा ॥३२॥

32. *Na tena rājaparitoṣaḥ kṣudhāsāntirvā.*

*Tena* from that (looking) *na* neither *rājaparitoṣaḥ* is the king pleased *vā* nor *kṣudhāsāntiḥ* appeasement of hunger.

32. Neither does it (the mere sight) make the king happy nor is the hunger appeased.

तस्मात् सैव ग्राह्या मुमुक्षुभिः ॥३३॥

33. *Tasmāt saiva grāhyā mumukṣubhiḥ.*

*Tasmāt* therefore *mumukṣubhiḥ* by seekers of liberation *sā* that (*bhakti*) *eva* alone *grāhyā* is to be accepted.

33. Therefore, *bhakti* alone is to be accepted by those who are desirous of liberation.

Is *bhakti* dependent upon knowledge, or is it independent of all paths? This is the point that is being discussed in the last few aphorisms. Narada says (see sutra 30) that *bhakti* is its own effect. It does not need any extraneous help. He gives an illustration here. If one knows the king's place, does the king get any satisfaction because of that? If

one knows what God is, does that please God? It does not. As the king is not pleased when one merely knows who he is, so knowledge does not come to be of any advantage in this respect. One's knowing of God does not mean that he is devoted. To be devoted, one must cultivate that attitude within him. Knowledge does not come to be of help. One more example Narada gives is that of food. Knowing various delicacies will not fill the stomach. If one is hungry, no amount of knowledge of food will help appease that hunger. One has to eat food.

In this manner, bhakti is not augmented by one's knowledge of God, just as one's hunger is not satisfied by the knowledge of food. It is a particular kind of relation with the object of one's love (God) that is necessary to satisfy the devotees, or to satisfy God. So, bhakti is not dependent upon knowledge. That is beautifully stated here. Of what use, then, is one's knowledge if one has no devotion or love? When one has devotion, he may direct it towards God, but devotion is not generated by knowledge. It comes to one spontaneously. Knowledge is of secondary importance, and it is not absolutely necessary at all that one should know towards whom he is directing his devotion. Here is an apparent contradiction. Sri Ramakrishna says, if one does not know, to whom will he direct his devotion, and how can he have it? What he means is that knowledge of the object of devotion does not help in the blossoming forth of devotion; it gives some help in directing the devotion, but devotion is not generated by knowledge. That is the point to be noted here.

Devotion does not depend upon our knowledge: it is independent of it. Our king's satisfaction with us, or of the bond of love between us and the king, does not depend upon our knowledge of the king. Even the enemy can have full knowledge of the king. Even so, a person who discusses at length the nature of God and is supposed to be fully conversant in that respect may not have any devotion whatsoever. It is merely an intellectual affair—an exercise of the mind which does not take one anywhere. That is the point stressed here.

Now comes the next point—interdependence. The interdependence proposed by some (refer to sutra 29 above) seems to be a very reasonable proposition. If we know the object of our devotion, naturally that devotion can be properly directed. If we know God to be a worthy object of our devotion, our devotion can automatically go towards Him.

Narada's point of view is different. Suppose one does not know. Can he not have devotion to Him then? And, after all, who can direct his devotion to God after knowing God? Who ever knows Him? Our knowledge of God may be very imperfect or meagre, but even then we can direct our devotion towards Him. There is another definition, in fact the very first definition of this book, which says that devotion is supreme love directed towards *something*. There, it is definitely stated, *to something* about which we do not have any definite idea. Even though we may not have any definite knowledge of the object to which we are devoted, devotion is perfectly capable of taking us to the highest realization. That is the point.



So the contribution of knowledge to the generation of bhakti is negligible, but for ordinary people, this little help is something which should not be neglected. The end and the means should be known as far as possible. I do not mean to say that they are absolutely necessary. But they are often helpful. Consider this illustration: a man is told: 'Hold on to the tail of a cow and it will take you to heaven.' The man closes his eyes and holds the tail tightly. He is dragged along through thorny bushes, is scratched and wounded, and bleeds profusely. Yet, he feels, 'I am going to heaven.' The idea is that it will be the progress of a blind man: it will not lead him to heaven, it will lead him from misery to misery. If we have no idea where we are going, how can we go, how can we make progress? If we are kept blindfolded in a big field, we shall perhaps go round and round, never reaching anywhere.

Thus, devotion with 'closed eyes' is no good. Open eyes are necessary, but then that is for ordinary people, and the objection is that devotion is in no way dependent upon knowledge. This is Narada's objection. The dependence of bhakti on knowledge is absurd. Bhakti is independent of everything. Even if a person does not know the goal, which is what Sri Ramakrishna has also mentioned, God will know what his mind is seeking. He does not know how to call upon Him, he has no knowledge of analysing the qualities of God, but he has devotion, and this devotion itself will take him to the goal, invariably.

In the case of many ordinary people, it is better if they start with that knowledge. It may be incomplete or imperfect knowledge, but even then it will be helpful. In an extreme case, if a person has no knowledge whatsoever but if he is very sincere, then I would say that his sincerity will make him reach the goal. After all, it is not a blind process. God is omniscient. If He sees that His devotee is seeking Him without knowing Him, and also does not know which way to go, naturally God will direct him. So, knowledge is not absolutely necessary. What is necessary is absolute sincerity, the yearning for God-realization. If that is there, nothing more is needed. That yearning alone will take one to the goal. That has been demonstrated by Sri Ramakrishna in his life when he started his sadhana.

An avatara has to demonstrate through his life what should be the means to the attainment of the goal. So Sri Ramakrishna has demonstrated through his life that the yearning of the heart alone can lead one to the highest goal. Sri Ramakrishna did not practice any kind of methodical sadhana in the beginning. He was just yearning for the vision of God, just as a child yearns for the mother, and the realization came when that yearning was at its climax. Only after the attainment of the vision did he start methodical practice, because that was also necessary to prove to the world that these different paths lead to the ultimate goal. So he practised various disciplines, but long before that, he had a vision of the Divine without going through any particular process, simply through extreme longing for God-realization. This shows that longing alone can take

one to the highest goal; it is not dependent upon anything. But for ordinary people it is safer to start with some idea of the goal and the path leading to it. Otherwise, one may wander about. If I start from here to reach the Tokyo Tower without knowing where it is, I will be probably wandering round and round and perhaps reach it in the end. But if I am conversant with the path, then naturally I will reach there faster and with less difficulty and wastage of energy. If I do not know the way, but have patience, sincerity and earnestness, I will reach the goal. That is the point that has been emphasised by the teacher of bhakti that yearning alone will suffice for reaching the ultimate goal; the goal will be taken care of if one has that sort of all-absorbing interest.

These teachings may appear contradictory, but if we try to understand the background against which they are given, then the efficacy of the different paths become apparent. Knowledge is required, karma is required, and yoga is required for the path of devotion. They are useful because they help us reach the goal without much wandering about and also expeditiously. That is why they are necessary. At the same time, what Narada says is also true: sincerity and devotion can take us to the goal on their own. The conclusion drawn by him is this: bhakti alone is to be followed by those who are desirous of liberation. Bhakti is the most important factor. If one has that, there is no fear of his or her missing the goal; one will certainly reach it. That is what Narada says with all emphasis.

Now it must be remembered that Narada puts emphasis on devotion because he is a teacher of the path of devotion *par excellence*. So he says that this alone can bring liberation. What about jnana? This propounder of the path of devotion does not bother about other paths. For him knowledge may be a barren, dry discussion. The path of knowledge, the way of discrimination, will only take one into intellectual speculation, and then it will end there. It will not necessarily mean that one will become Brahman. One may know about Brahman by scholarship, but it does not make him Brahman. There are many Vedantic scholars in the world—are they all enlightened?

Sri Ramakrishna says, 'What will mere scholarship accomplish without discrimination and renunciation?... If I see a pundit without discrimination and love of God, I regard him as a bit of straw.'<sup>1</sup> The point is that, however erudite a scholar he may be, unless the other qualities are there, he is absolutely nowhere.

So, knowledge as such is not the whole thing, though the teachers of jnana yoga will say that knowledge will ultimately give freedom from ignorance. To remove ignorance, what is the antidote? It is knowledge. So, if we don't have knowledge, our ignorance can never go. In response, the devotee will smile and say: 'If I have devotion, God can give me everything. Can He not give me right knowledge? Have I got to follow your process of logic and discrimination? My God is all-powerful; He can grant anything.'

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1. *Gospel*, p. 889

So, in this way bhakti is self-sufficient. A devotee does not think that bhakti alone cannot take him to the goal. He has a strong conviction. Only a man of knowledge will say: 'You are a fool, you do not know what God is, and you say God will give you liberation.' That is how their differences continue, and even to this day the differences have not been solved. Differences are there because of the difference of temperaments, of mental attitudes.

In this manner, their views may be different, but we can understand that a practical application of any of these paths is capable of leading us to the highest goal. That is what Sri Ramakrishna has repeatedly mentioned, though he was at the same time giving all emphasis to devotion when speaking amongst devotees and to the path of knowledge when speaking amongst the followers of that path. He was everything; a bhakta, a great man of knowledge, and a great man of action also. In him we have seen that each of these paths can lead us to the supreme goal.

तस्याः साधनानि गायन्त्याचार्याः ॥३४॥

34. *Tasyāḥ sādhanāni gāyantyācāryāḥ.*

*Tasyāḥ* of devotion *sādhanāni* means *ācāryāḥ* the great teachers *gāyanti* sing.

34. The great teachers describe in hymns and songs the following as the means of attaining devotion.

तत् तु विषयत्यागात् सङ्गत्यागात् च ॥३५॥

35. *Tat tu viśayatyāgāt saṅgatyāgāt ca.*

*Tat* that (love of God) *tu* is *viśayatyāgāt* through renunciation of objects of enjoyment *ca* as well as the *saṅgatyāgāt* renunciation of attraction.

35. The attainment of devotion is through the renunciation of objects of enjoyment and attraction towards them.

अव्यावृत्त भजनात् ॥३६॥

36. *Avyāvṛtta bhajanāt.*

*Avyāvṛtta* continuous (practice) *bhajanāt* of worship.

36. By continuous practice of worship.

लोकेऽपि भगवद्गुणश्रवणकीर्तनात् ॥३७॥

37. *Lokepi bhagavadguṇa-śravaṇa-kīrtanāt.*

*Loke api* even during ordinary activities of life *bhagavad* divine *guṇa* sports *śravaṇa kīrtanāt* listening and singing.

37. By listening to the sports of God and singing about the same even during the ordinary activities of life.

मुख्यतस्तु महत्कृपयैव भगवत्कृपालेशाद् वा ॥३८॥

38. *Mukhyatastu mahat-kṛpayaiva bhagavatkrpā leśāt vā.*

*Mukhyataḥ* mainly *mahat-kṛpayā eva* through the grace of great souls *bhagavat kṛpā leśāt vā* through a little grace of God.

38. Mainly, however, through the grace of the great souls or through a little grace of God.

We shall be discussing the different ways to the attainment of bhakti, or devotion to God. The aphorism says that different means to the attainment of devotion are explained by the great teachers of bhakti yoga. Narada describes these different means for the attainment of bhakti.

Bhakti or devotion can be attained through the renunciation of sense objects, and also one's attachment to them. The means are mentioned here: one, renunciation of the objects of desire as also one's attachment to them; two, unbroken devotion to God; and three, continuous remembrance of God or continuous flow of devotion towards God. Even when one is occupied with secular activities, one

should remain engaged in hearing and singing the glory of God, and in this way keep the mind always occupied with the thought of God. These are all helpful, but mainly one attains devotion through the grace of men of God, or with a little grace from God Himself.

Now, why are these last two mentioned? They are mentioned in the sense that we may, owing to good fortune, knowingly have contact with some holy person and through that contact devotion may be kindled in us. This part of it we can do. We can seek the company of a man of God and, through his grace, may have bhakti aroused in us.

But then, why the other portion? Even when we have not sought the company of holy people, it sometimes comes to us; bhakti is aroused in us through the grace of God. So, God's grace is the main thing, and that again comes without our knowing it. We may not know, we may not have deserved it, but God may bestow His grace on us, unsolicited, sometimes. We have to seek the company of holy men, but then people do not even do that sometimes. Without our knowing the reason for it, sometimes the grace of God is bestowed on us and we have got bhakti. So it is not necessary that it must invariably be through the company of holy men—even without it, it may come. The idea, however, is that if we wait for it to come, it may not come at all. That grace of God we may not have at all, because there is no way to know how it will come. If it is unconditional, naturally we have no means to the attainment of it. So the two things are mentioned: firstly, the grace of great



men, men of God, that we can seek and obtain; secondly, we should understand that through the grace of God alone also we can have devotion. These two things are mentioned to show the greatness of divine grace which can be bestowed on a person without his seeking it. Grace may spontaneously descend upon somebody. If we call it grace, then it must come unconditionally. Grace must be unconditional. Grace means we receive something which we have not merited—which we have not deserved. This may mean that we are not to seek any company or undergo any practice at all. But then, we may wait for an infinite time without receiving anything, because it is not necessary that God should show His grace on anybody and everybody. It is His choice. So we may wait in vain without receiving it. That is why both portions are mentioned.

One thing is that men of God are not easy to obtain. The company of holy men is rare and inscrutable. Rarely do we receive such a good fortune of having holy company. Again, we cannot know, and cannot judge for ourselves, who a great person is, how to come into contact with him and how his company brings about a change in us. All these things are inscrutable. We cannot understand this and we cannot rationalise too. These things are beyond our comprehension. If we get holy company it produces its effect without fail. It is an infallible remedy; it produces its effect invariably. That is, the company of great people can never go in vain. Therefore, if we have the grace of a great person, we should know that we have got the means to cross the ocean of birth and death. Holy

company will regenerate us, and transform us into saints. That is why stress is put on the company of holy men. It cannot be known as to how it brings about transformation, but if one has got the company of holy men, it is sure to produce the effect of rousing supreme devotion to God.

महत् सङ्गस्तु दुर्लभोऽगम्योऽमोघश्च ॥३९॥

39. *Mahat-saṅgastu durlabhogamyomoghasca.*

*Mahat* holy *saṅgaḥ* company *tu* is *durlabhaḥ* difficult to attain *agamyah* difficult to understand *amoghaḥ ca* unailing also.

39. The company of holy persons is difficult to attain as well as understand, and never fails to produce the result.

This aphorism eulogises the company of the holy. First of all, it is *durlabha*, that is, difficult to obtain. Why so? This is because, even if we are in the vicinity of some great person, there may not be actual communion with him. Merely being near a holy person will not help. Take for instance the case of people who lived in the temple of Dakshineswar and those who were residents of that locality. They had the opportunity to see Sri Ramakrishna daily and of coming in contact with him; but were they actually

having communion with him? No, they were not. Even those who were having close contact with him did not have communion. Therefore, it is difficult to obtain holy company, even for such people. Mere physical nearness is not the company of holy men. That alone does not help. We may be near a holy man without being actually in communion with him.

In this connection I remember an incident. A gentleman came to Udbodhan, the Mother's House. We were sitting with Swami Saradananda, and the man said casually: 'I have come to have *sadhu saṅga* (holy company).' Swami Saradananda remarked as I have just mentioned that the people who lived in the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar were constantly in touch with Sri Rama-krishna. The people who lived near about also had daily contact with him, but there is no instance of any religious awakening in any of them. Swami Saradananda especially said, 'any of them'.

लभ्यतेऽपि तत्कृपयैव ॥४०॥

40. *Labhyatepi tatkrpayai*

*Labhyate* it (holy company) can be obtained *api* even (by) *tat* His *krpayā eva* grace alone.

40. It (holy company) can be obtained through His grace alone.

तस्मिंस्तज्जने भेदाभावात् ॥४१॥

41. *Tasminstajjane bhedaābhāvāt.*

*Tasmin* in *Him tat jane* in His devotees *bheda abhāvāt* because of non-existence of difference.

41. This is because God and His devotees are non-different.

तदेव साध्यतां तदेव साध्यताम् ॥४२॥

42. *Tadeva sādhyatām tadeva sādhyatām.*

*Tat eva* that alone (holy company) *sādhyatām* attain.

42. Attain that (holy company) alone without fail.

The discussion on the importance of holy company is continued and concluded in aphorism 42. Incidentally, the repetition in aphorism 42 is for emphasis.

Narada says that holy company is not easily obtained. Even if we obtain it at all, it is through God's grace alone. Therefore, mere holy company is not enough. There should be mental communion, that is, spiritual communion. Without that, mere proximity of a great person is of no help. So it is not easily attained by everybody, even by people who are in close touch with great men. Secondly, it is inscruta-

ble. We do not know how that communion introduces a change in a person without his knowing it. He does not realize it, he does not know, but the change comes to him without any effort on his part, without his knowing how he is being transformed. And yet, the transformation comes, invariably. It produces the result without fail. The efficacy of it is such that it can never go in vain. It always produces the effect of kindling great devotion to God in such a person. By grace alone, therefore, this parā bhakti or supreme devotion can be attained. Though we do not realize it in the beginning, ultimately this effect comes invariably, and it comes through God's grace alone. Even the grace of a holy person may be otherwise called the grace of God. Through the grace of God alone can we have the company of great people, or can have the transformation in us without our having merited it. By His grace alone holy company is obtained. This is because there is no difference between God and a man of God. God and a man of God are identical. When a man attains to that level of God-consciousness, he becomes one with God; so his company means the company of the divine Reality itself, or God Himself. That holy man's grace means the grace of God. So, ultimately, it is the grace of God that produces devotion in us. That is the final teaching of Narada.

The idea is this: suppose a person has come into contact with a holy man, and subsequently he is transformed into a holy man himself. That is perfectly in order and is apparent too. However, it should be kept in mind that the grace of a holy person is only the grace of God in another

form. It flows through an instrument of His and that instrument is identical with Himself. So, there is no difference between the grace of God and the grace of a holy person. So, Narada says, 'Take recourse to that (grace of God) and that alone.' That is, whatever is conducive to the attainment of the goal, which is devotion, should be followed. Narada insists, as it were, that one should not waste the precious life without trying to resort to those means by which one can be blessed with supreme devotion. Narada repeats it for the purpose of emphasis: it is as if saying, 'Do it, do it, now itself.' His idea is that we should not waste our time. That is the positive side.

दुस्सङ्गः सर्वथैव त्याज्यः ॥४३॥

43. *Dussaṅgaḥ sarvathaiva tyājyaḥ*

*Dussaṅgaḥ* the company of the wicked *sarvathā eva* by all means *tyājyaḥ* to be given up.

43. The company of the unholy should be avoided by all means.

काम-क्रोध-मोहस्मृतिभ्रंश बुद्धिनाश-सर्वनाश-कारणत्वात् ॥४४॥

44. *Kāma-krodha-moha-smṛtibhramśa buddhināśa sarvanāśa kāraṇatvāt.*

*Kāma* lust *krodha* anger *moha* infatuation *smṛtibhraṁśa* loss of remembrance of God *buddhināśa* loss of the power of reasoning *sarvanāśa* complete ruin *kāraṇatvāt* being the cause.

44. This is because, (the company of the unholy) brings in its train lust, anger, infatuation, loss of remembrance of God, loss of the power of reasoning and complete ruin.

तरङ्गायिता अपीमे सङ्गात् समुद्रायन्ते ॥४५॥

45. *Taraṅgāyitā apīme saṅgāt samudrāyante.*

*Taraṅgāyitā* begun as a ripple *apī* even though *ime* these (unholy things) *saṅgāt* through unholy company *samudrāyante* become an ocean

45. Because of unholy company, these things, even though begun as a ripple, gradually turn into an ocean.

On the negative side, Narada says that evil company should be shunned by all means. That is, the company of holy men should be resorted to, and evil company should be avoided. Why should evil company be avoided?

Narada explains it in the next aphorism. Evil company has to be shunned because it is the cause of lust, anger, delusion, loss of remembrance of God, loss of the power of discrimination, and so on. Company with evil persons

causes all these. It rouses lust in us; it generates anger in us; it causes delusion; it makes us lose our remembrance of God—all these things happen through evil company. So that should be avoided by all means. Narada puts great emphasis on these points.

The problem is that we sometimes take a charitable view of things. Suppose an evil person is there. We argue, 'Why should we avoid him? If he is evil, let him remain what he is. We do not have anything to do with him.' In that manner, the company of such a man is not sought but sometimes tolerated. Narada is against that also. Today we shall tolerate, but tomorrow we shall be influenced, and next, we will begin to like the evil person. This is how evil company gradually transforms us into evil persons. Just as good company rouses devotion in us, evil company rouses lust, anger, delusion and so on, and all these evil tendencies come through evil company.

In the *Gītā*<sup>1</sup> it is said that through attachment comes desire. If we live in the midst of things causing temptation, they may not immediately show their effect; but gradually they will colour the mind. Later, without our knowing it, we shall be transformed into men of the world, full of lust, anger and so forth.

Therefore, it is to be very carefully observed whether we are avoiding such company or not. It may seem a little uncharitable, but for the safety of a seeker of God, it is

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1. सङ्गात् संजायते कामः —*Gītā*, 2.62



necessary—absolutely necessary—that such evil company should be avoided.

When a person has raised himself to a high level in the path of devotion, such company may not affect him anymore. In the beginning, however, as a seeker of God, he must be careful to keep away from evil company; otherwise invariably his mind will be dragged down. That is the point stressed here.

We cannot take a charitable view of things and say: 'Let us be practical. We cannot be away from evil company, so let us be with the evil one, and yet remain alert so that that person's influence may not be there on us.' That may be a practical way of looking at things, but this practicality will ultimately bring ruin upon us, for, gradually without our knowing it, our minds will be coloured. The influence is so strong that it gradually enters into us and transforms us. Just as good transforms a man into a good man, so evil transforms a man into an evil person without his knowing it. Only in very exceptional cases, when a man has risen high above good and evil, when he is steeped in the love of God, such company may not influence him. On the contrary, the influence of a man of God will gradually transform the evil person.

An ordinary seeker of God, however, has to be careful by all means so that he may not allow himself to be affected by evil company. That will lower his condition and take him away from the path of God. Narada places great emphasis on this. In the beginning, lust, anger, etc. may appear in the people as a small ripple of the ocean.

They are aggravated through the company of such evil people.

A devotee may have in his mind all tendencies—good as well as bad. Evil tendencies may remain only in a dormant condition. They may be felt ineffective—such evil tendencies may not change his mind and may not affect him so much. He remains a spectator, as it were, when these waves rise and fall. That is what has been taught in the *Gītā* also. These tendencies may be there, but if the devotee is alert, and can remain always with an elevated outlook, then these ripples will only remain ripples—the ineffective occurrences in the mind that will gradually die out. They do not change him; they do not make him lose his course, or make him lose his thought of God.

It is said: 'We must beware of them when we are in the company of evil, as such company will make our small ripple transformed into an ocean.' That is, our lust, anger, delusion, etc., will be augmented so much that we will not be able to control them. Therefore, one must remain alert and avoid evil company by all means, never thinking that one is strong enough not to be affected by it. Such complacency will always spell ruin.

कस्तरति कस्तरति मायाम्?

यः सङ्गं त्यजति, यो महानुभावं सेवते, निर्ममो भवति ॥४६॥

46. *Kastarati kastarati māyām? yaḥ saṅgam tyajati, yo mahānubhāvam sevate, nirmamo bhavati.*

*Kaḥ tarati* who crosses *māyām* the ocean of delusion *yaḥ* who *saṅgam* (evil) company *tyajati* gives up *yaḥ* who *mahānubhāvam* great person *sevate* serves *nirmamaḥ* without egotism *bhavati* becomes.

46. Who crosses the ocean of delusion? He who discards the company of the unholy, who serves great spiritual persons, who gives up the idea of egotism.

यो विविक्तस्थानं सेवते, यो लोकबन्धमुन्मूलयति (यो)  
निस्त्रैगुण्यो भवति, (यो) योगक्षेमं त्यजति ॥४७॥

47. *Yo vivikta-sthānam sevate, yo lokabandham unmulayati, (yo) nistraiguṇyo bhavati, (yo) yogakṣemam tyajati.*

*Yaḥ* he who *vivikta-sthānam* solitude *sevate* lives *yaḥ* he who *loka-bandham* worldly ties *unmulayati* uproots *nistraiguṇyaḥ* free from the three gunas *bhavati* becomes (*yaḥ*) (he who) *yogakṣemam* obtaining things of the world and their preservation *tyajati* gives up.

47. He who lives in solitude, uproots worldly bondages, goes beyond the three guṇas (*sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*) and renounces the idea of obtaining the objects of the world or their preservation (crosses the ocean of delusion).

यः कर्मफलं त्यजति,  
कर्माणि संन्यस्यति ततो निर्द्वन्द्वो भवति ॥४८॥

48. *Yaḥ karmaphalam tyajati, karmāṇi sannyasyati tato nirdvandvo bhavati.*

*Yaḥ* he who *karmaphalam* effects of actions, *tyajati* gives up, *karmāṇi* all actions *sannyasyati* renounces, *tataḥ* then *nirdvandvaḥ* free from duality *bhavati* becomes.

48. He who gives up all effects of action, renounces all actions, becomes free from duality.

यो वेदानपि सन्न्यस्यति, केवलमविच्छिन्नानुरागं लभते ॥४९॥

49. *Yo vedānapi sannyasyati, kevalamavicchinna-anurāgam labhate.*

*Yaḥ* he who *vedān api* even Vedic actions *sannyasyati* gives up *kevalam* only *avicchinna* uninterrupted *anurāgam* love *labhate* attains.

49. He who discards even actions enjoined by the Vedas—he only attains uninterrupted love.

स तरति स तरति स लोकांस्तारयति ॥५०॥

50. *Sa tarati sa tarati, sa lokānstārayati.*

*Saḥ* he *tarati* goes beyond *saḥ* he *lokān* others *tārayati* helps go beyond.

50. He does not only go beyond the ocean of maya but also helps others to do so.

Now, who crosses this ocean of maya? Who goes beyond delusion? Firstly, he who gives up attachment, avoids all contact with sense objects, and controls all one's passions.

Secondly, he who serves a great person of God. As it is said in the *Gītā*,<sup>1</sup> being in the company of a great person means that one should receive knowledge with humility, with a desire to know, by asking questions, and by service. Service prepares the mind to receive a holy man's grace. It is not that by service we propitiate him and thereby his grace comes to us. His grace comes to us without any condition, but we must be prepared to receive that grace. Receptivity must be there in us. If we serve a holy person, we shall be turning ourselves to the truth of the great ideas that he is always disseminating. We shall be able to receive these great ideas through our service to him. Service, therefore, is a great requirement—not for the holy man himself, but for the person who wants the holy man's grace because thereby he prepares himself. Through such service his mind becomes receptive to ideas.

1. तद्विद्धि प्रणिपातेन परिप्रश्नेन सेवया । —*Gītā*, 4.34.

Thirdly, he who gives up the idea of 'me' and 'mine'. The idea of possession should be given up. If we are full of the idea of possessiveness, there will be no scope for grace to work in us. For it to work upon us, we should have the attitude of receptivity—that we must receive grace from such and such a person. The mind will not remain receptive if we are full of the idea of possession. When I say I have this, or that I possess this, immediately the desire comes that I shall possess more; I must possess more things. The mind remains preoccupied; the idea of 'mine' keeps the mind engaged with other things, and therefore we do not receive the grace of great people. As Sri Ramakrishna says, water accumulates only where there is a depression in the ground. If water falls on high ground, it cannot stay there. 'An egotistic person cannot realize God. Do you know what egotism is like? It is like a high mound, where rain-water cannot collect: the water runs off. Water collects in low land. There seeds sprout and grow into trees. Then the trees bear fruits.'<sup>1</sup>

So, two things are necessary: the attitude of receptivity, and humility. We want to receive the grace of the Divine or the grace of great men, but if we are full of the idea of 'me' and 'mine', receptivity will not be there. The question has been raised: Who crosses the ocean of delusion? The reply is being given as follows:

- 1) He who renounces attachment towards sense objects.
- 2) He who serves great people or men of God.

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1. *Gospel*, p. 548.

3) He who gives up the idea of possessiveness.

4) He who resorts to a solitary and holy place.

Now, this last one is very important for pursuing the path without any distraction. When we are living in the midst of the din and bustle of society, of people following the path of the world and talking about worldly things, naturally the mind will be distracted. So, the first thing necessary is a place away from such distractions. Then, it will be all the better if the place is holy, having sacred memories or associations. At such places, the mind will naturally go towards God. So, such a solitary place is very important.

5) He who has overcome bondage to the pleasures of the three worlds.

The three worlds are considered to be this world and two higher ones. That is, the region in the intermediary space, and heaven—the abode of gods and goddesses. That is where people like to go to enjoy heavenly pleasures. So, it is not only necessary that one gives up the pleasures of this world, but one should give up the pleasures of even heaven or other higher regions, where they are supposed to be manifold—of much longer duration—and in quality also much higher and more intense. The pleasures will be there in abundance. The higher worlds are supposed to be worlds meant for enjoyment. Now, the pleasures of these three worlds must be rooted out of the mind. The mind hankers after pleasures. This hankering must be completely removed. The expression ‘completely rooted out’ is purposely given with emphasis. Not only removing them but

completely rooting them out, so that they may not crop up again. That is the idea. If a plant is cut down it will grow again so long as the roots are there; so the roots have got to be removed. The objects of pleasure bind us to some extent but more binding are the roots because, unless the roots are removed, they will crop up again in some other form.

6) He who has become free from the three *gunas*.

The three *gunas* are *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. They form the root of this world, the root of creation, the root of everything. These *gunas* or qualities are supposed to bind a person.<sup>1</sup> That is the original conception of the three *gunas*. These three must be transcended. *Tamas* is inertia; *rajas* is activity, which may direct us to activities for the attainment of pleasures; the third is *sattva* which binds us to the objects of pleasure. *Sattva* attaches us to pleasure—that is, it provides pleasure for us. Miseries are generated by *rajas* and inertia by *tamas*.<sup>2</sup> Therefore all the three *gunas* will have to be transcended, and he who has transcended the three *gunas* crosses delusion.

7) He who gives up all idea of acquisition and preservation of the objects of enjoyment.

The idea is that those who renounce such things become fit to go beyond delusion. Sometimes, we have certain things and we want to preserve them. Then there are other

1. सत्त्वं रजस्तम इति गुणाः प्रकृतिसम्भवाः ।

निबध्नन्ति महाबाहो देहे देहिनमव्ययम् ॥ —*Gītā*, 14.5

2. cf. *Gītā*, 14.9



things that we do not have, and we want to have. Desires may be in either of these two forms. The desire should not be either for the things that we have, or for the things we do not have and want to have. All these will have to be renounced.

8) He who gives up the fruits of actions.

When we go through any activity, there is the desire to get the fruit or result of the activity. A man of God will have to renounce the fruits of all activities. The idea is that he should not do anything with the motive that he will derive benefit from it. Karma may be performed without any attachment, without any selfish motive, without any idea of gaining something thereby for oneself. Such karma is not binding and does not put us into bondage. When we perform actions with the idea of getting results from them, those very actions will bind us to delusion. That is why the fruits of actions will have to be given up.

9) He who renounces all actions.

Here actions mean rites enjoined by the scriptures: these will also have to be renounced, because they distract us. Thereby we become free from the opposites like pleasure and pain, etc., and can go beyond maya.

10) He who has uninterrupted hankering for God.

The idea is that hankering for God should not be stopped or slowed down, but it must be tempered. There must be a continuous burning desire for God-realization or devotion to God. That desire must be continually burning like the flame of a lamp or like the continuous flow of oil from one vessel into another—without any break or

interruption. When the mind goes on thinking of God in that manner without any interruption whatsoever, then that mind becomes fit for God-realization. That is how the means to the attainment of God-realization have been described here. They are simple descriptions, but very effective. Here there is no mention of anything which we cannot understand, or which we cannot try to practise.

|| The question may arise that an uninterrupted flow of hankering for God cannot be achieved. Yes, it cannot be achieved immediately, but effort should be made to maintain that. We should try hard to achieve that uninterrupted remembrance of God, or uninterrupted devotion to God. It is only then that we become capable of God-realization. This capability, again, means that it is only then that we become fit for the grace of God. God's grace is bestowed on us, only we have to receive it. If we prepare ourselves we shall be able to receive that grace. Otherwise, it will go without benefiting us. Even God's grace must become fruitful in us. The idea is, God can make a worldly man a God-man—no doubt about it. However, what we have to do to achieve that goal is mentioned here. Though it has been clearly stated that with all these efforts, it is not necessary that we *must* have God-realization, because grace is the primary factor. It is the main factor for our regeneration. The means also have been described here so that, by these means, we can try to make ourselves competent for receiving grace. The means are very simple and rational. We can understand every bit of it. There is no philosophical jargon here: we can understand without much scholar-

ship every word of what has been said. Now it is up to us to practise to the best of our ability. If we try, if we practise, the hope is held before us that we shall succeed, through the grace of God. We receive all these things through the grace of God, but we have to be competent enough—we ourselves must be able to receive that grace. These are the exercises for receiving that grace.

In sutra 50, the words are repeated twice in order to conclude the discussion on this topic.

अनिर्वचनीयं प्रेम-स्वरूपम् ॥५१॥

51. *Anirvacanīyam prema-swarūpam.*

*Anirvacanīyam* beyond description *prema-swarūpam* the nature of supreme love.

51. The nature of supreme love is beyond description.

मूकास्वादनवत् ॥५२॥

52. *Mūkāsvādanavat.*

*Mūka* the dumb *āsvādanavat* experience like.

52. It is like the experience of a dumb person.

In sutra 51, the definition of prema or divine love is given. The true nature of devotion is inexplicable. It defies exact analysis, precise definition and proper description. We cannot find out, analyze and describe at length what this love is—what the contents of this love are. Why can we not do that? It is because this is like the taste of a dumb person. It is like the experience of joy which a dumb man has when he tastes something sweet. He enjoys it, but cannot describe it. He feels, but cannot give expression to his feelings because he is dumb. Owing to his dumbness, he cannot give expression to any of his feelings. This divine love, on the other hand, is such that nobody can give expression to it—whether one is dumb or is able to speak. Let alone God-realization or the love of God; even in the case of ordinary things like our human love—can we describe it? No, we cannot. It is an elementary principle which does not admit of any further analysis or description. A mother loves her child. A philosopher comes and says: ‘Can you describe what your love for the child means?’ She will naturally say, ‘No, I cannot. But I feel it.’ So, that feeling, when directed to God, becomes all the more indescribable. When referring to it, we are describing it so much. But then, do words carry any conviction to persons who have not got the same experience? Only another mother will know what the love for the child means, because she has also got the same experience, though not communicable. She cannot communicate it to another. At the most, she will tell another person who has not got a child: ‘You will understand when

you too have a child.' Those who have not had the experience of having been mothers may taunt her, 'What is this? Why do you make so much fuss about the child?' They will not understand. Only another mother can understand what it is.

Exactly in the same manner, love for God is felt but cannot be described. Those who have the same feeling can understand. Those who have not got the same feeling, may simply taunt, saying, 'What is this?'

In this connection, I will tell you one incident which happened sometime ago. Many people were receiving spiritual initiation in a certain place. Among them was one woman who had a child. That child was kept with somebody else outside when the initiation was going on. When there was a break during initiation, the woman wanted to go out because her child was crying. She could hear it. Others also heard the crying, but it did not affect them. The mother's mind was affected. When she wanted to go out, the father of the child came and tried to pacify her, saying that they were trying to console the child. At this the mother became angry with her husband. Then one of the brahmacharins interceded, and the woman said to him, 'Please don't involve yourself in this, you do not understand.' I appreciated the idea. We do not understand what a mother's feeling is towards her child. When that is awakened in the heart, everything else is forgotten. In the same way, when love for God is awakened, this is much more intense—ininitely more intense—than the feeling of the mother for the child. This cannot be under-

stood by another. Just like a mother's attitude cannot be understood by anyone who is not a mother, in the same way the devotee's hunger for God cannot be understood by anybody, unless he has got that hunger or yearning himself. If someone wants us to describe it, we cannot. At the most, all we can say regarding the feeling one has for God is only paraphrasing. It is like saying that such a person will shed tears, feels no rest, no peace of mind, etc.—as we find it to be the case. But that is no description or analysis at all. The fact remains that that feeling is indescribable, not given to analysis. It is only an experience, like that of a dumb person. The experiencer cannot give expression to the feeling: he cannot describe what goes on inside him.

प्रकाशते क्वापि पात्रे ॥५३॥

53. *Prakāśate kvāpi pātre.*

*Prakāśate* manifests *kvāpi* in some *pātre* container.

53. It (prema) manifests itself in the heart of a worthy seeker.

Devotion manifests itself in one—whoever it may be—who has made himself fit for such manifestation. Now, nobody can have this naturally or spontaneously. It is not

possible to achieve it that way. It is revealed in somebody who is competent for having that blessing.

A person who has the required competence is rare. Though it is indescribable, though it is unanalysable, it finds expression in a person who has made himself competent to receive it.

A question may be raised in this connection: if a thing is indescribable, why should we talk about it? If no one has given expression to it, and the persons who are hearing also have not realized it, then what is the fun in saying that there is such a thing in existence? The answer is: there is such love of God, because the existence of a thing can be proved only by its experience. That is why this sutra adds: 'Yes, it can find expression in a person who is competent to have it.' And the competence can be acquired by the means we have just described. Therefore, simply because it is indescribable, we should not be led to believe that it does not exist. It does exist, because it reveals itself in some rare persons who have made themselves competent to receive it.

Prema was described in this section. I repeat again: It is of the nature of love which is beyond description. It is like the taste of a dumb man. He has the taste but cannot express it. This love of God is revealed in one who is competent to receive it and, who is fit for receiving this revelation. That is, though it is indescribable, it is not that no one has any experience of it. It is definitely revealed in some person when he is competent to receive that revelation.

गुणरहितं कामनारहितं प्रतिक्षणवर्धमानं  
अविच्छिन्नं सूक्ष्मतरं अनुभवरूपम् ॥५४॥

54. *Guṇarahitam kāmanārahitam  
pratikṣaṇavardhamānam avicchinnam  
sūkṣmataram anubhavarūpam.*

*Guṇarahitam* without attributes, *kāmanārahitam* without any desire *pratikṣaṇa vardhamānam* increasing every moment *avicchinnam* uninterrupted, *sūkṣmataram* subtlest *anubhavarūpam* innermost experience.

54. It (prema) is without attributes, without any desire, and goes on increasing every moment. It is an unbroken inner experience, subtler than the subtlest.

A further description of prema is that it is free from all the guṇas, free from all desires and is ever increasing. It is a kind of experience which is described like this. It is of the nature of realization; of the nature of experience. That experience is intuitive, free from the Gunas—the three attributes of sattva, rajas and tamas, free from all desires, increasing every moment and uninterrupted. It is subtler than the subtlest.

These are the expressions used for describing this love. Every bit of this description is particularly characteristic of this love of God. As we say that a man of knowledge is above the three gunas, similarly we find that a devotee



who has got that love of God revealed in him is also above the three gunas.

The three gunas have their characteristics: firstly, sattva leads to happiness. That happiness will be the happiness derived from objects or that which comes at one moment and goes the next. So, that is happiness which is derived from sattva, the first quality.

The second quality is rajas. Rajas engages one in activity, makes one always active. When once he has this love of God revealed in him, a bhakta is not like that anymore; he is not of the active temperament. This is because he remains engrossed in that love of God. That engrossment in the love of God makes it impossible for him to be frequently engaged in outward activities.

Thirdly, inertia is the quality of tamas. The devotee has not got inertia. He is not inert; it is not like being stock and stone. It is an experience which is all absorbing. Inertia means absence of all experience. It is the condition of sleep of the mind; when the mind goes to sleep, that is tamas.

So he is free from the three gunas, and free from all desires too. He does not have any desire for anything because all things are useless for him. His mind is so much engrossed in God that he does not feel the need of anything. So he is free from the desire for external objects. Even internal desires are not there. We may have internal desires. As for instance, the pleasures of the sensations of the mind. That also is not required here because the mind is full of love for God, and therefore it is not hankering for

anything at that time. And another quality: a very peculiar characteristic of this experience is that it goes on expanding, goes on increasing in intensity, as it were. Its duration—as stated previously—is interminable; it is an ever-continuing flow; and not only that, it is ever-increasing also.

Then, the indescribable is described like this: it is in the nature of an experience. It is devoid of all attributes and free from all characteristics and tendencies to selfish action. It is of the nature of a homogenous subjective experience. It is subtler than the subtlest, manifesting itself automatically as the result of the fulfilment of certain conditions, and expanding every moment. When it is generated, it does not remain static. It is extremely dynamic, in the sense that it goes on increasing continuously—expanding continuously. That is why it cannot be described, or one cannot elaborate on it. A lover of God will have that intense hankering all the moments of his existence. It is not that it comes in fits and starts, but remains permanent and is ever-increasing.

Every human love is associated with desire. Here there is no lingering desire. When love for God is generated, it is a one-way traffic: the devotee only wants to give that love to God, never expecting any return. That is the idea. That is the special characteristic of this love. He who has got such love in him does not ask for any return from God. He is happy. He gives his love and never expects any return. He has no mind to think of seeking return from God. So, a lover of God is a giver, and not a receiver. He is not a

beggar. He does not beg; he simply allows his heart to flow towards God uninterruptedly, like a perennial stream. And the stream is ever-expanding. The more the love flows, the bigger, the stronger, the more expansive it becomes, and the devotee remains immersed in that love.

तत् प्राप्य तदेवावलोकयति तदेव शृणोति  
तदेव भाषयति तदेव चिन्तयति ॥५५॥

55. *Tat prāpya tadevāvalokayati, tadeva śṛṇoti,  
tadeva bhāṣayati, tadeva cintayati.*

*Tat* that (prema) *prāpya* having obtained *tat eva* that alone *avalokayati* sees *tat eva* that alone *śṛṇoti* hears *tat eva* that alone *bhāṣayati* speaks *tat eva* that alone *cintayati* thinks.

55. After the attainment (of that prema or supreme devotion) he sees only that, hears about that alone, speaks of that alone, thinks of that only.

We cannot describe this love because it is subtler than the subtlest. Nevertheless it is a positive experience. That is why it is said that it is of the nature of experience and, as such, it cannot be ignored; nor can it be said to be non-existent. The very fact that the positive experience of this love of God is in the mind of the devotee precludes us from saying that it does not exist. Though others may not

have the same experience, a devotee who has got the requisite qualifications, that is, competence for enshrining prema in the heart, does have it in abundance. That is what is mentioned there: every moment it goes on increasing.

In the sutra it is added that the attainment of love does not make a devotee engage in anything else; so that is further elaborated. Having attained that love, one sees that love only. 'Sees' means the whole of our processes of seeing, hearing etc.—all these processes are absorbed in that love only. So the devotee hears that, sees that, speaks of that, and thinks of that. There is no scope to think of anything else. The mind is fully absorbed in that love only.

That is the supreme love described here. So, in brief, it is a love which is beyond description. But, nevertheless, it is a fact of experience, and the experience is such that one's mind becomes free from all other thoughts. The mind is absorbed completely in that one thought. That is what is expressed by saying, 'He hears that, speaks that, and thinks of that'. It is complete absorption in that love, and every moment it increases in volume. The flow is never broken, and it is subtler than the subtlest and therefore it cannot be described. That is what is mentioned as the characteristic of supreme love.

गौणी त्रिधा, गुणभेदाद् आर्तादिभेदाद् वा ॥५६॥

56. *Gauṇī tridhā, guṇabhedād ārtādi-bhedād vā.*

*Gauṇī* the beginner's (devotion) *tridhā* of three types *guṇa bhedāt* owing to differences in the qualities *ārtādi* the worldly seeker, etc. *bhedāt* differences.

56. The beginner's devotion falls into three categories: because of the prevalence of the three qualities (*guṇas*), or of the nature of the aspirant seeking freedom from distress, etc.

उत्तरस्मादुत्तरस्मात् पूर्वपूर्वा श्रेयाय भवति ॥५७॥

57. *uttarasmāduttarasmāt pūrvapūrvā śreyāya bhavati.*

*Uttarasmāt* than the succeeding ones *pūrvapūrvā* earlier ones *śreyāya* greater *bhavati* become.

57. Of these, the preceding categories are superior to the succeeding ones.

Bhakti has mainly been divided into two categories. One is supreme devotion, *para bhakti*, and the other is inferior, called secondary devotion, *gauṇī bhakti*. Now, *gauṇī bhakti* or secondary type of devotion may be divided into three categories, according to the different attributes of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. Of these, *sāttvikā* devotion is absolutely unselfish, it is complete absorption in God. There will be no desire in the mind of the devotee for anything

for himself. That is why it is called *sāttvikā*. Secondly, *rājasikā* devotion means there is a sort of give and take: 'I love God, may God love me also.' That way it is a matter of give and take. *Tāmasikā* means inertia; that is, there is not that exuberance of love. It is only a stage when the mind is creeping towards that love, as if moving in a dream. It is not awakened in the sense in which he is full of that idea of devotion always. So it is called *tāmasikā*. This type of devotion sometimes means this: the aspirant will want his own joy and happiness. He will not bother about the object of love. Thus, being selfish in one's love for God is called *tāmasikā bhakti*. Sri Ramakrishna says: 'Even bhakti has three aspects: sattva, rajas and tamas.'<sup>1</sup> Again, 'A man endowed with *tāmasic* bhakti has burning faith. Such a devotee literally extorts boons from God, even as a robber falls upon a man and plunders his money.'<sup>2</sup> So, one is purely unselfish; another is of the nature of give and take; and the third is only taking and not giving. These are the three types of devotees, according to the three qualities. One finds mention of this classification in the *Bhāgavata* in Kapila's advice to Devahūti.

Another classification mentioned in the aphorism is that of the three of the four types of devotees, *ārta*, *jijñāsu*, *arthārthī* and *jñāni*. The last of the four is left out when considering *gauṇī bhakti*. So, of the three, the aphorism states that the preceding one is superior to the succeeding

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1. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 250.

2. *ibid.*, p. 147.

one. Thus, *ārta* is greater than the *arthārthī*. The *Gītā* mentions<sup>1</sup> the four types of devotees. Narada considers only three. For Narada an *ārta* means one who wants to seek God because he is helpless. He is suffering on account of the misery of the world, and so he is praying to God. This path of entering the devotional highway is better than that of *jijñāsu* who wants to know about things. He has not got that feeling. Lower in category than a *jijñāsu* is the *arthārthī* who wants God only to gratify his selfish desires.

अन्यस्मात् सौलभ्यं भक्तौ ॥५८॥

58. *Anyasmāt saulabhyam bhaktau.*

*Anyasmāt* than others *bhaktau* through the path of devotion *saulabhyam* easiness of attainment.

58. The object is easier to attain through devotion than by other paths.

This aphorism is very important. It says that devotion is easily attainable than the other paths—*jñāna* and *karma*. Or, the object is easily attained through the path of devotion. The reason for this easy availability is explained in the next aphorism.

1. *Gītā*, 7.16.

प्रमाणान्तरस्यानपेक्षत्वात् स्वयं प्रमाणत्वात् (च) ॥५९॥

59. *Pramāṇāntarasya anapekṣatvāt svayam  
pramāṇatvāt (ca).*

*Pramāṇāntarasya* alternative proofs *anapekṣatvāt* not desired *svayam* of itself *pramāṇatvāt* being proof.

59. It does not depend upon any other proof because it is itself a proof.

It was said earlier that through bhakti God is more easily attained than through the other paths. The reason for this assertion is given in this aphorism. It says that devotion does not depend upon any other reason or argument. It is the proof of itself. It does not depend upon any other proof: it is self-evident. When one has it, then the question does not arise in his mind as to whether what he is having is true or not. Such questions do not arise in the mind of a devotee at all. In other streams there may be questioning. What one experiences can be subject to questioning, since there can be some doubt about it.

Through the path of karma one can attain certain objects, but the doubt may be there: 'Will this action actually bring about the desired results?' The doubt is always there in karma, because we do not have any convincing proof of it. In jnana one has to constantly argue. So it depends upon the force of argument. What is the proof that one's knowledge, discussion or rationalizations are



directing him towards the Truth? If there is any reason for it, then only one can accept it, not otherwise. In devotion, however, such questioning will not arise. A person who has this will be convinced about the reality of it, and no question as to its reality will arise in his mind. He will have no doubt about it because it is self-evident. It being the deepest experience of the soul, it becomes self-evident. Other things depend upon proof.

Now, this is a bit of casting aspersions on the other paths perhaps, particularly, the path of knowledge. When that knowledge dawns in a person, it is of the supreme nature; he also will not have any doubt about it. Others may question, but he will not question. Questions may be raised by others.

So it is in the case of devotion also. One may question whether a devotee who has got that deepest experience of love of God has got the last thing: the highest ideal. This is subject to questioning by others, but a devotee himself will not have any doubt; he is convinced that he has realized the goal.

Now suppose we say he is convinced, but that conviction may be self-delusion. He may be deluding himself. The point is, if the delusion never breaks, then you cannot call it delusion. Any delusion, to be called a delusion, must be subjected to a condition that it disappears. Suppose I am seeing a snake in a rope. It is a delusion; but we can call it delusion only when I see the rope, and not the snake again. That is, the spell of delusion must break at sometime. But this emotion which we call devotion, the absorption of

a devotee in the love of God, never breaks. So, this lasting spell cannot be called a delusion.

That is why it does not depend upon any other proof. The devotee is convinced that he is having the highest state of experience. So his condition does not depend upon any test, or proof. It does not depend upon any other instrument of knowledge. It is immediate and self-evident. That is one thing.

शान्तिरूपात् परमानन्दरूपाच्च ॥६०॥

60. *Śāntirūpāt paramānanda rūpācca.*

*Śāntirūpāt* of the nature of peace *paramānanda-rūpācca* of the nature of supreme bliss.

60. (The devotional path is easier than others) because of its being of the nature of peace and supreme bliss.

The first reason adduced to show that bhakti is the easiest path was that it is its own proof. Now, in the present sutra it is mentioned that bhakti is of the nature of supreme, eternal peace and also of the nature of supreme happiness.

The word supreme is important here. There may be a bit of joy in our attainment of earthly success or in acquiring some sense objects. This is not supreme joy. Compared to supreme happiness, there is nothing higher, nothing more

permanent, nothing more enduring. It is of the highest nature and need not be tested by any other evidence.

लोकहानौ चिन्ता न कार्या निवेदितात्मलोकवेदत्वात् ॥६१॥

61. *Lokahānau cintā na kāryā, nivedita-ātma-loka-vedatvāt.*

*Lokahānau* loss of public appreciation *cintā* worry *na kāryā* need not be done *nivedita* surrendered *ātma* self *loka* public esteem *veda* injunctions of scriptures.

61. One should not worry about the loss of public appreciation because the devotee has surrendered his self, public esteem and the adherence to injunctions of the scriptures.

A devotee should not worry about the loss of his objects of desire or enjoyment. The objects of enjoyment may be lost, but even the least fear need not be there in the mind of a devotee on this account. This is because, he has given up all rituals, and therefore he may perhaps fear that he will be deprived of higher happiness. The devotee need not entertain such fear. He has dedicated himself or surrendered his own self, surrendered all the joys of the world and those that are held in high esteem by people. For example, Vedic rituals will bring the joys of heaven or any other sphere to a person performing them. This is not

necessary for a devotee because he has surrendered himself completely to God.

There is one more important point. The devotee need not bother about public esteem or appreciation because he has nothing to do with it. He should not think what people will say about him or should not bother about the sacrifices etc. he must have performed. He must be absolutely free from the fear of public opinion or Vedic injunctions, as he has surrendered everything to God.

न तत्सिद्धौ लोकव्यवहारो हेयः किन्तु फलत्यागः  
तत्साधनं च (कार्यमेव) ॥६२॥

62. *Na tatsiddhau lokavyavahāro heyah, kintu phalatyāgaḥ tatsādhanam ca (kāryameva).*

*Tatsiddhau* for its success *lokavyavahārah* public dealings *na heyah* need not be discarded *kintu* but *phalatyāgaḥ* surrendering fruit of actions *ca* and *tatasādhanam* its means (*kāryameva* have to be undertaken).

62. For the success in the path of devotion, one should not discard the (good) dealings with others; but renunciation of the fruits of actions as well as the means of their attainment should be maintained.

In the previous aphorism, it was stated that a bhakta need not care for Vedic injunctions or public opinion. The

question is, will he behave in a manner which will be unrestricted and go about as he pleases? How will he behave in this world?

This sūtra therefore adds that right behaviour in this world need not be shunned for the attainment of devotion. But then, it has been said that all one's actions are to be surrendered to God.

First, what is to be surrendered is the fruit of action. The devotee will have to go on as other people do; one cannot simply sit quiet. He will have to act in the world keeping steady his goal in view; his behaviour should always be in keeping with the great ideal which he either has attained or is aspiring to attain.

The idea is that whatever he does, he does not do for the sake of the attainment of certain objectives. If he does something, he does not do it with the desire for attaining something or achieving something. He should perform actions but should not have any desire for their fruits. This is a very important point. Becoming a man of God does not mean becoming a stock or stone. He should renounce the fruit of action, not the actions. He must carry on activities but without attachment to the fruits.

In the *Gītā*<sup>1</sup> it has been said that nobody can live in this world renouncing all activities even for a moment. That is not possible. Even breathing is an action, and you cannot stop breathing! Life will not continue without that. In the same manner all activities need not be eschewed, but we

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1. *Gītā*, 3.5.

should not have any desire for the fruits of such activities, nor indulge in those activities as are motivated by the results thereof. Even sacrifices which are motivated by the results that are to be attained through performing them according to the scriptures can be gone through without one's desire for the prescribed results. As it is said in the *Gītā*: 'Just as an ignorant man performs actions being attached to the fruits thereof, a man of God will do the same things without any attachment.'<sup>1</sup> Why does he do them? With the desire of doing good to the world. Is it a desire? Yes, it is. But not a selfish desire. He does not desire anything for himself thereby. The idea is that he goes on doing things in the same manner as before, but does not do any of these things with the motive that he will gain something thereby for himself. An action will have a consequence as its result. Will the actions of such a devotee be barren? Will they not produce any fruit? Will they be fruitless efforts? The scriptures say that they will not be fruitless, though the fruits will not go to him. The fruits will be attained by others.

Those who revere that person will get the results of his good deeds. And those who hate him, those who antagonize him will get the results of his bad deeds. How can there be any bad deeds by him? The answer is that, without knowing, he may be harming something. He may be harming creatures by walking, by taking food etc. So, who will be the recipients of the fruits of such actions? Those who

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1. *Gītā*, 3.25.

hate him will receive the evil effects of his actions. That is the conclusion given in the scriptures.

Therefore, a man of God will not renounce actions as a whole, but whatever he may do, he will have no desire to gain results of those actions for himself. That is the idea.

Therefore, not that all actions are to be stopped but all actions with selfish motive have to be shunned. Not only that, activities which are conducive to the attainment of supreme devotion must be adhered to, because they will lead to the attainment of that goal. If, however, the attainment has already been made, then such activities will set an example to others, so that by following them others may also reach the same goal.

When activities which are conducive to the attainment of devotion are pursued even after the attainment of para bhakti, devotees perform them not because of any motive, but because it has become their habit—their nature. They had been following that course all along, so they have become used to it. Therefore, they do the same things without the idea of attaining supreme devotion because they have already got that, but activities are simply because of habit.

स्त्री-धन-नास्तिक-(वैरि)-चरित्रं न श्रवणीयम् ॥६३॥

63. *Strī-dhana-nāstika (vairi) caritram na śravaṇīyam.*

*Strī* women *dhana* wealth *nāstika* people who do not believe in God (*vairi* enemies) *caritram* descriptions *na śravaṇīyam* are not to be heard.

63. The descriptions about women (sex), wealth, people who do not believe in God and enemies are not to be heard.

There are things which are hindrances to the attainment of that supreme devotion. They are, of course, to be shunned. So Narada mentions that the devotee should not listen to descriptions about sex, wealth, people who do not believe in God, or enemies. Such descriptions should not be heard.

First point is sex (women). Naturally, people in modern times would raise objection to that. But the idea is that it will rouse sex consciousness in one's mind, which is to be avoided. Not that women are to be avoided as such. The idea is that attitude towards women should be such that it does not give rise to passion, or to the idea of lust.

In this connection, it is to be particularly noted that women are mentioned for men. Similarly, men for women. The descriptions of men as will give rise to sex ideas are to be avoided by women also. The thing applies, according to one's position in life. If one is a man, he should avoid descriptions of women, that is, such descriptions as will give rise to passions. So, it is applicable to both sexes.

Naturally, thoughts of wealth will give rise to attraction towards it. And hearing about an unbeliever, that is,



one who does not believe in God—his life, his words, his behaviour—will naturally lead one to doubt about the reality of God. Therefore, the company of such and such ideas should be avoided. Similar is the case with descriptions of enemies because they will rouse anger in one's mind.

The idea is simply this: whatever distracts the mind of a person from the thought of God should be avoided. Whatever takes one away from the thought of God, obstructs one's continuous remembrance of God, has to be avoided for the obvious reason that indulgence in such thoughts will gradually create in the mind a tendency to go away from God. It is not merely an objective idea, but will create an attachment in the person who is indulging in such liberty.

In the *Gītā*<sup>1</sup> it is said that attachment comes from association. This association is a very dangerous thing. In the beginning one may think that he will remain unaffected by it. Actually it cannot be so. One has to be very alert in this respect because, in the beginning, it may not appear to be harmful; one may think that he is above these things. Through association, however, gradually the condition of the mind will deteriorate. The mind will gradually go away from God and get attached to worldly things and pleasures. That is the note of caution that has been sounded here—and a very strict one—which is to be followed by a devotee who is pursuing spiritual life. Apparently, it may

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1. *Gītā*, 2.62

appear difficult, impossible, or even absurd, in modern society. Modern society may say whatever it likes. A devotee has to follow his ideal without being influenced by the public opinion of the times.

Free mixing with everybody is the order of the day and, to some extent, this may be permissible, but a line has to be drawn clearly as to how far one can go and where to stop. This is a very important point that has to be borne in mind because these ideas are not meant for the people of the world. These ideas are meant for those who want to have supreme devotion to God—those who are God-minded. For them, certain cautions are absolutely necessary, however much this may be decried by people of the world. Some may say that this will lead to suppression of one's tendencies. That is a misnomer, because what does suppression of natural tendencies mean? In a civilized society it is expected of every citizen to exercise control over his mind. If he is allowed to behave freely, it will not be a human society but an animal society. So, exercise of restraint is absolutely necessary, even for the safe running of society, what to speak of divine love! For the peaceful existence of any society, it is absolutely necessary to have restraint.

Modern psychologists are creating a havoc in this respect by bringing out the term 'suppression'. Everywhere we hear: 'Oh, if we do this, it will give rise to suppression. That will give rise to complexes, and that in turn will bring about nervous breakdown.' Well, suppose we take this at its face value. Will it be a human society at all, if we give

expression to all the tendencies that arise in our minds? If we allow free rein to our tendencies, there will not be a society at all. It will be a society of animals. Animals do not have any repression and indulge in whatever ideas that occur to them at the time. That keeps them as animals, and never allows them to rise beyond that level. A human society is very different from an animal society. The very existence of a society will depend upon control over the senses. Without it, it will not be possible to live peacefully in this world. That is why whenever one goes to the extreme, society wrecks vengeance on that person.

Is it not necessary for the health of the society to teach people to have restraint over themselves? To what extent is a different matter. Restraint is necessary to some extent and, if it is a good thing, then there is no limit to it. People who have thought over this matter will say that restraint is necessary, but only to a certain extent, and not beyond that—if it goes beyond that, it gives rise to complexes. They are partly right and partly wrong because suppression means that you have the tendency, and you don't allow yourself to behave according to your tendency. You also don't have any higher ideal which actuates to exercise control over yourself—not out of fear, but with the idea of reaching a particular goal which is consistent with purity of behaviour—that will definitely not lead to any complexes.

This is what is called sublimation. The senses are not to be suppressed, but they are to be sublimated. The term is different because the goals are different. One is due to

the fear of public opinion, the other is because of one's attraction to a higher ideal. So the results will be very different.

I have to emphasize this point at length because now society is changing very much; it has become extremely permissive. People's homes are getting ruined, and they think they are going 'forward'. Those who have travelled widely through Western countries will realize what human society has come to by giving free rein to the senses and to natural inclinations. That is not what leads to lasting peace, or liberation of society, or to a higher state of existence.

Restraint is absolutely necessary, but it is not to be out of fear of public opinion. If it is for the love of an ideal, it will not suppress the senses. The senses will be shunned with the idea of rising to higher states and reaching the goal. This is what is called sublimation. As we shall see, this subject is dealt with more clearly later on.

अभिमान-दम्भादिकं त्याज्यम् ॥६४॥

64. *Abhimāna-dambhādikam tyājyam.*

*Abhimāna* pride *dambha* vanity *ādikam* and so on *tyājyam* must be given up.

64. Pride, vanity and other vices are to be given up.

One should give up pride, vanity and other vices. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'Give up vanity and pride,'<sup>1</sup> and, 'God cannot be realized if there is the slightest trace of pride.'<sup>2</sup> As all teachers say, Sri Ramakrishna also used to say that for a man of God what is necessary is humility. He must be modest; he must be humble; he must not be proud; he must not be vain. In this manner everything that will prevent one from proceeding towards God will have to be avoided. That is the idea.

One can judge for oneself which things are to be avoided by making experiments oneself. For instance, one is to be truthful. This is not merely an ideal behaviour in society. We also lie to ourselves when we are alone. Even when we are alone we have to be truthful—not to others, but to ourselves. That is a virtue which has to be practised irrespective of status. Wherever one may be, whatever may be the position in society, whether one is a monk or a householder, for everybody this truthfulness is extremely necessary. Trying to deceive others, trying to pretend to people what we are not, will not do. As Sri Ramakrishna used to say, our thoughts and words should be in harmony. The idea is that what our mind thinks should not be hidden by our words.

Then, shall we be harsh to people? Are we to be rude to others? No, that is not the idea. But let us not be hypocrites. We have to be true to ourselves without being

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1. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 630.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 624.

hypocrites in our behaviour. These ideas are not elaborated here. One has to find them out for oneself. Whichever behaviour is harmful to one's spiritual life has to be avoided. Now, that is the negative side of it. What is the positive side? That is given in the next aphorism.

तदर्पिताखिलाचारः सन् कामक्रोधाभिमानादिकं  
तस्मिन्नेव करणीयम् ॥६५॥

65. *Tadarpitākṣhilācāraḥ san kāmakrodhābhimānādikam tasminneva karaṇīyam.*

*Tadarpitākṣhilācāraḥ* devote all actions to Him *san* such as *kāmakrodhābhimānādikam* lust, anger, pride and so on *tasmin* in him *eva* alone *karaṇīyam* must be done.

65. One should devote all actions to God and direct lust, anger, pride etc. towards Him only.

One should surrender all one's actions to God. Lust, anger, pride, etc., which are to be shunned normally, are to be directed towards Him only. If we desire union with anybody, it should be transformed into our desire for union with God. If we are angry against anybody, we should be angry with ourselves that we are slack in our attempts for reaching that supreme devotion, and so forth. If we have pride in us, let us be proud of our relationship with our supreme God.

As Sri Ramakrishna would say, if you are to be proud, be proud in this manner: 'I am God's son, I am His servant, I am part and parcel of Him.'<sup>1</sup> This kind of pride will be helpful, and not harmful.

So, these things are to be transformed into a higher quality. Lust, anger, pride, etc. would make one go away from God. If they are associated with God, they will have an uplifting influence. They will not be a hindrance anymore but help in one's spiritual progress. So, as Sri Ramakrishna used to say, one must direct them to God. One must give them that new direction. It will then help one reach the goal, rather than leading astray. In his words it is like this: 'If you can give a spiritual turn to your *tamas*, you can realize God with its help.'<sup>2</sup>

That is the idea. I said about sublimation and not repression earlier—that idea is expressed here. It should be all associated with the divine Reality. Our ambitions in life and everything should be directed towards it. Then no suppression is necessary, no complexes will rise; they will all be turned Godward, and thereby our progress will be smooth, unrestricted and unhampered by the ever-restricting tendencies.

The idea is explained here to serve as an example. And yet, it is so important that everyone should give much thought to these ideas. We must not take them at their face value and simply ignore them because they may jar with

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1. cf. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, pp. 680, 861.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 147

our ideas. We must try to understand and see if there is any truth in them after thorough testing. The ideas may appear somewhat novel to some, but they have been practised through the centuries and have been found to be very effective.

त्रिरूपभंगपूर्वकं नित्यदास्य-नित्यकान्ताभजनात्मकं  
प्रेम (एव) कार्यं प्रेमैव कार्यम् ॥६६॥

66. *Trirūpa-bhaṅga-pūrvakam nityadāsya-nityakāntābhajanātmakam (vā) prema (eva) kāryam, premaiva kāryam.*

*Trirūpa-bhaṅga-pūrvakam* transcending the three kinds of *gauṇī* devotion *nitya-dāsya nitya-kāntābhajanātmakam* constant service either as a servant or wife *prema kāryam* one must love God *prema eva kāryam* and one must love God alone.

66. Having transcended the three categories of *gauṇī bhakti*, one must render constant service to God either as a servant or as a wife, and love Him and Him alone.

What should be done and what should not be done has been mentioned in the preceding aphorisms. Now, Narada explains that love is to be bestowed towards God only. Love



is to be directed to Him and to Him alone. It is mentioned twice to give emphasis. That is the positive part. Then there is the negative part of it, which is, avoiding the three categories of *gaunī bhakti* that we mentioned in sutra 56. One group is *sāttvikā*, *rājasika* and *tāmasika*; the other three are *ārta*, *jijñāsu* and *arthārthī*.

We have already discussed how an *ārta* bhakta is superior to the other two and a *sāttvika* bhakta is higher than the *rājasika* and *tāmasika* bhaktas. Here even these should be transcended. What else is to be done? Narada says that one must serve God constantly and unfailingly, either with the attitude of a servant, or like the wife does. This service should be constantly done, unwaveringly. There may be several upheavals but the bhakta's devotional service should continue. This is *prema* or true love for God. Narada gives great emphasis to this when he says that this love alone should be practised, this love alone should be practised.

भक्ता एकान्तिनो मुख्याः ॥६७॥

67. *Bhaktā ekāntino mukhyāḥ.*

*Bhaktāḥ* the devotees *ekāntinaḥ* who have one-pointed love for God *mukhyāḥ* primary.

67. Primary devotees are those who have one-pointed love for God.

Those who have one-pointed love for God—for His own sake—are primary devotees. 'Primary' here means those that are of the highest class. Two points are mentioned. Love must be one-pointed. That is, devotion should not be scattered over various things, God being but one of them. The mind has to be completely devoted to God and God alone. There is no place for anything else, or anybody else.

What does this mean? Does it mean that the devotee becomes indifferent to other people? No, not so. Other people become objects of his love insofar as he sees God in them. He does not love people as such, but he loves them because God is manifested there. So, he will not be simply indifferent to everybody else, but what is insisted upon is that his devotion must be one-pointed. It should not be scattered among many other things. It is said in the Bible: 'I am a jealous God'. God does not bear a partner who will have one share, and He will have another, of the devotee's love. God must occupy the whole heart, or none of it. He cannot be satisfied with a part of our love, the other part being given to the things of the world. That is not expected of a great devotee. He must be one-pointed.

The other thing implied is that the devotee loves Him for His sake alone. He does not consider God to be a means to some other end. For him God is an end in Himself. He loves God because He is God and not otherwise. It will not be because God will save him from trouble. He must have that love which is absolutely unselfish; love for God's sake.

There must not be even the idea that he will have peace, or happiness thereby, because that will be selfishness. No idea of one's own selfish motive should be there. Pure love means, love which does not have any ulterior motive. And the love must be one-pointed and directed to God and God alone.

कण्ठावरोध-रोमाञ्चाश्रुभिः परस्परं लपमानाः

पावयन्ति कुलानि पृथिवीं च ॥६८॥

68. *Kaṅṭhāvarodha romāñcāśrubhiḥ parasparam lapamānāḥ pāvayanti kulāni pṛthivīm ca.*

*Kaṅṭhāvarodhaḥ* voices choking *romāñca* horripilation *śrubhiḥ* with tears *parasparam* with one another *lapamānāḥ* exchanging notes *pāvayanti* purify *kulāni* the family *pṛthivīm ca* and the world.

68. Such devotees exchange notes with one another in choked voices, hairs standing on end, and tears in the eyes. They purify their families and the world also.

How do people of God behave? Narada says that such people discuss about their devotion, or about God among themselves, exchanging notes with other devotees. While they do that, they will have the sensation of choking. When the emotion of love becomes extreme, one is unable to

talk. Even when the mind is proceeding towards God, talk becomes almost inaudible; that is, the devotee becomes choked with feeling. His hairs will stand on end because of the rousing of extreme devotion. Not only that, they say that the hair of his head also will stand on end. You may have experienced that when the hairs of the body become straight. Whenever there is extreme form of emotion you may experience such physical changes. The shedding of tears is another expression.

These are the outward expressions of a devotee. He does not cultivate these things, mind you, but they come of their own. What happens otherwise? There might be a simulation of them. People may try to excite their emotions and, out of that emotion, sometimes tears come out of their eyes. This is what professional actors do. Sometimes they use artificial means for doing it, but that is because they are not fully capable of acting their part. Thus, when they so desire very able actors can shed tears also. But that is only a demonstration—not love. The devotee does not desire to shed tears nor does he have the mind to produce those effects. They come of themselves.

Then there are other expressions. There may be sweating; there may be tremors in the body. These are considered to be signs of the highest type of devotion, but caution should be there. Even these can be cultivated. If so, they have no connection with real love or devotion.

Once, it so happened that Swami Vivekananda saw a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna sitting alone quietly and trying to have the signs of devotion which we see in Sri

Ramakrishna. Swamiji found out that the wrong step was being taken, and he scolded him, saying: 'These are not the things to be practised; practise love. Then other things will come of themselves. Sri Ramakrishna had these signs manifested in his body not because he wanted to give expression to them. They came naturally when there was an extreme surge of emotion.' So that caution has to be borne in mind: these are expressions and they are not infallible. That is, whenever we see these expressions, let us not be duped by them, thinking that they are the signs of real devotion. No, they are not. Yet, in an extreme state of devotion, these signs appear in a devotee. The devotees speak of their beloved God among themselves because when one has that exuberance of feeling one likes to talk about these things among people who have got similar feelings and there is joy in talking. The idea is that they are not going to show off their devotion, but when they think of God either alone, or when they are in the company of other devotees, they express feelings when they talk about the things of God. And, when they do this, the outward expressions appear in the body, namely tears, hairs standing on end, tremors in the body, etc. All these various manifestations come.

Such devotees purify the family in which they are born and they purify the world also. They have such a great spiritual power in them that the power transforms the whole family in which they are born. Not only that, the world becomes benefited by the presence of such great lovers of God.

तीर्थीकुर्वन्ति तीर्थानि सुकर्मीकुर्वन्ति  
कर्माणि सच्छास्त्रीकुर्वन्ति शास्त्राणि ॥६९॥

69. *Tīrthīkurvanti tīrthāni sukarmīkurvanti karmāṇi,  
sacchastrīkurvanti śāstrāṇi.*

*Tīrthī-kurvanti* make holy *tīrthāni* the holy places  
*sukarmī-kurvanti* make noble actions *karmāṇi* the actions  
*satśāstrī-kurvanti* make holy *śāstrāṇi* the scriptures.

69. (Such devotees) make holy places holier, render all actions blessed, and make the scriptures more sacred.

When this love awakens in a devotee, through the awakening of that love, places associated with him become holy, and also the places of pilgrimage. The places of pilgrimage are those which have been blessed by the presence of such great lovers of God. Any holy place is always associated with some great lover of God. Wherever such holy men stay, that becomes a place of pilgrimage—that becomes holy. Such is the power of the lovers of God. Other people will resort to them so that they can imbibe a little of that holiness. That is why we visit places of pilgrimage. The devotees transmute all their actions, endowing them with blessedness and rendering all actions righteous and good. Whatever they do becomes a righteous action. They make the scriptures holy. The idea is that in the scriptures you will find essentials and non-essentials mixed together.

As Sri Ramakrishna used to say, sand and sugar will be mixed together in scriptures. So, because of their allegiance to the scriptures, the scriptures become endowed with holiness. Why are the scriptures holy? They are holy because holy men have given their allegiance to them. So even the scriptures are purified, made holy, by these devotees. The holy people enliven the *śāstras* by being living commentaries to them. Had it not been for such exalted devotees, scriptures would have remained practically meaningless to us.

Thus, the very places where devotees stay become permeated with their spirit; the actions that are performed by them become holy because of their association with them; the scriptures become holy because they pay homage to the scriptures. The scriptures would have remained barren if such people were not born at times to authenticate them, to give credibility to them. The scriptures become authoritative because they have been demonstrated and proved by the lives of such holy men and women.

तन्मयाः ॥७०॥

70. *Tanmayāḥ.*

*Tat* in that *mayāḥ* permeated

70. (For) they (the devotees) are permeated with divinity.

मोदन्ते पितरो नृत्यन्ति देवताः सनाथा चेयं भूर्भवति ॥७१॥

71. *Modante pitaro, nṛtyanti devatāḥ sanāthā ceyam bhūrbhavati.*

*Pitaraḥ* the ancestors *modante* rejoice *devatāḥ* the gods *nṛtyanti* dance in joy *iyam* this *bhūḥ* mother earth *ca* also *sanāthā* having a protector *bhavati* becomes.

71. The ancestors rejoice, gods dance in joy, and the mother earth finds a protector in the devotee.

नास्ति तेषु जातिविद्यारूपकुलधनक्रियादि भेदः ॥७२॥

72. *Nāsti teṣu jāti-vidyā-rūpa-kula-dhana-kriyādi bhedaḥ.*

*Teṣu* among devotees *jāti* caste *vidyā* learning *rūpa* beauty *kula* family background *dhana* wealth *kriyā* profession *ādi* and so on *bhedaḥ* distinctions *nāsti* are not there.

72. In them (devotees of this exalted nature) such distinctions as caste, learning, beauty, family background, wealth, profession, and so on are never present.



यतस्तदीयाः ॥७३॥

73. *Yatastadiyāḥ.*

*Yataḥ* since *tadiyāḥ* (they are) God's very own.

73. (Distinctions do not exist) because they are God's very own.

A very beautiful description of that greatness is given in the above aphorisms. The place where devotees stay becomes holy; whatever they do becomes holy; and any scripture they pay their allegiance to becomes holy. Such is the purifying effect of holy people. The spirit of a holy person permeates those places, those scriptures and those actions.

In the same strain, Narada goes on. The ancestors become happy, and they rejoice; the gods dance with joy; and the earth becomes endowed with bliss. Because of the appearance of such holy people in their families their ancestors rejoice. Gods dance with joy, thinking that evil will be removed from this earth now because such a person has taken birth here. And the earth also rejoices that here comes a person who will save the people of this world.

In them there is no distinction based on caste or culture, beauty or birth, wealth or profession and the like. What such a devotee does, where he is born—these ideas do not matter. How his appearance is or how he looks like and so on are immaterial because, by his very attainment of this supreme love, he goes beyond these things. Whether he is

very learned or unlettered—that also does not matter; whether he is of high birth or low too is of no consequence. Whether he is wealthy or poor does not matter. Irrespective of all these, whatever he does, his love of God predominates. That is, all these things are not to be considered in regard to a man of God who has such a great love for God. Such distinctions do not make any difference among holy men because they are men of God. They are His own. They are God's own. It is the divine presence that permeates them; so it does not matter what appearance they have or what clan they are born to or what family they are born in. All these are immaterial because they are, after all, persons who are completely imbued with the presence of God and permeated by the divine presence through and through.

वादो नावलम्ब्यः ॥७४॥

74. *Vādo nāvalambyaḥ.*

*Vādaḥ* argument *na* not *avalambyaḥ* be entered into

74. One must not enter into an argument.

बाहुल्यावकाशत्वाद् अनियतत्वाच्च ॥७५॥

75. *Bāhulya-avakāśatvād aniyatatvāc ca.*

*Bāhulya-avakāśatvāt* because of scope for many views *ca* and *anīyatatvāt* inconclusiveness of views.

75. This is because there is scope of many viewpoints and none of them is conclusive.

The next point is a caution. One should not enter into discussion. The idea is that it is not proper for one to enter into a controversy about God or about other spiritual truths, or about the comparative merits of devotees. Such a comparison only takes a person away from the central truth, namely, supreme devotion. Rather than entering into vain arguments, the spirit of devotion will have to be imbued. Let us receive as much spirit of it as we can and not enter into controversy over these things. When we enter into a discussion, we lose the spirit of receptivity. We forget that we have to receive the influence. If we are receptive, then only that influence will be helpful to us. Communion with men of God requires this kind of complete cessation of any kind of controversy.

When we try to discuss something, we will have a standpoint, and we argue with one another to maintain that our standpoint is correct. These attempts will take away the mind from the true spirit of devotion. So let us not enter into any discussion about God or about other spiritual truths, or about the comparative merits of different devotees. 'Such and such a devotee is better than such and such a devotee,' and so on is wrong thinking. By such wrong thinking the mind fails to receive that influence or inspiration that we can otherwise have when we are receptive.

These are short utterances, but are full of significance. When we discuss these things, it has to be remembered that we talk about them only so that we may imbibe the spirit, and not merely to show off our scholarship or our grasp of the subject. These are not the attitudes of a true seeker of God.

When a holy man is near us, we should receive the spirit and inspiration as much as possible from him without trying to discuss and find out the relative merit of one great man compared with another. This is because, such judgements will always make us critical and will prevent us from imbibing the spirit. That is why it is said that no such controversy should be entertained with regard to such god-men, or even about the existence of God. For argument's sake, suppose I try to establish the existence of God with another who does not believe in it. What happens? Though unknowingly, I shall somewhat be coloured by his point of view.

So such discussions are very harmful. Not only are they unnecessary but are extremely harmful too, because they produce in us a sort of scepticism. Without knowing it we become victims of doubt. In the beginning, we feel we shall try to convert others with arguments, but no. What will happen is that we ourselves will grow that spirit of doubt. Here in bhakti, no doubt is to be entertained; the spirit must be absorbed wholeheartedly without any kind of hesitation.

These things are stated and they are invaluable instructions. They have to be carefully borne in mind. We enter

unnecessarily into fruitless discussions with others, and the result is that we ourselves become victims of scepticism which the others may have. So, let us always remain receptive. Particularly, in the presence of holy men, let us make the best use of the advantage by imbibing from them as much of the spirit, as much of the inspiration, as we can, because it is a rare opportunity and it may not be had many times.

What was said above is from the viewpoint of seekers. Even in the case of a devotee who has attained *mukhya bhakti*, arguments are not called for. This is because by arguing with others the devotee may have doubts about his ideal and way of life. We have seen, for example, in the life of Sri Ramakrishna how he would run to the Divine Mother whenever someone gave an opinion contrary to his faith and realization. Though he may have encouraged arguments for fun, Sri Ramakrishna decisively spoke against the tendency to argue. 'One cannot realize Truth by futile arguments and reasoning,'<sup>1</sup> he said. It may be argued that discussion will clarify matters, or that newer ideas may be brought out through discussion. The point is that there is a chance of our controversy being carried on to an excess. Now, it is not invariably able to lead us to a final conclusion of a subject. Sometimes discussions are carried on indefinitely and never lead to any final conclusion; that is, discussions often prove to be barren. Such discussions must be avoided by all means.

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1. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 496.

Our tendency is to go on arguing to defeat our opponent and show off our superiority over him. For this reason, discussions should be avoided, but that does not mean that one should not listen to any reasoning or should not carefully attend to what a competent person says. Such attention and questioning for clarification of what is said is always helpful. At the same time, what usually happens is that discussion is carried on endlessly and it ultimately proves barren. Such discussion only distracts the mind and never leads to any strengthening of faith, nor does it make us improve ourselves. So such discussion must be avoided.

भक्तिशास्त्राणि मननीयानि तदुद्बोधककर्माणि करणीयानि ॥७६॥

76. *Bhaktiśāstrāṇi mananīyāni tadudbodhaka karmāṇi karāṇīyāni.*

*Bhakti śāstrāṇi* the devotional scriptures *mananīyāni* to be reflected upon *tat* devotion *udbodhaka* inspiring *karmāṇi* activities *karāṇīyāni* must be done.

76. Devotional scriptures should be studied and reflected upon, and those activities which arouse devotion must be performed.

The present Sutra says that the scriptures which teach bhakti are to be discussed and meditated upon. What is prohibited is barren discussion as I have suggested. By

'scriptures' not all scriptures are meant but those teaching devotion alone. Followers of the path of devotion should particularly avoid discussions on Jnana Yoga, or scriptures which teach the path of knowledge, because then there is a chance of the devotee being misguided and confused. Therefore only such scriptures as contain the teachings of devotion are to be discussed and meditated upon. The teachings dealing with love and devotion to God may be discussed and reflected upon and spiritual practices which arouse devotion may be undertaken. That is, any action which generates devotion should be undertaken.

So in one place discussion has been barred. In another, it is said that what is unnecessary and is to be avoided is barren discussion but not such discussion as will clarify the teachings of the devotional scriptures. With regard to action, only such action as gives rise to devotion is to be undertaken.

As we all remember, Sri Ramakrishna would also encourage the study of devotional treatises. He would sometimes recommend the study of works like the *Bhāgavata* or the life of Chaitanya.

सुखदुःखेच्छालाभादित्यक्ते काले

प्रतीक्षमाणे क्षणार्धमपि व्यर्थं न नेयम् ॥७७॥

77. *Sukha-dukhā-icchā-lābhādi-tyakte kāle*

*pratīkṣamāṇe kṣaṇārdhamapi vyartham na neyam.*

*Sukha* happiness *dukha* misery *icchā* desire *lābha* profit *ādi* and so on *tyakte* given up *kāle* time *pratīkṣamāṇe* when available *kṣṇārdham* half a moment *api* even *na* not *vyartham* to no purpose *neyam* be spent.

77. Having been freed from the dualities of happiness and misery, gain and loss, desire etc., the devotee gains more time. He must not waste even half a moment.

A devotee has to free himself from all other pre-occupations, as has already been stated. His mind has been made free from pleasure and pain, desire for gain, etc. So, what is he to do with this mind freed from other preoccupations? Is he to waste that time? Time is precious and therefore even half a moment of such time as is gained by one's cessation of other activities should be fruitfully used for the attainment of devotion and should not be wasted.

When more time becomes available because of the devotee's freedom from pleasure and pain, desire for gain etc., he should not waste even half a second. The idea is that actions are to be avoided not to spend time in laziness or wasting away one's time. The time thus saved should be devoted to the cultivation of devotion. Therefore even half a moment is not to be spent in vain. That is, one has to be always alert and see that every moment of time is fruitfully used for the attainment of devotion.

This is an important point to be taken note of by any seeker in spiritual life. It so happens that, being free from



ambitions and having shunned the company of other people, the seeker gets more time than ordinary people. But what happens sometimes is that this free time is not employed fruitfully. He does not scrupulously spend this time for spiritual attainment, or for the improvement of his devotion. It is a great warning that is sounded here. In the name of spirituality, we should see that we do not indulge in laziness. This is to be carefully remembered. That is why it is stated that even half a moment should not be wasted. This means that we should always remain alert and see that every moment of our lives, freed from other preoccupations, is employed in the serious pursuit of the love of God.

अहिंसा-सत्य-शौच-दयास्तिक्यादि-चारित्र्याणि  
परिपालनीयानि ॥७८॥

78. *Ahimsā-satya-śauca-dayā-āstikyādi-cāritryāṇi*  
*paripālānīyāni.*

*Ahimsā* non-violence *satya* truthfulness *śauca* cleanliness *dayā* compassion *āstikya* faith in spirituality *ādi* so on *cāritryāṇi* virtues *paripālānīyāni* should be preserved and cultivated.

78. Virtues like non-violence, truthfulness, cleanliness, compassion, faith in spirituality and so on are to be cultivated (by the devotee).

A devotee should cultivate and preserve virtues such as non-violence, truth, purity, compassion, faith in higher spiritual Reality, and the like. He should cultivate these means to the attainment of the love of God. This is how he should keep himself busy during every moment of his life which he has managed to keep free from other preoccupations. Every item is to be attended to.

Non-violence means non-injury to others in thought, word and deed. Non-violence means one should not even think of doing any harm to another, one should not act in such a way as may harm anybody. One should not speak in a manner that will hurt the feelings of others. So non-violence is to be practised in thought, word and deed. The devotee is to remain non-violent, that is, he has to cultivate the quality of being always helpful to others, and not harmful. We often harm others even when we are pursuing spiritual life, without paying much attention to such things. For instance, sometimes people who are supposed to be religious speak ill of others who are not to their liking; they criticize those who do not believe in God. That should not be the attitude of a devotee. He should refrain from harming others in thought, word or deed. This is one attitude which is negative.

The other aspect of it, the positive aspect, is that the devotee should be helpful to others; he should have love for others. He should see that he makes others happy, but at the same time not at the cost of his going astray from the path of God. His helping others must not be at the cost of forgetting his goal of God-realization, or attaining

supreme love towards Him. Nothing should occupy the place of God.

We should not be too much occupied with altruism, with the idea of helping others, because that way we not only use up our spiritual attainment, but we do not really prove helpful to others. If we are not pure, we cannot understand how we can really help others. The help that we, out of our emotion, try to do to others is not real help. On the other hand, it takes away the merit of it, because we do it at the cost of our remembrance of God. That is why even these altruistic ideas should be followed without harming our spiritual quest.

Then it is a great thing to be a follower of truth. A man pursuing spiritual life—which is realization of God, or cultivation of supreme love for Him—should be truthful to the core. Truth is to be followed in thought, word and deed. We should not speak an untruth; we should not think in a manner that is untrue; and we should not act in a manner that will be untrue. In short, we should practise truth in thought, word, and deed—that is what is said here.

Next is good conduct. This is absolutely necessary as the basis of spiritual life. It is often found that such conduct is neglected. That is, we think we can afford to behave in the way others do, but this is not conducive to the attainment of the goal. This is to be fully understood.

Even for the sake of argument, we should not think of the ideas of people who do not believe in God, and we should not even make a show of being non-believers. Some-

times people do that. They simply say nonchalantly: 'Oh, I do not believe in God,' although they are believers and know they are. This is both straying from truth and creating the impression in another's mind that one is not a spiritual man. Moreover, this does not mean that such an outward behaviour is not harmful to oneself. It is indeed harmful and one should be careful to guard against any such temptations.

सर्वदा सर्वभावेन निश्चिन्तितैः भगवानेव भजनीयः ॥७९॥

79. *Sarvadā sarvabhāvena niscintitaiḥ bhagavāneva bhajanīyaḥ.*

*Sarvadā* always *sarvabhāvena* by every means *niscintitaiḥ* being free from cares and worries *bhagavāneva* God alone *bhajanīyaḥ* is to be worshipped.

79. The devotee, being free from all cares and worries, should always worship the Lord alone.

In the previous aphorism, many virtues were mentioned. All such virtues are to be cultivated. It is the Lord alone who is the repository of all blessed qualities. He is to be worshipped by a devotee, free from all grief and misery. The idea is that one should keep one's mind free from all grief and worries, and God alone is to be worshipped.

Without worrying about anything, the whole mind is to be directed towards Him.

There are two aspects. One is to keep the mind free from all preoccupations, and worries about attainment of earthly goals, or worries as regards reputation, wealth, etc. The mind should be freed not simply for the sake of attaining a peaceful mind. No, it is not that. The mind should be kept free from worries so that it can be directed towards God without any difficulty. Free from cares, one should pray and worship God and God alone.

The idea is that peace of mind is not for one's own enjoyment. We may get peace of mind, but peace of mind is not the goal. This is to be remembered. We often say: 'I am peaceful.' What is that to a devotee? It is an attainment, no doubt; but it is a lower attainment which may produce joy in him or which may make him happy. But that is not the goal. The goal is God and God alone.

All such spiritual practices are to be undertaken, not with the idea of gaining mental happiness, or peace, or reputation, but with the sole idea of worshipping God. No other thought should be there, no other goal should be kept in mind.

Sometimes people think that spiritual life means a life full of peace and happiness. For a devotee it is not that. If non-attainment of that love for God makes one unhappy, that unhappiness is an asset for him. It is not peace of mind or happiness that is desired. The goal is God and God alone. So we should devote all our mind to the worship of God and to cultivate devotion towards

Him, and never even think of mental happiness or peace or joy.

स कीर्त्यमानः शीघ्रमेवाविर्भवत्यनुभावयति (च) भक्तान् ॥८०॥

80. *Sa kīrtyamānaḥ śīghramevāvirbhavaty-anubhāvayati (ca) bhaktān.*

*Saḥ* the Lord *kīrtyamānaḥ* thus glorified *śīghram eva* very soon *āvirbhavati* manifests Himself (*ca* and) *anubhāvayati* blesses with realization *bhaktān* the devotees.

80. Having been glorified thus, the Lord manifests Himself very soon and blesses the devotees with realization.

We often hear people who are following the path of God say, 'Oh, we are at peace', as if that were an end in itself, or 'I have got happiness', as if this were an end in itself. These are not the ends. They may be helpful in making one free from worry, so that one can devote one's whole attention to God, without interruption. Instead of that, if we enjoy peace of mind and happiness, we simply fall from our devotion to God. We must remember this.

All these wrong notions will have to be eschewed by the mind. Not that we have to be unhappy always. I do.

not mean that. Our happiness will only be through the attainment of that supreme love of God; otherwise, ordinary happiness is not something which is desired; it is not lasting. God is to be worshipped, or love of God is to be cultivated, in every respect, at all times, and in every way. This is also important. Even if we are eating, drinking and carrying out our normal activities, which are neither spiritual nor otherwise, nor harmful—even such activities should be done with the thought of God. There should be nothing in this life which is not permeated with the thought of God. Each and every act of the devotee should be a worship. The entire life of a devotee must be one constant worship of the Divine. Without any other thought in mind, without anything in the world to disturb him, the devotee must constantly please God through all forms of worship.

Being thus glorified, the Lord manifests Himself and blesses the devotee with realization. Then alone can the devotee feel the presence of God; it is only then that the realization of God—that most coveted goal of life—is achieved.

God manifests Himself before us and makes us realize Him. We realize His reality—and that, very soon.

These are the ways that lead the devotee to God-realization, and that too, within a short time. The length of time depends on the earnestness and intensity with which the devotee carries out his practices.

When he sings the glories of the Lord, meditates on Him, keeps himself absolutely pure, remains free from all

other preoccupations, and constantly engages in the thoughts of God, realization is not a long way off.

त्रिसत्यस्य भक्तिरेव गरीयसी, भक्तिरेव गरीयसी ॥८१॥

81. *Trisatyasya bhaktireva garīyasī, bhaktireva garīyasī.*

*Trisatyasya* of the eternal truth *bhaktiḥ eva* devotion alone *garīyasī* greatest.

81. Devotion to the eternal Truth alone is the greatest.

God is eternally true—in the present, in the past, and in the future. He who is never non-existent, ever-present and eternal—that is the glory of the Lord. Devotion towards such a God is superior. The love of the absolute eternal Truth is the greatest. This love is indeed the highest. This is added to give emphasis to the utterance.

So, the means to the attainment of *parā bhakti* or supreme love of God have been stated at length. The obstacles to be avoided have also been stated. The devotee will in this way keep away from the pitfalls. He will keep himself engaged constantly with the means that have been described here for realization of the supreme Reality, which is true in the present, past and future—that is, eternally true. This is what is implied: God alone is eternally exist-



ent, everything else exists only for a time; God alone exists for all time and is therefore worthy of our love.

गुणमाहात्म्यासक्ति-रूपासक्ति-पूजासक्ति-स्मरणासक्ति-दास्यासक्ति-  
सख्यासक्ति-वात्सल्यासक्ति-कान्तासक्ति-आत्मनिवेदनासक्ति-तन्मयतासक्ति-  
परमविरहासक्ति-रूपा एकधा अपि एकादशधा भवति ॥८२॥

82. *Guṇamāhātmyāsakti-rūpāsakti-pūjāsakti-  
smaraṇāsakti-dāsyāsakti-sakhyāsakti-  
vātsalyāsakti-kāntāsakti-ātmanivedanāsakti-  
tanmayatāsakti-paramavirahāsakti-rūpā  
ekadhāpi ekādaśadhā bhavati.*

*Ekadhā* one alone *api* though (*bhaktiḥ* devotion) *guṇamāhātmyāsakti* love for the glorification of the Lord's blessed qualities *rūpāsakti* love for His enchanting beauty *pūjāsakti* love of worship *smaraṇāsakti* desire for remembrance *dāsyāsakti* desire for service *sakhyāsakti* desire for Him as a friend *vātsalyāsakti* love for Him as a son *kāntāsakti* love for God as a wife loves her husband *ātmanivedanāsakti* love of self-surrender *tanmayatāsakti* love for being absorbed in Him *paramavirahāsakti* love for the pain of separation from Him (*iti* thus) *ekādaśadhā* eleven types *bhavati* becomes.

82. Though itself only one, bhakti manifests itself in eleven forms: love of the glorification of the Lord's blessed qualities, love of His enchanting beauty, love

of worship, love of constant remembrance, love of service, love of God as a friend, love of God as a son, love of God as the husband, love of self-surrender to Him, love of complete absorption in Him, and love of the pain of separation from Him.

We have read in the sutra that *parā bhakti*, though one, manifests itself in the following different forms:

- 1) Love of the glorification of the Lord's blessed qualities—the glory of the different qualities of God (the idea being to meditate on God's qualities or to desire to remember God's qualities constantly);
- 2) Attachment to Lord's beauty;
- 3) Attachment to His worship;
- 4) Attachment to His remembrance;
- 5) Attachment to Him as that of a servant to his master;
- 6) Attachment to Him as a friend;
- 7) Attachment to Him as a child (i.e., the devotee cherishes the feeling or attitude towards God as his son);
- 8) Attachment to the Lord as the husband (as a wife's relationship to her husband);
- 9) Love for self-surrender to Him;
- 10) Attachment to Him in the form of complete absorption in Him;
- 11) Attachment to the supreme anguish as a result of separation from Him.

These are the forms which *bhakti* may take, or any one of these may be cultivated by the devotee. These forms are

supposed to be inter-related. Whenever a person develops this extreme form of love for God, he develops these ideas or attitudes towards God. The first form mentioned is the glorification of the attributes of the Lord. A devotee actually starts his devotion with this. God's glory has to be meditated upon so that gradually we become more and more attached to Him.

Then comes His beauty. To think of the beauty of the Lord is moving a little bit closer or making a closer relationship with the Divine. Then comes worship, which means offering worship to Him, or even attachment to His worship. Next is attachment to His remembrance.

Then various other attitudes are mentioned:

Attachment to God as His servant. This is the beginning of a close personal relationship with Him: the attitude of a servant towards his master. The devotee considers himself as a servant and God as his master.

Next in order of nearness is considering Him as a friend of the devotee. Now, this relationship means being almost at the same level, as it were. A servant keeps himself at a distance from the master, but a friend need not keep any kind of distance. He is so intimate that he considers God as his equal. This is the beauty of the relationship of friendship.

Even more intense is the relationship between the father or mother and the child. God may be treated here as the child and the devotee may consider himself or herself as the father or mother. This is a very sweet relationship where there cannot be any question of 'give and take'.

The parents expect nothing from the child. They have only to give and nothing to gain in return. This is the relationship the devotee bears towards the Lord. God is the receiver of love, protection, care; the devotee does not seek any kind of return from Him. So, it is naturally the most unselfish type of love. Later, it is attachment to Him, considering God as the Beloved. This is the relationship of the sweetheart towards her paramour. This is supposed to be the closest kind of relationship, the most intimate and intense form of love. Next comes attachment to self-surrender, the surrender of the devotee to the Lord: 'The Lord's will be done.' He does not seek anything from God, but everything that comes to Him he considers as coming from God, and he completely surrenders himself to His will. The next is attachment or desire for complete absorption in God. This absorption may be so intense that the feeling that God and His devotee are different is removed. Only God remains and the devotee completely disappears, becoming completely absorbed in that divine love. His personality ceases to be a separate personality but gets absorbed in God.

The last form is the desire for extreme pain brought about as a result of the absence of realization of God that arises in the heart of the devotee. He feels that every moment that he is separated from God is intolerable. This form is the last one, but this pain is something which the devotee does not like to shun. He does not wish to be relieved of this pain, because it is caused by the supreme anguish due to the Lord's absence. This is said to be the most

effective form of devotion to God which immediately brings in its train complete absorption in God. God-realization invariably comes with the dawn of this kind of feeling in the mind of the devotee.

These are the various forms of love mentioned in the sutras. They are different aspects of the same love of God. Although this love is one, it may be manifested in these eleven forms. The idea is that God-realization may be attained through any of these various attitudes. That is why these eleven forms of love are detailed, so that the devotee may cultivate any one them.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say that for the awakening of intense devotion to God, it is necessary for the devotee to think in terms of some sort of a relationship to be established with God. He should look upon God in one of the following ways: as a master, as a friend, as a child, as a sweetheart, etc. Anyone of these attitudes will suffice for God-realization, although in the scriptures on the bhakti cult, it has been said that gradually an attitude of veneration towards God, the scriptures, etc., develops. It is not mere veneration; but is also mixed with love. That is called the *śānta bhāva*, the peaceful relationship. There is no exuberance of feeling in this. A person quietly thinks of God, meditates on Him with all his tendencies subdued; his mind stilled and made completely calm. That is why it is called *śānta*. When the waves of the mind are quiet, they become just like an ocean without any ripples. There were sages who had great respect for Sri Krishna but kept themselves far away from Him, thinking that they were too

insignificant to be able to approach God. So, that feeling of difference or distance is present to a very appreciable degree. In the *Bhāgavata* there is a beautiful verse describing the devotion of the sages: 'The sages, who were immersed in the bliss of the Self, also had selfless devotion to the lotus feet of Sri Hari. Such is the glory of the Lord.'<sup>1</sup>

This relationship is the beginning of one's attitude towards God. This has not been described as an attitude which a devotee should continue to have; he may begin with this attitude, but then he must outgrow that stage. Of course, a person of that type, say, an ascetic, or a sage may have that attitude, and yet he may be great.

The cultivation of devotion, however, requires more intimacy. The devotee does not like to be satisfied with a relationship where God is far away from him, beyond his reach. So, he has to cultivate a more personal relationship with God. Though we have mentioned these relationships above, we elaborate on them here.

The first in the series of personal relationships with God is that of looking upon God as the Master and oneself as the servant. Here there is no exuberance, but there is more closeness. A servant looks upon his master with respect no doubt, but yet there is a loving relationship between them. A servant not only respects his master,

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1. आत्मारामाश्च मुनयो निर्ग्रन्था अप्युरुक्रमे ।

कुर्वन्त्यहैतुकीं भक्तिमित्थम्भूतगुणो हरिः ॥ —*Bhāgavata*, 1.7.10.

but also loves him. So this is a more intense relationship.

In the *Rāmāyana* an illustration is given of the relationship between a servant and his master in that between Hanuman and Sri Ramachandra. Hanuman is a great devotee of Ramachandra. He considered his aim in life to be nothing but service to Ramachandra; he completely devoted himself to the service of his master. This is an illustration of the devotion of the servant to the master.

The next is the relationship as between friends. God is considered to be a friend. A friend does not think so much of the greatness of his friend, because the idea of greatness creates a difference. ('My friend may be a great man to others, but in my eyes he is just a friend, almost on the same footing as myself.') All these relationships have been illustrated in the life of Sri Krishna, in the *lila* of Sri Krishna in Vrindavan. We find all of them beautifully illustrated in the *Bhāgavata*.

The relationship of friendship is beautifully illustrated in the life of Sri Krishna and his playmates, the cowherd boys of Vrindavan. The cowherd boys never considered Sri Krishna to be a very superior person. They had no qualms about even riding on his shoulders, or offering him food already tasted by themselves. That kind of relationship is possible only when there is an intensely simple approach, as in friendship. A friend deals with a friend as an equal, having nothing to hide from him, being happy in seeing his friend happy in every respect and on the same

footing. The cowherd boys of Vrindavan had this relationship with Sri Krishna.

Then comes the feeling of the parent toward the child. This relationship has also been beautifully illustrated in the attitude of Yashoda towards Sri Krishna. It is a beautiful story.

Sri Krishna was actually the son of Devaki and Vasudeva, but on the very day he was born, he was removed to the house of a couple who lived far away from the place where he was born—a couple called Nanda and Yashoda. They were simple people who lived by raising cattle and selling milk and dairy products. It was to their house that Sri Krishna was taken, lest Kamsa (who was out to kill him) should find him. That is the story.

They say that a similar story is told in the life of Jesus. When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, King Herod was told by his informants that the child born of Mary would be the King of the Jews. So Herod was anxious to kill the child. Jesus was therefore taken away to Egypt, so that Herod could not lay hands on him. Herod ordered the killing of all the infants in Bethlehem, so that although he could not recognize Jesus, he thought that Jesus would be one of them and so, would be killed.

In the same way King Kamsa was after Sri Krishna and wanted to destroy him. So Sri Krishna was quietly carried away from the prison in which his parents were being kept by Kamsa to a distant place on the other side of the Yamuna river and put in the house of Nanda and Yashoda. They brought him up, and the story goes that



Yashoda also gave birth to a child at about the same time as Sri Krishna was born, but did not know whether the child was a boy or a girl. When Sri Krishna was brought there, the child born to Yashoda was taken away and Krishna put in its place. Nanda and Yashoda therefore considered Sri Krishna to be their own son and poured out their love on him.

It is a beautiful story, which is narrated chapter after chapter in the *Bhāgavata*, describing Yashoda's and Nanda's love for the child Krishna. They never thought of his greatness. When Sri Krishna even displayed some extraordinary miracles, they thought them to be the work of some demon and so performed propitiatory sacrifices—as parents may do—so that the demon might leave him, never thinking that the child was none other than God manifested in the form of a child.

So the attitude of a devotee towards God was not present there, although at times Yashoda was told that Krishna was none other than God Himself. But what does it matter to a mother? Sri Krishna may be God, but to a mother he is only a child. So that was the personal relationship of Yashoda and Nanda towards Sri Krishna—an attitude which ignores the glories, the greatness, and such ideas as make a difference between the lover and his beloved. No such difference is there. On the other hand, the parents consider a child as depending solely on their love. He is to be taken care of and is not someone from whom protection is sought. Protection is to be given to Sri Krishna and not sought from him. This is a relation-

ship which is extremely unselfish. It is an illustration of unselfish love of the purest type, the love of parents towards their children.

Next comes the loving relationship between husband and wife, or between the lover and his sweetheart. Here the devotee considers himself as a wife or sweetheart, and God as the husband or lover. It is said that in this case the intensity is the utmost that can be thought of through human relations.

This love is depicted in the story of the relationship between Sri Krishna and Sri Radha. Mind you, they are not husband and wife, but Radha is the sweetheart and Sri Krishna is the lover. Why is it depicted in this way? Because here the intensity of love is at its uppermost limit. Love between a husband and wife is sometimes taken for granted. Also there is not that extreme feeling of closeness that exists between a lover and his sweetheart. This sort of relationship is illustrated as an instance of the maximum intensity of the devotee's love towards God.

People may consider it to be immoral to think in this way, but that is because they think about it in a carnal manner. It should not be thought of in that way. It should be understood by way of illustration. The great intensity of feeling existing between the two lovers cannot be exemplified in any other way. God and the devotee must have that sort of intensity which has no parallel in any other relationship. According to the bhakti path, this is the highest that can be conceived.

इत्येवं वदन्ति जनजल्पनिर्भयाः एकमताः कुमार-व्यास-शुक-  
शाण्डिल्य-गर्ग-विष्णु-कौण्डिन्य-शेषोद्धवारूणि-बलि-हनुमद्-  
विभीषणादयो भक्त्याचार्याः ॥८३॥

83. *Ityevam vadanti janajalpanirbhayāḥ ekamatāḥ*  
*kumāra-vyāsa-śuka-śāndilya-garga-viṣṇu-*  
*kaunḍinya-śeṣa-uddhava-āruṇi-bali-hanumad-*  
*vibhīṣanādayo bhaktyācāryāḥ.*

*Iti evam vadanti* thus say *janajalpanirbhayāḥ* not caring what people may say *ekamatāḥ* unanimous *kumāra ādayaḥ* Narada, Vyāsa, Śuka, Śāndilya, Garga, Vishnu, Kauṇḍinya, Śeṣa, Uddhava, Āruṇi, Bali, Hanumān, Vibhīṣaṇa, and other *bhaktyācāryāḥ* teachers of devotion.

83. Thus unanimously declare, without caring as to what people may say, the teachers of devotion, like Kumara (Narada), Vyasa, Shuka, Shandilya, Garga, Vishnu, Kaundinya, Shesha, Uddhava, Aruni, Bali, Hanuman, Vibhishana, and so on.

Then Narada sums up by saying that this is the *unanimous* opinion of all great teachers of bhakti, such as Kumara, Vyasa, Shuka, Sandilya, Vishnu, Kaundinya, Garga, Sesha, Uddhava, Aruni, Bali, Hanuman, Vibhishana and so on. Narada says that he is not giving any new ideas of his own, different from the experience of other great teachers of bhakti. So he cites several teachers of bhakti who have represented in their lives the different aspects.

In their lives they have shown how these attitudes are to be cultivated by following this kind of devotion.

These great teachers of bhakti do not care for what people might say. This is an important point. People may criticize such attitudes—and people do criticize—but then devotees will have no fear of them. They will not mind what people say. They will go their own way, being convinced that they are on the right path, and that their path is leading them, or has led them, to the Highest. So they have no fear of public opinion or what others say.

But if there is any such criticism from one who is really an *ācārya* (a competent teacher), then the devotee has to think. He has to be careful. But in this case all great teachers of bhakti are unanimous in their opinion as to the effectiveness of this path and therefore they teach this without fear of what people may say.

This path has been severely criticized by others. Take, for instance, those who follow the path of knowledge. They say: 'What is this indulging in mere emotional forms? Where will it lead a person? It will never give him *mukti*, liberation, the highest goal of life.' So they criticize the path of a devotee severely, but a devotee is not shaken by such criticism. As, for instance, when Sri Ramakrishna was clapping his hands and singing the glories of God, Tota Puri, his teacher and follower of the path of knowledge, criticized him: 'Why, do you make chapattis like that?' (Formerly in India people sometimes used to make chapattis by taking in their hands a lump of moistened flour and then beating it between the palms of their two hands to

flatten it into the desired size and form—somewhat in the manner of clapping one's hands.) Tota Puri was making fun of Sri Ramakrishna, never thinking that this can be an attitude or performance which can lead to God-realization. He never believed in that, so he criticized.

When Sri Ramakrishna said, 'I shall ask my Divine Mother whether I should take *sannyāsa* or not', and went to the temple to ask the deity, Mother Kali, Tota Puri was wonderstruck: 'What is this? The boy seems to be a very competent person for Vedanta, but why has he such a superstition? He goes to the temple to ask the deity. What has this got to do with *sannyasa*?'

The idea is: 'All forms of deities, all symbols, all images, according to the knower of Brahman, means nothing—they are non-essentials; that is, they are nothing in comparison with Brahman which is the only Reality. They are all unreal. So why does Ramakrishna approach the temple and seek the opinion of the Mother who is unreal?'—that is Tota Puri's thinking.

So we see that this devotional attitude may be severely criticized by followers of other paths, but that does not shake the determination or faith of a devotee. He continues on his own path.

We have now almost come to an end of our dissertation on the *Narada Bhakti Sutras*. I hope my thoughts on these ideas have given you something to work on and some path to keep to. I do not mean that it is the only path, but, whatever other paths there may be, this is a very important one by which to approach God.

Narada particularly says that he is not teaching anything which is not corroborated by others. He humbly quotes other authorities also, side by side, in support of what he has said. So he says: 'Thus say the teachers of bhakti unanimously without being afraid of public criticism', and then he proceeds to give their names. The list is long. Kumara, Vyasa, Shuka, Shandilya, Garga, Vishnu, Kaundinya, Keshava, Uddhava, Aruni, Bali, Hanuman, Vibhishana and others. The idea is that, as regards Truth itself, nobody can claim authorship of it or be originator of it. Truth is eternal and many, many teachers down the centuries and millennia have been teaching the same Truth, though each in his own way.

य इदं नारदप्रोक्तं शिवानुशासनं विश्वसिति श्रद्धते, स भक्तिमान्  
भवति सः प्रेष्ठं लभते सः प्रेष्ठं लभते ॥८४॥

॥ ॐ तत् सत् ॥

84. *Ya idam nārada proktam śivānuśāsanam viśvasiti śraddhate sa bhaktimān bhavati saḥ preṣṭham labhate saḥ preṣṭham labhate. Om tat sat.*

Yaḥ he who *idam* this *nārada proktam* told by Narada *śivānuśāsanam* auspicious teaching *viśvasiti* believes *śraddhate* has faith in *saḥ* he *bhaktimān* lover of God *bhavati* becomes *saḥ* he *preṣṭham* the most beloved *labhate* attains *saḥ* he *preṣṭham* the most beloved *labhate* attains. *Om Tat Sat.*

84. Whoever believes and follows with faith this auspicious teaching of Narada becomes a lover of God and realizes the Dearest who is the sole aim of life.

As in some earlier sutras, Narada repeats the final words to emphasize his idea and to conclude the discussion.

In conclusion, it is said that whoever believes in this auspicious gospel of Narada and has faith in it becomes a lover of God and attains the highest beatitude and goal of life.

Narada did not intend to show any great scholarship in these sutras. The teachings in the *Bhakti Sutras* are very simple, easily understandable, and can be easily followed also. Bhakti yoga is the most popular way of attaining the supreme Goal. The most popular way, because it does not presuppose much scholarship, not even much of austerity. Too much of asceticism is disapproved of by teachers of bhakti yoga. Scholarship also sometimes creates a sort of pride in a person's mind that he is a great scholar while, contrary to this, bhakti yoga teachers show utmost humility. So scholarship is not the strong point in bhakti yoga, though there have been many great scholars who described bhakti yoga at length. Yet scholarship, by itself, has no merit in bhakti yoga. As Sri Ramakrishna says, a child may not know what greatness his father may have. Nevertheless, he loves his father, and the father loves the child. It is not so important to scrupulously follow the rituals also. Again, as Sri Ramakrishna says, a child may not know how to utter the name 'father' distinctly. He simply makes some sound, and the father understands that the child seeks him.

So is it not necessary to follow the ritualistic processes of precise pronunciation of the mantras as prescribed in the scriptural texts. Here it is simple yearning for God that is needed. It may not be associated with any kind of ritual and no methodical practice is absolutely necessary. That has been demonstrated by Sri Ramakrishna in his life. When he was seeking the Mother, he did not think of any particular procedure by means of which that calling was to be directed. He simply yearned. His heart was bleeding for a vision of the Mother. And that was a demonstration that in bhakti yoga there is no necessity for any scrupulous observance of rituals. A bhakta may be conversant with the scriptures, or he may not be. If he is conversant with the rituals to be followed in formal worship, he practises the rituals. They are not, however, absolutely necessary for reaching God. Whatever rituals Sri Ramakrishna learned before that awakening of intense yearning in his mind, he was doing as the scriptures desire to be followed; but then when he was mad with love, he forgot all the processes. When he was worshipping Mother Kali, there was absolutely no method. It was just the behaviour of a child in the presence of the Mother. Sri Ramakrishna showed thereby that rituals are not absolutely necessary. Though Sri Ramakrishna was formally initiated into the *śākta* cult, that was only a sort of formal initiation, to which he never gave any emphasis in his utterances. That means that even without such a ritualistic approach, God can be attained through sheer love for Him. That is the speciality of bhakti yoga. And then, about the intellectual aspect, scholarship is not the strong point in bhakti yoga. Narada



was a great scholar himself but he never demonstrated his scholarship in dealing with these Sūtras. We have seen throughout that there was no mention of scriptural passages in corroboration of what he said. Nowhere is any mention of scriptural passages found in the *Sūtras*. That does not mean that Narada is not competent to quote passages in his favour. He never thought it necessary. Particularly, to show that a man need not be a scholar at all, yet he is competent to approach God and realize Him through the path of devotion, scholarship playing no part thereby in the yearning for God. Sri Ramakrishna has demonstrated the same idea. Then about the position in society. A devotee need not be of a high caste, or be held with esteem in society. Narada was the son of a maid-servant about whose ancestors nothing is known, though at times Narada has been described as 'Brahma Kumara', son of Brahma, or Brahmā, but that is only a casual utterance. In the story itself, there is no mention of Narada's antecedents. Nothing is said about his father, except the reference that his mother was a maid-servant and that Narada had the spirit of renunciation awakened in his life very early, he renounced the world and went away for visualization of the ideal or to have the vision of God. He sat in meditation and prayed with great earnestness and God appeared before him. Thus it is demonstrated in his life that no high pedigree, great lineage, being born of great sages and saints, is necessary for God-realization. From any stratum of society one can follow bhakti yoga without any hesitation and, if he is sincere and intense in his practices, God-realization will inevitably follow. But to instil faith in the

hearts of the followers of the bhakti cult, Narada says that whatever he has described in connection with bhakti yoga has been taught by great sages (as mentioned before). Narada says that these are the instructions given by Shiva, Narada is merely a narrator of it.

What happens to him who believes in these teachings and follows them? He becomes endowed with devotion. As a climax, he realizes that Supreme, the highest beatitude in life. It is repeated twice to indicate the end of the chapter and also the end of the book. Or it may mean that invariably he realizes that Supreme, the dearest of the devotee. Two things are there: whoever has faith in Him, and actively participates in that process, attains that. Merely believing superficially is not enough. The whole life must be moulded accordingly. Then only the teachings are of any value to him. There may be a great scholar giving discourses on bhakti without being a devotee. As Sri Ramakrishna says, there is the story of a great propounder of the *Bhāgavata*. He was giving discourses in the presence of a king in his court, and, at the end of the discourse, he would say: 'Maharaj, have you understood?' The king would reply: 'You understand first.' The pundit was astonished by such answers. 'What is this? I have studied the scripture all my life and I am explaining these teachings to my great satisfaction and yet, the king says: "You understand first." Have I not understood?' After three such meetings, when the answer was only, 'You understand first,' or 'You please understand yourself,' the pundit began to think: 'What is the idea?' The pundit was a scholar and there was sincerity in him. So he tried to analyse

for himself: 'Why is it that the king has said that I have not understood it?' Then after much thinking he came to know the essence of the teaching: 'The essence of this teaching is that one has to give up everything for the sake of God. Have I done that? No! So the king is right when he says, "You understand first".' So, at last, he gave up the discourse and sent word to the king: 'Yes, now I have understood.' And he renounced the world. That is the secret! If we understand these things, it is not to be merely intellectual understanding. That understanding will not take us anywhere. As Sri Ramakrishna used to say, vultures fly high in the sky but their attention is riveted to the carcasses below. A scholar, similarly, says lofty things, describing scriptures and giving discourses on very high ideals, but his mind is attached to the things of the world. So, then, what is the use of his scholarship? Sri Ramakrishna says that I do not care a straw for such a scholarship. That scholarship can give fame and wealth, but cannot bring salvation. So it is all useless. In bhakti yoga this is particularly relevant. Renunciation is, of course, considered to be a very high quality for a seeker of God, but renunciation for a devotee is a miracle because he has not understood the world in the sense that the scholar understands it. He has the feeling in his heart of hearts that the world is not the thing that he needs, that he longs for, but he wants his beloved God. God is the thing that he seeks, and therefore to him the world is worthless without God; it takes him away from God. As the story goes, once, being pleased with Hanuman's devotion, Sita gave him her necklace of pearls. Hanuman is a monkey, and as monkeys do,

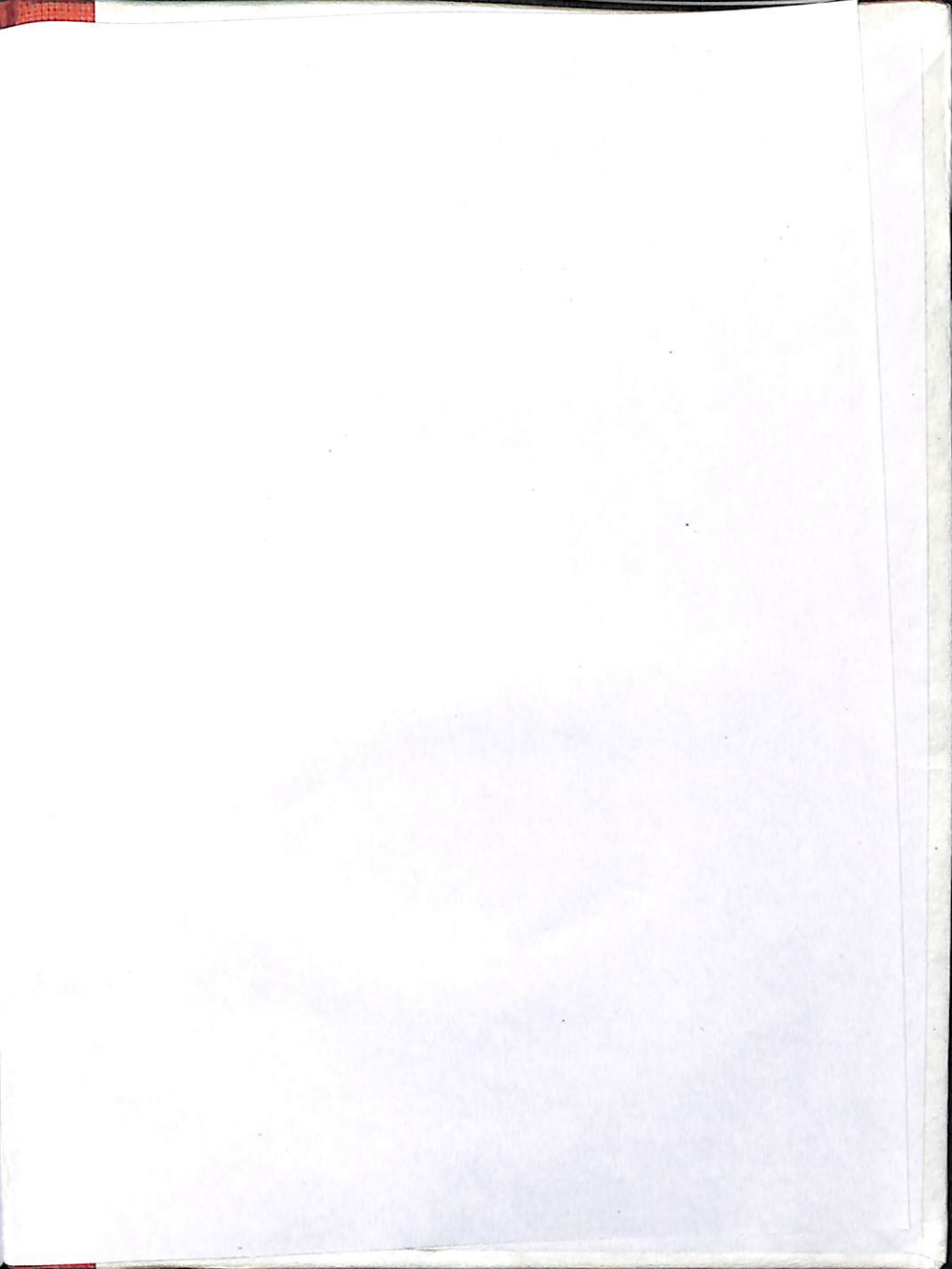
he took out that necklace and began to bite the pearls, break them, and throw them away. Noticing this, somebody remarked: 'He is behaving exactly like a monkey; he does not know the worth of the necklace. The pearls are priceless but he just spoils the necklace and throws it away.' Someone else asked Hanuman: 'Why is it that you are throwing these invaluable pearls? You do not know what value they have. Why are you breaking them?' Hanuman replied: 'I am breaking them to see whether Rama is there inside. I do not find Rama, so I am throwing them away.' Then the questioner remarked: 'Well, you have a body. Is there Rama inside that you don't throw away the body?' The story goes that Hanuman opened his heart, and lo, there was Rama residing in his heart. Otherwise, the body also would have been thrown away. That is the attitude of a devotee. For him nothing is valuable except God; everything else is worthless for him. It is not Narada alone who has taught these things, but a host of other teachers of bhakti have been mentioned here by way of corroboration. Lastly, to summarise, it is mentioned: 'Whoever has *śraddhā* and belief in these teachings...' They almost mean the same thing. *Śraddhā* means faith in the scriptures, and belief means the faith that we can have normally, even without the help of the scriptures. So whoever has got faith and belief will realize this. Realize what? He will realize God who is the Dearest. It is beautifully summed up: 'he realizes the Dearest'. It may not mean God also; again, even His glory is not needed there; it may be God without any attributes, except that He is dear to the devotee—the Dearest, who is the supreme object of life.

The devotee attains to that. Now, after that supreme Goal is attained, what else remains to be attained? Nothing, because He has his desires fulfilled, he is at peace with himself, his heart is flowing with love for the Dearest, and is becoming united with the Dearest. That is the end of his love for a devotee. It is a beautiful ending of a beautiful discourse.

The subject has to be treated not simply for intellectual understanding, not merely to satisfy one's curiosity, but to attain something which really matters most in life, which is of utmost importance to a human being—and that is, to become united with God, to reach Him, to be in His company. That is what is attained through bhakti yoga. Whether it is appreciated by others or not, Narada has said, a bhakta never cares. Even when he is criticized as mad, to be not like the people of the world—what does it matter to a devotee? He has attained his highest goal and does not care for what others say. That also has been clearly stated here. That is bhakti yoga. The price to be paid is one's all—everything that one possesses, including the body. The Gopis described themselves as the servants of God, who desired not even a little compensation for that. They sacrificed themselves at the feet of the Lord, without considering anything else worth having, and without seeking any return. The devotee has sacrificed everything for Him, and nothing else matters—not even his own happiness. It is not happiness that a devotee seeks; he seeks God. Happiness comes unsought. He is satisfied that he can serve God to the best of his capacity, and with heartfelt dedication to Him. That is what is called wholehearted devotion. No corner should be kept for something

else or somebody else. God must occupy the whole heart. That is what is called one-pointedness, which has only one object for it, and nothing else. That is the point which is to be considered in the life of a bhakta. An apt illustration is the life of the gopis. They gave up everything, including reputation in society. They gave up everything for the sake of God. That is the beauty of the lives of the gopis. That is what Sri Ramakrishna has extolled as the ideal of devotion. A devotee must give everything to God without keeping anything, not even his reputation in society—not to speak of other things. That is the beauty of bhakti yoga. When one achieves this, he certainly attains to the goal, namely, the dearest One. That is the end of bhakti yoga.

Therefore, we have seen that a bhakta need not necessarily be a scholar, a great man of piety, having performed many sacrifices or many spiritual rituals; he need not even follow the codes of purity in the sense in which it is ordinarily understood. But he is pure, and his very touch, his very presence, purifies others. A sinner can be turned into a saint by a mere touch from him. That is the greatness of devotion. That is the greatness of a devotee. Sri Krishna says in the *Bhāgavata*: 'How can I give adequate return, the love that I have received from the gopis? I cannot adequately return the love that the gopis have bestowed on Me.' As a devotee feels towards God, so also God feels towards a devotee. Sri Krishna says: 'When sages and such great bhaktas go, I go behind them so that the dust of their feet may fall upon me and I may be purified.' That is the highest tribute that can be paid to a human being.



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