

Narada Bhakti Sutra
A summary of Swami Tadatmananda's Discourse
January 16, 2007

We have been talking about *gauni bhakti* (secondary *bhakti*) starting with sutra 56. In the last several sutras we have seen lots of definitions, classification, and framework. We need to understand the rationale behind this. As such, *bhakti* is devotional and it's meant to engage our emotions; so why all this intellectual definitions, etc.? The reason is that this text (Narada Bhakti Sutra) is addressed to a specific audience, i.e., for a particular type of devotee. It is written in an scholarly sutra style in Sanskrit to appeal to scholarly, more educated, and intelligent people.

Intelligence, however, can be a mixed blessing. Undoubtedly, a powerful mind is an asset. Just as a powerful car, which for the most is simply a gas-guzzler, can be an asset when you need that entire horsepower as you are passing an 18-wheeler on a 2-lane highway and there is an oncoming car on the opposite side! Similarly, it's desirable to have a powerful mind, but sometimes it can be a hindrance, when it keeps on asking question after question. The irony of the situation is that the truth we are seeking is indeed very simple and not complicated at all. Yet, we have so many scriptures to explain us this simple truth. That's because our ignorance is complicated! Therefore, the problem is mental confusion and our powerful mind needs to be addressed at an intellectual level. This is the reason why we have seen the detailed definitions and categorization in this text. For many others with a simple mind who wish to seek God, *bhajan*, *kirtan*, and *puja* can be quite enough. Recalling his own experience regarding practice of *bhakti*, Swamiji used to say at one time, " I don't have a single devotional bone in my body!" But, that changed over the course of years. His intelligence was a source of unending doubts, and it prevented Swamiji from simple *bhakti* and devotional acts. One of the problems, he felt, was that he did not understand the symbolism of *puja* and *bhakti* and his intellect was complaining. Once the questions were answered and he understood the symbolism, his mind became quiet, and he began to really enjoy *puja* and *bhakti*. In essence, we have to allow our intellect to relax.

Continuing with the topic of *gauni bhakti*, as we saw it previously, it is of three kinds, viz., *tamasic*, *rajasic*, and *saativic*. These three types correlate well with the *bhakti*, of *aarta*, *arthaarti* and *jijnyasu* as narrated by Lord Krishna in Bhagavad Gita. *Aarta* is the one who prays only when in dire need, *arthaarti* prays for fulfillment of his desires, whereas *jijnyasu* prays to discover God.

Having understood *gauni* (secondary) *bhakti*, we now transition to *mukhya* *bhakti*, which means primary *bhakti*.

Sutra 66: *Tri-rupa-bhangapurvakam nitya-daasya-nityakaantaa-bhajana-aatmakam prema kaaryam premaiva kaaryam.*

Translation: Love alone such as that of an uninterrupted servant or an eternal beloved, free from the three forms, should be practiced.

Commentary: The only love that has to be practiced is the love that has transcended the *tamasic*, *rajasic*, and *saatoic bhakti* (three forms). Two examples are given. One is the love of a devotee who worships God with an attitude of uninterrupted servant (*nitya daasya*), and the other is the love for God, seen as an eternal beloved (*nitya kaanta*). Servant as we have discussed before was a privileged position in ancient times. A servant in the king's palace, for example, served his master with loyalty and gratitude, as the king took good care of all his needs. A servant thus does not have to worry about anything, contrary to, for example, a warrior, who has to constantly defend himself from the enemy attacks and watch out.

The significance here is that the love, with any of the five attitudes (*bhava*), as described earlier, has to be *nitya*-this is what distinguishes *mukhya bhakti* from *gauni bhakti*. In the *gauni bhakti* (secondary) one continues to develop and grow this attitude of a loving relationship. During the development process, the devotion is present some times and not at other times. The *bhava* (feeling) becomes of a cyclical nature. Devotion has to be cultivated to a point where the love for God is always there. This transition from the secondary to the primary *bhakti* can be exemplified by the love of a young mother for her first-born child. Before the child is born she may not be particularly motherly in her thinking. When the child is suddenly born, the mother's attitude begins to change. But even then, in the beginning, a young modern mother still wants to have a break from her maternal role and may want to spend some evenings out with her friends, at times. The maternal feeling is not yet fully established. But gradually, the love for the child becomes more intense and the motherly attitude becomes a permanent feature of this young mother. In *mukhya bhakti*, a *nitya daasya* feels he is devoted to the Lord and is his servant all the time.

The second example in the *sutra*, is described as *nitya kaanta* meaning an eternal beloved. The relationship is the same as was previously described for *maadhuria bhakti*. But the difference is that *maadhuria bhakti*, as secondary (*gauni*) *bhakti*, comes, and goes, whereas primary *bhakti*, as *nitya kaanta* is completely uninterrupted. It is a permanent, unchangeable attitude of being connected to and totally non-separate from *Bhagavan*. It is the feeling of total intimacy with God just as could be between spouses. When the relationship is this strong, the ego boundaries melt away, and the two people virtually fuse into each other. It's

like river water merging into the ocean and becoming one with it. Similarly, being a *nitya kaanta* means being utterly one with God and being totally devoid of one's individuality. This is to be understood as merging of *jiva* into *Isvara*! This is the goal of *para bhakti*, and this is what is to be pursued. A goal can only be reached through some means, because you can't practice the goal itself. Just as you cannot "practice" being enlightened, because being enlightened is the goal you reach by spiritual means. To reach the goal of *para bhakti*, you need the practice (*saadharma*) by means of secondary (*gauni*) *bhakti*. Without the practice, you cannot reach the goal. Through continuous practice your *bhakti* ripens into *mukhya bhakti*, when the ultimate goal of *para bhakti* is reached.

Sutra 67: *Bhakta ekaantino mukhyaahaa*

Translation: Those who are singularly focused on God are primary devotees.

Comment: Previous sutra described one distinguishing feature of *mukhya bhakti* as *nitya*, i.e., that which remains with the devotee continuously. This sutra identifies one other such characteristic as being the single-minded focus on God. These devotees have only one goal in mind, and have only one purpose in life. They are obsessed with God. Generally, obsession is regarded as a problem in the sense that when one is obsessed, for example, with gambling, or even with one's work, it creates a problem in other aspects of life. But, for a devotee who has an obsession for God, it is not a problem. Because, this devotee sees God everywhere and in every one; and everything is to him is manifestation of God. Accordingly, the devotee is essentially obsessed with everything and everyone. If you have love for everyone, it makes life glorious! If being in love with one person can be wonderful, just imagine being in love with hundreds of people! Hence, this kind of obsession has no negative connotation. In fact, obsession with God creates a powerful emotional involvement as described in the next sutra

Sutra 68: *Kantha-avarodha-romaancha-ashrubhihi parasparam lapamaanaahaa kulaani prithivim cha.*

Translation: They converse with one another with choked-up throats; hair on the body standing on end, and, tears flowing; they purify their families and this earth.

Commentary: *Mukhya bhakti* also has other distinct characteristics described in this sutra. This *bhakti* is associated with the experience of powerful and intense emotions, such that when these *bhaktas* are talking to others, their voice is choked up with emotions, the hair on their body is standing on its end and the tears are flowing from their eyes.

Bhagavan can be unemotional from the Vedantic perspective. Vedanta wield s tremendous knowledge and power of intellect to destroy our ignorance and to knock-off our confusion. Vedantic statements like "*sarvam kalvidam brahma*" (all

of this is brahman) or “*tat tvam asi*” (you are that) are powerful statements of the truth but, they are unemotional. On the other hand, in the case of *mukhya bhakti*, the relationship reaches to a point of such an intimacy with God, that a *bhakta* is gripped with intense heart moving emotion. What is described in the above sutra is the emotion at its highest peak, which is manifested by a choking voice, tearful eyes, and hair standing erect. These are tears of joy, which are shared with others by these *bhaktas*, and these tears are vividly displayed openly.

These devotees are *saadhu's* and *saadhavi's*, i.e., holy men and women, who purify their families and friends. They are the likes of Mira Bai, Rama Krishna Parramhans, and Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. They are great saints, who as role models show us the direction to be pursued. It is these saints who display an emotional fervor, and are the ones that purify the land they walk on. It is their presence itself that is transformative. Powerful role models in any arena have the transformative power-they might be parents, teachers or mentors-they have a powerful effect on your life. Here we are talking about these saints as role models. Being in contact with such people does affect you; their qualities rub-off on you. That is the power of *satsanga*, i.e., being in the company of good people. Books can give knowledge, but *satsanga* affects your personality. Exemplary emotional fervor of saints can uplift you. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, who lived some 500 years back, is the exact personification of such a role model. He wrote just one single text with a handful of verses, yet he brought about a devotional revolution that persists even now. He communicated his emotion. Shri Shankar Achaarya, on the other hand, gave us lots of books and invaluable commentaries on scriptures, because his goal was to transmit the knowledge and remove our doubts, with powerful logic, requiring an unemotional approach.

Through *satsanga* with saints, you can absorb their qualities like a sponge. Recollecting his experience some 25 years back, Swamiji told about his relationship with his guru, Pujya Swami Dayananda Saraswati. He saw in his guru a behavior that was extraordinary; he saw on his eyes something great, something valuable that he must discover for himself. Like a sponge he wanted to absorb all the good qualities of Pujya Seamiji. Swamiji's association with Pujya Swamiji was remarkably transformative for him! Next sutra will talk about importance of these great saints who are indeed exceptional. Such saints purify the entire world!

Sutra 69: *Tirthikurvanti tirthaani, sukarmikurvanti karmaani, sacchaastrikurvanti shaastraani.*

Translation: They make holy places holy, they make actions righteous, and they make scriptures authoritative.

Commentary: There are many holy places known as *tirtha* or places of pilgrimage. All religions have such holy places. Generally, in these places there

is a temple or a shrine. But what really makes them sacred or holy is not the buildings and the shrines; it is the saintly people in the past who are associated with such places and who lend sanctity to these places. In places like these, e.g., a temple, when you enter into it with an attitude of *shraddha*, you feel something special in the air, so to speak, which you don't feel in ordinary places. In his experience, Swamiji got such a feeling of certain powerful presence, more often in small ancient temples rather than the big modern marble temples, or monuments like Taj Mahal, etc.. It appears that, as the saints and mahatmas go through these temples over the centuries, their continued presence sanctifies such places and endows them with an aura and magnetism. This phenomenon is seen even when one resets a new altar in a new home or a newly built ashram. In the beginning, one may not feel much of a sentiment in front of such new altars, but with regular worship and prayer, and the presence of saintly people in the ashrams, gradually, that powerful appeal comes back and the altar gains the sanctity. As a vivid example, Swamiji pointed out how this was our experience as well, with the new building of the ashram where we are gathered for this talk (Arsha Bodha Center); the sense of sanctity appears to be growing over the last couple of years. If that can happen here in our experience, one can easily imagine how *tirtha's* (sacred places) that are blessed with the presence of *rishis* and saints over centuries, and continually visited by mahatmas, can be sanctified by great people.

These same saints also have the power of making our actions into righteous actions. Presence of such saints and, association with them, can transform our behavior and lead us into the right direction. Saints are role models and they lead us by living an exemplary life that we can emulate. Their qualities "rub off" on us. In this way they make our actions righteous as stated in the above sutra.

Saints and mahatmas also make our scriptures sacred. They endow our scriptures with authority and reverence. Without them, the scriptures will hold no special significance and they would become neglected like ordinary books. If Bhagvad Gita remained only as a small section of 700 verses in the 100,000-verse epic of Mahabharata, it would have never gained the status as one of the most revered and recognized scriptures throughout the world. It happened because, mahatmas and great teachers held it up high and conveyed its valuable teachings to the world and made it work for everyone. Just as in modern world, big sports stars and celebrities popularize various merchandise through their endorsements, similarly, mahatmas elevate the status of our scriptures through their "endorsements".
