

Narada Bhakti Sutra
A summary of Swami Tadatmananda's Discourse
January 23, 2007

In the last class we started on the beautiful part of the text, which is *sadhu stuthi*, i.e, praise of the saints and saintly people. The context here is *sadhana bhakti*, and the text is describing a spiritual aspirant who has climbed the rungs of the ladder of *sadhana*. At this level the aspirant is practicing *mukhya* (primary) *bhakti* and not *gauni* (secondary) *bhakti*. We are talking about a more mature devotee, who is described as *sadhu*. The chief characteristic of this person is that he recognizes every one and every thing as God. To him you are God, I am God, a chair is God, and the whole nature is God. *Mukhya bhakta* has this perspective all the time. An interesting anecdote portrays such a person. When a disciple asked a saint, "Have you seen God?" the *saint* looking straight into his eyes said, "Yes!" The devotee asked, where and when had the saint seen God, and to that the saint replied matter-of-factly, again looking at him, "Here! Now!" This is the vision of the saints. Such a perception is what transforms a devotee into a saint. As such, one cannot practice being a saint. But if your worldview has changed such that you see everything with reverence and see God in everything, then that's what transforms your behavior. Thus, the change of perspective comes first, and the right actions and right behavior follows. It may not happen immediately, and there may be a gap between gaining that perspective and change of behavior; but it happens with time. The wisdom needs to be assimilated until the actions are transformed. It is this saintly person that is described in sutra 69. These saintly people with their presence are the ones who make holy places sacred. They are the role models for actions, e.g., being compassionate, etc. It's easy to be compassionate to the ones you love: your family, your children, friends, and such. But, how about those who have hurt you? The yardstick is how much compassion you have for such people and for your enemies!

Through their behavior, saintly people demonstrate what good actions are. They are the ones who endow us with *shraddha* for scriptures. If Bhagavad Gita was lying on a shelf in a book store with a thousand other books, and all you know is that it is a Hindu scripture, it's not likely that you will pay much attention to it, and not very likely that you will buy it. In reality however, when you have heard so much praise for the Bhagavad Gita from many saintly people, you are likely to notice it and perhaps buy it.

Sutra 70: *Tanmayaahaa*

Translation: (They are) filled with that.

Commentary: The sutra means that the primary devotees described in the sutras above are filled with "that" meaning God. How does a *sadhu* become a *sadhu*? This sutra answers the question by saying that a *sadhu* becomes a *sadhu* because

“he is full of That”! Meaning that he is made of God. But then, we all are manifestation of God, so what’s the difference? Sutra implies that a sadhu is “full of God”, or filled with God. He is the one who has realized divinity within, and the one who feels divine. It has to be an emotional feeling and not merely an intellectual feeling about divinity. Without the emotional engagement, divinity is only a concept in the head and an empty understanding. There may be many emotions associated with divinity, e.g., a feeling of gratitude towards God, reverence, awe, or joy. With this divinity within, you have need for nothing else. When you are full of love for God, your behavior has got to be transformed. You will give everything you possibly can.

Normally, we have many demands on ourselves: demands of our profession, demands for taking care of family, relatives, friends, etc. But when you only have limited resources and two arms to work with, how much can you do? Your time, emotional energy, and financial resources are limited. You can only give how much you have; you are limited. But the one, who is described as *tanmaya*, is the one who is full of God and has no limits.

Swamiji related his own experience of seeing this virtue of giving without any limit, in his own guru, Pujya Swami Dayananda Saraswati. He saw it in total amazement how Pujya Swamiji kept on giving. He gave his time, his efforts, and even his money-and this even when some would ask for favors that might seem like taking undue advantage of Pujya Swamiji’s giving nature. We ourselves are often in that situation when some one is taking advantage of you. Imagine when a certain relative who has asked you of financial favors in the past again asks you for a loan. You know you will probably never see a dime of that money back, but you give with hesitation and reluctance, because you feel awkward to do otherwise. But not Swamiji; he gave repeatedly and without hesitation. As for fiscal responsibility, he felt he had to do what he thought was appropriate. It was that simple to him! Swamiji thought this is what makes Pujya Swamiji so unique. This is an example of real compassion, a mark of a *tanmaya*, one full of God. Imagine some one hurting you but you response with kindness and compassion-it can only happen when you are *tanmaya*.

There is a charming little story from *puranas* that illustrates this unlimited giving. It’s the story of *akshaya paatra* (magic vessel) that was gifted by Sun-God to Pnandavas and their wife Draupadi while they were in exile. Once they were visited by the short-tempered *rishi* Durvasa along with his 1000 disciples in their forest cottage. Rishi told them that right after he and his disciples have bathed in the river, they all would have a meal. Draupadi was aghast! She and the Pandavas had finished eating their meal and all she could find was a single grain of rice! Draupadi realized how she and her husband would suffer the wrath of Durvasa, if nothing were served. She prayed to Lord Krishna and cooked the

single grain of rice thinking of him. When the guests arrived after their bath, she started serving them rice. She kept on serving ladle after ladle of rice to each one of them and the pot kept on providing the rice-it would not empty even after all were well fed. *Tanmaya* is like that! Like the *akshaya paatra*, which never emptied, they keep on giving.

One may not have unlimited material resources to give, but love is something one give without limit. Your ability to love is like *akshaya paatra*. The more love you give, the more love you have left to give, and more loving you become.

One final example that nicely brings out the sense of infinite fullness of a saint, can be seen in a rather unique interpretation of the famous mantra, "*purnamadaha purnaidam, purnaam purnam udachyate, purnasya purnamaadaya, purnameva vashishyate*"- essentially it means , "that is full, this is full; from that fullness this fullness comes forth, leaving what is still full". Conventionally, this mantra is interpreted from a Vedantic perspective, where "this" refers to the universe (creation) and "that" to Brahman; the mantra reveals the infinite nature of brahman, the underlying reality of the creation. In Swamiji's interpretation, it shows a connection between God and *tanmaya*, the *sadhu*, who is full: "God is full, this *sadhu* is full. Take as much as you want from *sadhu*, the *sadhu* remains full".

Sutra 71: *Modante pitaro, nrityanti devataahaa, sanaathaa cheyam bhurbhavati.*

Translation: The ancestors rejoice, *devatas* dance, and this earth is blessed with a savior.

Commentary: On the surface, this sutra is in the praise of the *sadhus* (saints). It states that, because of these saintly people the fathers and forefathers are happy, the *devatas* dance out of joy and, the earth is blessed by these saints because they are the saviors of this world. But there is another meaning as follows.

Every one is born with three debts, according to our scriptures. We owe these debts for being born as human beings, which is the most precious birth of all other forms that we can be born with. For this reason owe a responsibility or a debt. When, by your good fortune, you win a lottery of one hundred million dollars, you have to bear the responsibility associated with this good fortune; you have to use discretion and utilize the money wisely.

With the good fortune of being born as a human, you also have a responsibility to live wisely and be grateful. You owe your gratitude to your ancestors, to *devatas*, and to *rishis*. You were born as a human being because of your ancestors; so when you become *tanmaya*, they rejoice because you have fulfilled your life. It's the same as when parents rejoice when their children reach pinnacle of success in their academic fields and professional careers.

You owe the second debt to *devatas*. In Vedic times, forces of nature, wind, fire, water, rains, etc. were recognized as gods by the names *Vaayu*, *Agni*, *Varuna*, *Indra*, etc. You owe your human birth to natural forces and hence to *devatas* who are the presiding deities of these natural forces. It is your responsibility to live wisely and not abuse the natural resources provided by blessings of *devats*. They are not going to be happy if you don't live in an ecologically sensible way. Imagine how you would be judged if an account was taken of your contributions in your lifetime, years after you were gone. You might have had some professional achievements, you left some progeny behind, and you also left all the heaps of waste paper and tons of garbage you generated as a consumer! This kind of a legacy is not going to have *devatas* dancing out of joy!

Another point the sutra makes is that these saints are the saviors of the world. Such a savior is best exemplified by Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. Chaitanya was born about 500 years back in Bengal in an orthodox Brahmin family. Although initially, his major interest was acquiring Vedic knowledge as a scholar, later, as he grew up, he underwent a total transformation and became a staunch proponent of *bhakti*. He was considered a rebel and his followers grew vastly in numbers. He was a revolutionary of his times who had a broad impact. He realized there was too much emphasis on rituals and *havans* in his times. He said let's worship Krishna, let's sing *kirtans* in praise of Lord Krishna and let's dance in ecstasy of His love. He had transformative power. The impact of his powerful *bhakti* movement that started 500 years back continues up to this day.

In every religion there are movements like that, by people who are rebellious and reformist who change the direction of a religion. Jesus Christ was a Jew and he found Judaism rigid and orthodox. He, with his different views and his teachings, started the Christian religion, which is the biggest religion in the world today. But Martin Luther, in the 16th century, came as another rebel and started a reformist movement in the Christian religion itself. This movement gave rise to a new denomination of Christianity that came to be known as Protestant. Mahatma Gandhi was another great figure that had the transformative power—he changed the course of history and showed the effectiveness of his non-violence movement. He demonstrated it as a powerful force, which gained freedom for India from the colonial rule of the British. He is to be reckoned as a savior, who had the power to bring about a major transformation in thinking of the people across the world. Such persons who bless the earth by their presence exemplify *tanmaya*.

Sutra 72: *Naasti teshu jaati-vidyaa-rupa-kula-dhana-kriya-aadi-bhedaha.*

Translation: Among them, there is no distinction based on caste, education, appearance, family, wealth, profession, etc.

Commentary: Among these saints (*tanmaya*) there is no discrimination against any one based on such factors as mentioned in the sutra. This is the conventional meaning. Another meaning is that people who are saints can be any body regardless of these same factors, i.e., their caste, education, appearance, etc. Let's look at each of these factors from both perspectives.

Caste (*jaati*): Every one is a form of God and every one is divine regardless of their caste. Although caste is not that big a factor in modern world, there still exists discrimination based on race, and, ethnicity. A saintly person is devoid of such discrimination.

Education (*vidya*): We sometimes have a tendency to judge people because they don't have a high level of education. If some one does not have, for example, the fluency to speak the English language properly, we are prone to judge them as being lower in some way, just because they did not have the benefit of education as we did. Education does not make any one a better person than an uneducated person. A saintly person will not do that.

Appearance (*rupa*): People also make their opinions based on appearance of others, as though some one not appearing so well is inferior. When we see one who is significantly disfigured because of some unfortunate accident like fire burns, etc., we tend to feel uncomfortable. The person has undergone tremendous suffering, and we should instead feel compassionate towards them.

Family(*kula*) background: "If you are from the right side of the tracks you are OK"-this type of attitude discriminates between the families that are considered "upper class" versus "lower class"; it's particularly true in India, although it exists in the US and other parts of the world to a certain extent as well. A *sadhu* will not discriminate on this basis.

Wealth (*dhana*): When we see someone who does not have much money, we make our own judgments. We conclude that the person is not industrious, or he is lazy and not motivated. Even if the person is all that and is not ambitious, who are we to judge? A wise person does not discriminate based on wealth.

Profession (*kriya*): People tend to think of scientists, doctors, and engineers as a high class people and others in professions like butchers and leather tanners (particularly in India) or garbage collectors as lower class. Once again, there is no need for such discrimination; people in any profession can have "high" thinking.

Another interpretation of the sutra mentioned above can also be very clearly seen. As a matter of fact, it's not uncommon to see two meanings in many a

verses in scriptures like Bhagavad Gita, etc. Accordingly, with regards to caste, the saints can come from any family and, not only Brahmin families-they may be from any *varana* including *sudras* (laborers) or even outcastes. They can be born anywhere in the world, not only in India or only in Hindu tradition. Similarly, there is no rule that they have to be educated. Even a dumb-witted person can be a saint; Swamiji tells delightful stories of a factionary saint, Manda Baba, who illustrates such a saint. One can be educated and intelligent and yet be a *raksasa*, like Ravana. The same is true with regard to wealth; saints don't have to come from poor families, or rich families-it could be either one. As far profession, saints may be engaged in teaching, or something else, or may do nothing. They may have no inclination to teach, or no one may ask them to teach.

Thus, the sutra has both the meanings, namely, that saints don't discriminate against people on any basis, and there is no distinction among saints regardless of their background based on those same factors.

Sutra 73: *Yatastadiyaahaa*

Translation: Because they are His own

Commentary: This sutra can be similarly interpreted in two ways: one, there is no distinction among the saints regardless of who they are because they are all His and secondly saints don't discriminate against people because all people are His. There is a very nice saying in the Christian tradition, that says, "We are all God's children", looking upon God as our father, which is a traditional way Christians look upon God. If we are all God's children, how can we be partial to any one or favor any one. Even we as parents make every effort to play no favorites and love and treat our children equally, regardless of how many of them are there. Similarly, God does not favor any one. To Him all are equal-this includes the most wicked, the most mean spirited persons, including cruel dictators, and terrorists and their leaders that we unfortunately see in today's world. A *tadiyaahaa* is the one who recognizes this fact- that every one is equally deserving of love and compassion.

Looking at the second meaning, *tadiyaahaas*, seeing themselves as His, serve him with a *daasya bhava*, i.e., the attitude of a servant. They see themselves as God's hands and arms. They see themselves as instruments of God's compassion. It is as though this saint is a flute in the hands of Lord Krishna, through which the Lord is playing beautiful music. They are hollow as a flute, implying that they have emptied themselves of their ego and individuality, and allow themselves to be an instrument in God's hands.

There is a beautiful prayer, written by St. Francis of Assisi, that expresses the same feeling, i.e, make me your instrument. It goes like this:

*Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace;
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.*

We have to recognize that we can't expect God to perform a miracle and appear in front of us to fulfill our prayers and wishes. He has to have His "messengers" and that's what we are. We might see an example of this in our own lives. We might be praying to God, "O! God! Please give me this and give me that". Suddenly, you see that your next-door neighbor walks in and brings that same thing that you were praying for. You wonder if your neighbor beat God to the punch, and that you need not have been praying. You must recognize, that this person is functionally an instrument in God's hands and God is answering your prayers!

Saints described as *tadiyaahaas* in the sutra are the ones who feel and say to themselves, "I am His instrument and I only do His bidding".
