

Narada Bhakti Sutra
A summary of Swami Tadatmananda's Discourse
November 28, 2006

With sutra 33, we finished Chapter 2 of the Narada Bhakti text. The first two chapters have described *para-bhakti*, which is the goal to be reached. To reiterate, *para bhakti* is a permanent state of utter non-separation from God. When everything is God, how can there be a separation anyway? It's just that we have to recognize this truth. By now (having been coming to the ashram regularly) we all have heard and known whatever is needed to be heard and to be known. What it takes is some time and effort to assimilate all the pieces together.

The next three chapters are about how to reach the goal of *para-bhakti*, i.e., the *sadhanas* (practices).

Sutra 34: *Tasyaaha sadhanaani gayantyaachaaryaaha*

Translation: For that (*para-bhakti*) teachers sing (many) practices.

Commentary: "Teachers sing" is a poetic way of describing how the teachers portray various *sadhanaas* in an artistic manner with a dimension of beauty to it.

Sutra 35: *Tat tu vishaya-tyaagaat sanga-tyaagaat cha*

Translation: Now that (goal) by renunciation of worldly things and giving up attachment.

Commentary: One of the *sadhanas* to reach the goal of *para-bhakti* is by way of renouncing worldly objects and giving up attachment. Renunciation of worldly things is an attitude and an understanding that the worldly objects have only limited value and that they will not give you that inner peace and contentment. The second aspect of this *sadhana* is giving up attachment. You may intellectually recognize the limited worth of the worldly objects, but not quite accept it emotionally. Cognition or conception takes place in the intellect and therefore, grasping facts conceptually is relatively easy compared to emotional acceptance. Emotions are governed by complex neurological changes in the whole body, and the emotional changes occur slowly. It is the emotional attachment to objects and, the freedom from desire for these objects, that is to be renounced.

Sutra 36: *Avyaavritat bhajanaat*

Translation: Through uninterrupted *bhajana*

Commentary: *Bhajana* in this context implies worship or worshipful service (*bhajan* and *bhakti* stem from the same root *bhaj* meaning to worship or to serve). The worship that Narada is advocating is continuous non-stop worship. A good example of how worship can be uninterrupted is to imagine the love of Gopis for Lord Krishna; no matter what activity they were engaged in, they thought of

their beloved Krishna non-stop. That kind of tenacity for the goal will make your worship (bhajan) uninterrupted.

Sutra 37: *Loke'pi bhagavad-guna-shravana-kirtanaat*

Translation: By hearing and singing the glories of the lord amidst worldly activities.

Commentary: This verse presents another *sadhana*, viz., listening to the glories of the Lord in stories and by singing his praises.

It seems that Narada in this sutra is making reference to the best-known verse in *Srimad Bhagavad*. This verse is known as *Navavidha Bhakti* since it recounts nine forms of bhakti:

"Shravanam, kirtanam, Vishno smaranam, paada-sevanam, archanam, vandanam, daasyam, sakhyaam, atma-nivedanam."

1. *Shravanam* is listening to stories like Ramayana, Mahabharata, and those in various *puranas*. These stories present religious teachings in the context of stories, which engross every one's attention and evoke a feeling of *bhakti*.
2. *Kirtanam* is singing the praise of the Lord. Singing is one of the best ways to evoke devotion because it appeals to our emotions. Nothing can connect us to God as easily as singing. Devotional singing is almost universal in its appeal, and is a form of worship in almost all religions.
3. *Vishnu smaranam*, is uninterrupted thinking of God as Vishnu or as any other form.
4. *Paada-sevanam* means worship of Lord's feet. It entails worshipping God through the service to people. Remember that all of the people are part of Him and every being needs some help. By helping people we worship Lord's feet.
5. *Archanam* is doing *puja* or *havan* or any simple ritual, like lighting a *diya* (oil lamp) or lighting an *agarbatti*.
6. *Vandana* is chanting hymns and singing the glories of the Lord.
7. *Daasyam* is an attitude of being in the service of the Lord as a servant. To get the right orientation of this attitude, we need to visualize the ancient culture in which being in the service of a king or a master was an extremely desirable position. The servants were well taken care of and had a feeling of gratitude towards their masters. Their service was more from the love of their heart than merely a job to be done. *Bhakti* with the feeling of gratitude, in fact, is a more mature form of worship.
8. *Sakhyaam*, means friendship; in this form of *bhakti* there is no rank distinction between the devotee and the Lord. It is characterized by a

sense of intimacy and connectedness. With a feeling of non-separateness, it is possible to look upon one's relationship with God as friendship.

9. *Atma-nivedanam*, is the surrender of the self and it is the culmination of *bhakti*.

In the sutra 37, it is these nine forms of *bhakti* that Narada has in mind as other *sadhanas* for *para-bhakti*. Every *sadhana* (yoga, meditation, *puja*, etc.) requires an effort. However, it would be extremely difficult to do a *sadhana* in an uninterrupted manner if you had to "do" it with willful effort. It's easy when it simply "happens". That is the way it was for Gopis in their devotion for Lord Krishna.

Sutra 38: *Mukhyatastu mahat-kripayaiva bhagavat-kripaa-leshaad va*

Translation: Primarily through the compassion of great beings and, a little bit of Divine grace.

Commentary: You cannot reach the goal of uninterrupted bhajan through your own efforts alone; you need help. Primarily, what you need is the compassion of a loving greathearted, compassionate person like a spiritual teacher, or a sage or a saint, i.e., some one great! It is through their compassion or through a little bit of *Bhagavan's* grace that you reach your goal.
