

**Narada Bhakti Sutra**  
**A summary of Swami Tadatmananda's Discourse**  
**November 7, 2006**

In previous verses (16-18), various practices for achieving the goal of *parama prema bhakti* have been described. According to Vyasa, Garga and, Shaandilya, *bhakti* is pursued through the practice of *puja*, *katha*, and reveling in God's presence within (meditation). These forms of *bhakti* involve body, speech and mind, respectively. Now, in verse 19, Narada says that the best way to *bhakti* is to develop a sense of *tad arpita buddhi*, which means offering unto the Lord. Not only the activities relating to *bhakti* done by body, speech, and mind, but in fact, all of our actions, without any exception, are to be offered to God. Thus, Narada is advocating a total surrender to God.

The common image of total surrender is that of a devotee flatly lying on the ground to offer his salutations (*pranam*) to a guru or to a deity in the temple. However, this type of surrender is an emotion that does not last long, even if it's done day after day. When *bhakti* is merely an emotion, it will not be a steady state of surrender because emotions are transient; this form of *bhakti* is not going to lead to *parama prema bhakti*.

Total surrender is one of those pursuits that is thwarted by the very effort to achieve it. It's like making an effort to fall asleep; as long you continue to willfully make an effort, you can't fall asleep. Sleep comes when the willful effort stops. Similarly, true state of surrender is reached only when willful effort stops. Exercise of will is a power a person has (*icchha shakti*), but it is that very power that obstructs the surrender; the wielding of this power needs to be surrendered. As Pujya Swami Dayananda has said, "the highest use of the power of will is to surrender it", i.e., to have no need to use it. If you truly have the power, there is no need to show it off. If a country is the most powerful country in the world, there is no need for it to put on a show of strength. Demonstration of power in fact represents weakness. But in that case, if the state of total surrender cannot be accomplished willfully, how is it to be achieved? The answer is in fact given in the previous three verses, i.e., by developing a deep devotion through the practice of *puja*, *katha* and meditation. Such practice leads to the attainment of the final goal, i.e., *parama prema bhakti* or enlightenment. Total surrender happens when this goal is reached.

To reach that goal, what needs to be given up is not the power to will, but the one who wields that power. And one who wields that power is the ego, or *ahamkara* in Sanskrit, which means "I-maker" or the sense of being a doer. The ego that wields the will is in fact a mental construct; it's a figment of one's imagination; it's the one that masquerades as *you*. It's the one that says, " I

am\_\_\_\_\_“ (blank can be anything). “I am\_\_\_\_\_“ thought is a mental event like any other thought. And, surrender means the surrender of that ego. To be familiar with what that state of “ego surrender” is, reflect on the state when you are totally absorbed in your favorite music. You feel you are lost in the music; what is actually lost is your ego. In that state you cannot do anything; you cannot even think that you are enjoying the music or that you are lost. You cannot wield your power of will! With the total immersion in music, the ego gradually softens and becomes weaker, and finally gets lost. That’s a state when ego is temporarily surrendered.

For attaining *parama prema bhakti*, one has to similarly attain the state where ego is totally surrendered. Initially, one has to engage in the willful act of doing *puja*, etc. But gradually, the devotion builds up and one gets more and more immersed in the devotional activity-and that’s when the ego slowly softens and goes away. Swamiji reflected on his own experience when he had no interest in the practice of *puja*. But he saw the value in it and he persisted. With time, he developed a remarkable devotion for this practice. Initially, one has to make an effort and persist.

We are compelled to use our power of will and our ego to fulfill our desires. The only person, totally free of desires, is an enlightened person who recognizes the ego for what it is and has reached a state of total surrender. But fortunately, it is also true that to the extent one gains the freedom from desires (by pursuit of spiritual growth) to that extent one will develop a sense of surrender.

Narada believes that all of our activities need to be devotional to soften the ego until it goes away; that’s when a total state of surrender is reached, and the state of enlightenment is discovered!

In the second part of Verse 19, Narada speaks of extreme anguish that one experiences when one “forgets that”; i.e., not being able to attain the desired intensity of focus in a devotional activity. This tremendous agitation a devotee suffers, indicates that the devotee has developed an immense value and attachment to devotional activities and has a strong desire to reach the ultimate goal of *parama prema bhakti* (liberation or *moksha*). This desire is unlike any other desires. Other desires for worldly objects, when fulfilled, lead to new desires. But a desire for *moksha* (*mumukshutoa*), when fulfilled, ends all the desires, and it is absolutely necessary to have this desire to reach the ultimate goal.

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