

Narada Bhakti Sutra
A summary of Swami Tadatmananda's Discourse
December 19, 2006

Sutra 49: *Vedaanapi sannyasyati; kevalam-avichhinna-anuraagam labhate.*

Translation: Who gives up even the Vedas; attains the only unbroken love.

From sutra 46 to the first half of sutra 49, Narada has described what are the prerequisites to be qualified to “cross the maya”, meaning, to achieve the ultimate goal of *para-bhakti*. Just as in other pursuits, it is necessary to put in efforts, same is true for cultivating *bhakti*: it takes time, effort, and proper guidance. It is no mystery! Those efforts are what qualify you to reach the spiritual goal.

The second half of this sutra and the next one, describe what it is that one achieves as a result of all the efforts. Narada says that what one achieves is “uninterrupted love”, and that alone! Nothing but that! This uninterrupted or un-intermittent love is not like an extremely intense conventional love. Conventional love, no matter how intense, is still an emotion. And an emotion cannot be uninterrupted. Emotions come and go. Even happiness comes and goes, as it should; you can't be smiling all the time. It would be construed as an aberrant behavior to have a smile on the face and remain happy in the face of a tragedy!

Bhakti cannot be an emotion, if it is to be uninterrupted. To understand exactly what uninterrupted *bhakti* is, we have to draw on the earlier discussion of love as three totally different states: *kama* (physical attraction), *prema* (romantic love), and *bhakti*. Although difficult to define, love involves two entities drawn together and being united; so love may be described as that which unites two. In the case of *kama*, love based on physical attraction, or lust, it is the two bodies that are united. In romantic love it is the hearts and minds of the two in love that are united.

How does *bhakti*, which is directed to God alone, unite the devotee with God? Before answering this question though, it's interesting to note the irony of posing the question itself-because from a Vedantic perspective, we are already one with God! Nevertheless, we can understand how we are united with *Bhagavan* at three separate levels. If we consider *Bhagavan* as a *viraata purusha* (cosmic person) then God is the entire creation, including entire universe and all of physical reality. From that viewpoint, *Bhagavan's* body is the whole creation, and hence our body cannot but be part of *Bhagavan* and be united with Him. God's mind can be perceived as the immense intelligence of the nature and the natural laws. Everything in nature is full of His intelligence, down to a grain of sand!

The precise forces that hold electrons and protons of opposite polarity together in an atom are the same in a grain of sand as in any other substance in the world! That intelligence is Lord's intelligence and that is his mind. How can our mind, being part of that intelligence, be separate from God's mind? There is no separation!

At the level of consciousness also, we are utterly non-separate from God. Our consciousness by which we know all our mental events (perceptions, thoughts, and emotions) is *atma*, which is *sat-cit-ananda*, meaning unborn or uncreated consciousness that is limitless and that which lacks nothing. This is our fundamental nature. *Bhagavan's* consciousness is *paramatama* or universal consciousness. *Atma*, being limitless must be united with universal consciousness (*paramatma*), as wave is united with ocean. Essential nature of wave is water, the same water that makes the ocean; there is no separation between wave-water and ocean-water.

The wave-water metaphor also exemplifies physical unity between the devotee and God. Body is born of physical elements (which are *Ishvara's* creation), sustained by elements and returns to the same elements, just as wave is born of ocean, sustained by ocean and merges into ocean.

With this understanding of non-separation of body, mind, and consciousness, with God, we can see that the goal of *para bhakti* cannot be something that we will reach-because, we already are there! What it takes is the recognition that you are non-separate. We are like a kid who feels he is separated from his mom and looks for her all around in front of him except a couple of steps behind him where mom is standing; he was never separated from mom!

Once you recognize that non-separation from God, that recognition stays with you; it is not something that comes and goes. It is just as the recognition of yourself as being a human that does not come and go; you always know that. One, who has recognized that non-separation, is an enlightened person, the one who revels in uninterrupted love. This is the love that Narada points out in this sutra as *avichhinna-anuraaga*.

Sutra 50: *Sa tarati sa tarati, sa lokaanstaarayati.*

Translation: He crosses, he crosses (and) he makes other people cross.

Commentary: The phrase "he crosses" is repeated twice for emphasis. It refers to the crossing of *maya* that Narada mentioned in sutra 46. Having crossed that *maya*, Narada says the second result is that such a person will lead others to cross the same *maya* (first result is uninterrupted love pointed out in sutra 49). This person is an enlightened person who has discovered what other spiritual aspirants want to discover. What he has discovered is something boundary-less,

vast, and complete. Something that the more you share, the more you have to share. Generally, what we can give is only limited, whereas a guru has discovered something limitless that he can give without any limits. He sees others who are seeking this. It's but natural that he will share it with others. Indeed, for a guru this is a practical necessity.

Spiritual life is a journey, very much comparable to a *yatra* (pilgrimage). For a *yatra* you go to some sacred place that is generally quite remote and often not so easy to get to, for the sake of the *darshana* of *Bhagavan* in that sacred place. Swamiji recalled a nice experience of his own. He had gone to Kedarnath in the Himalayan Mountains in India on four separate occasions and had grown very fond of this sacred place. He very much enjoyed these trips, climbing the long trail on the mountainside to reach the Shiva temple on the top for the *darshana* of shiva linga. It was a very profound experience for him when he realized, on one of his trips, the symbolism of the whole mountain as the Shiva *linga*. The *linga* in the temple is only the tip of the mountain some 10 ft tall with a 30 ft wide base around which the temple is built. So where does the *linga* stop and the mountain start? To him this was a revelation of the fact that the Lord is present not only in the temple at the top of the mountain, but everywhere you look. Symbolically, temple represents your body and mind and when you go inside the temple it symbolizes looking within yourself as in meditation. God is within you and everywhere else; not only in the temple!

Swamiji found so much pleasure in these trips that he was actually eager to share this joy with others. It was just like when you enjoy a great meal in a restaurant and you can't wait to share the experience with your friends. Swamiji did indeed then organize a trip with a large group of 55 people on to this *yatra*! It was a wonderful experience for all! (*see footnote below for another description by Swamiji of this experience with some other details*)

Thus, the one who has crossed maya, the one who has reached the goal of para-bhakti and recognized the nature of true self will help others discover the same truth.

With the next sutra starts section 4 of the Narada Bhakti text.

Sutra 51: *Anirvachaneeyam premaswarupam*

Translation: Intrinsic nature of love is indescribable.

Commentary: Although we have talked about love at great length and described it in terms of a union of two coming together and being utterly non-separate, yet that only describes the result of what happens in love. The true experience of what it is really like or what is its true nature is beyond the capability of words – referred to in the sutra as *anarvachaneeyam* or indescribable. A good example of

limitation of words is to attempt to describe to some one asking, “what does an egg plant taste like?” You can’t really describe that experience of taste. But you can use the words to tell the person, “here is a dish of egg plant; taste it.” With words you can lead some one to discover something for themselves.

Love cannot be described in words. This is the same problem in Vedanta; you can’t describe the truth you seek; i.e., the state of non-duality between you and brahman. Words and mind fall back, having failed to grasp that truth. But that does not mean you cannot discover the truth you seek. You can use words and the mind as the means to get you there. You can complete a 1000 miles journey with the help of even a little car; it is limited and finite as a means, but it will help you complete the journey. Similarly words and the mind are limited, and finite vehicles that can guide you and steer you in the right direction. Means don’t have to have the grasp of the goal to lead you there.

Sutra 52: *Mooka-aasvaadana-vat.*

Translation: Like the experience of taste by a mute person

Commentary: A mute person, even though incapable of talking, can experience the joy of something nice without having to speak about it; words are unnecessary for that experience. Similarly, uninterrupted love of *para-bhakti* cannot be described by words. But you will know it when you have it.

Sutra 53: *Prakashate kvaapi paatre.*

Translation: (that uninterrupted love) is manifested anywhere and anytime there is a qualified recipient.

Commentary: Uninterrupted love cannot be described as an experience, because it is the very nature of your true self. It is much like a wave expressing that it wants to experience water. Water is its essential nature, so there can be no question of wave experiencing it. *Bhagavan* is already present in your ordinary experience here and now and there is not going to be any unique “experience” *per se*. If you can see the presence of *Bhagavan* everywhere, when you are halfway to the top of that mountain where you are going for *Bhagavan’s darshana*, going into the temple on the top will not present you with any unique experience! The discovery takes place when you are qualified, for example, by being detached from worldly attachments.

Question and Answer Session

Q: Swamiji, when we are in a *satsang* as here tonight, we are engaged in a spiritual pursuit and have a spiritual feeling. How can we bring that spirituality in an environment (home, office, etc.), which is not conducive to spirituality?

A: It’s true that simply having an altar at home where you sit and worship does not make a home a spiritual environment; other family members may have

different needs and different issues facing them and may not have the same spiritual inclination as you do. You cannot and should not attempt to change others. But you can change yourself. Maintain your spirituality and be what you want; lead by example.

This is how Pujya Swamiji (Swami Dayananda Saraswati) advised his students at the end of a three year Vedanta course. He knew they were going out in an stressful environment, pursuing their professions, and facing myriad other responsibilities. His advice to them was, "Create your own *satsang*. Be a spiritual person in whatever environment you are. You can't change people or the environment!"

Q: Why would *Bhagavan* listen to petitionary prayers that ask God for this and that?

A: This form of a prayer is all right for the young, but it's not a mature form of prayer. A mature person would express his surrender to God and leave it to God to bless him.

Children's prayers are like when they petition their mom for candies and cookies; mom may not give exactly what they want, but she will not let the child go hungry; she will substitute the request with a healthy snack. Same way, God will bless you and give you what you need but not necessarily what you want.

Q: We talked about three kinds of pursuits in the previous talks as being *bhakti*, meditation and pursuit of knowledge. Now, these are not exactly three separate paths-right Swamiji?

A: *Bhakti*, etc., are not separate or independent paths. They are different bodies of teachings with different emphasis, even though they end up teaching the same thing. *Bhakti* emphasizes prayer, Vedanta emphasizes inquiry, and yoga emphasizes meditation. You can follow any one of these pursuits, but you need others as well.

Q: Swamiji, does giving up scriptures (as mentioned in a previous sutra) mean giving up the ritual portion of the scripture or the whole scripture?

A: Broadly speaking, Vedas have two portions called karma *kaanda* and *jnana kaanda*, meaning ritual and knowledge-based portions. Karma *kaanda* for achieving worldly goals can be given up when one is ready. For an enlightened person, even the *jnana kaanda* becomes useless because he no longer needs the knowledge. Once you have crossed the river on a boat you don't need to carry the boat on your head. But, in spite of that fact, the body of knowledge in

scriptures remains valuable, and the scriptures serve a useful purpose of teaching others who aspire enlightenment.

Excerpt from Swamiji's lecture in this series on September 9, 2006:

Footnote 1: 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.
