

**Narada Bhakti Sutra**  
**A summary of Swami Tadatmananda's Discourse**  
**September 26, 2006**

We need to clearly understand *parama prema bhakti* so as to build a solid foundation for further study of this text.

*Bhakti* as *parama prema* is not to be misunderstood as intense love; "intense" is a matter of degree and "love" is an emotion, which comes and goes. *Bhakti* is unique and qualitatively different from love (*prema*). We need to explore this further.

Sutra 2 clearly says that *parama prema* (let's call it true *bhakti*) is in (or directed to) "this"; it does not say it is in Vishnu, *Bhagavan*, or Shiva; it is not "that" which would mean some thing remote and separate. The word used is "this"; any name, as *Bhagavan*, etc. would only be limiting the limitless God.

*Bhakti* directed to "that" or something separate is *sadhana bhakti* as opposed to *sadhya bhakti*. *Sadhana* is means by which one reaches a goal, and *sadhya* means goal. *Sadhana bhakti* is devotion to *murtis*, deities, *avatars*, or a guru (as one who is ego-less). Through *sadhana bhakti* one reaches *sadhya bhakti*, which is the goal, reaching *Ishvara*. It is clearly the *sadhya bhakti* that is being referred to in Sutra 2, and this becomes evident in Sutra 3 as well.

Sutra 3: "*Amrita swarupa cha*"; translation, "and having the essential form of amrita (immortality)."

Commentary: This sutra means, "The nature of that *bhakti* (referred to in Sutra 2) is immortal". Immortal is that which is uncreated and undying; undying because it is never born in the first place. This sutra is not a prayer; prayer is *sadhana bhakti*. *Amrita swarupa* (immortal) can only be understood as the goal that one reaches.

Common image of *bhakti* is that of a devotee standing in front of an altar and offering prayers. As mentioned above, one can pray to the Lord in form of a *murti* on the altar, as a deity, as an *avatara*, or a Guru (see footnote 1 below). All these are separate and remote from us-they are "that" and not "this". This is what *sadhana bhakti* is: that which is directed to God who is separate from you (referred to as *dvaita* in Vedantic philosophy). Its importance is not to be underestimated, because it is *sadhana bhakti* that leads to an understanding of *Ishvara* and attainment of the goal (*sadhya bhakti*).

*Ishvara* is the creator and the sustainer of the creation and the one unto whom the creation returns. *Ishvara* as such is formless. All forms of *Ishvara* are superimpositions (generally anthropomorphic, i.e., modeled after human form) on the formless one. By whatever name or form one describes *Ishvara*, He is more than that! *Ishvara* is *nirakara*, meaning without form. *Ishvara* alone is what exists. Physical universe is nothing but *Ishvara*; *Ishvara* alone is what exists and every thing that exists is *Ishvara*!. We, being part of the universe, are also manifestation of *Ishvara* and cannot be separate from *Ishvara*. We are the wave in the ocean, which is *Ishvara*- wave is born of ocean, sustained by ocean and merges into the ocean; it is not separate from ocean. Our relationship with *Ishvara* is the same, i.e., we are not separate (referred to as *advaita* in Vedantic philosophy). With this understanding of *Ishvara*, we can recognize *Ishvara* as “this”. *Parama prema bhakti* is thus directed to “this” *Ishvara*.

Sutra 4: *Yal labdhva puman siddho bhavati, amrito bhavati, tripto bhavati*

Translation: Having gained that, man realizes himself as an accomplished one, as immortal and as contented.

Commentary: Even though the sutra implies that something (“this”) is first “gained”, the Vedantic irony is that you already have what you want to gain; you already are what you want to become! If you are going to seek *Ishvara*, where can you look? He is everywhere! (*Swamiji illustrated this by a personal anecdote; see footnote 2*). When you start seeking God through *sadhna bhakti*, you eventually understand that you are non-separate from God. All our teachings in this Ashram are directed to discovering that which has been unrecognized; the fact that you already are immortal.

Further discussion of Sutra 4 will continue.

Footnote 1: We do not worship *murtis* or deities as gods themselves; that would be idol worship; idol in the Western mind means a false god. We Hindus must eliminate the word idol from our lexicon. A good analogy to explain our prayer directed to *murtis* is that just as we use a telephone to speak to some one at the other end, we pray not to, but through the *murtis* on the altar to reach God. For many people, using forms of God makes it easier to relate to God.

Footnote 2: Once Swamiji traveled to the sacred Kedarnath pilgrimage site in Northern India to see the famous Shiva Linga in the temple on the top of the mountain. It was a long journey by air, then by train, taxi and finally a long trek up to the mountaintop to have a *darshana* of the Shiva Lingam; this lingam is one of the naturally formed lingas (*swayambhuva linga*). Once he reached the peak and had the *darshana* of the lingam in the temple, he realized that the lingam was really the peak of the mountain itself. He was struck with the recognition that in reality the whole mountain was the lingam! This perspective was a vivid

realization to him that God pervades the same way in the world-everything is God!

Regardless, he enjoyed the trip so much that in spite of this recognition he went three more times to Kedarnath! "It's just fun" as he put it.

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