

**Narada Bhakti Sutra**  
**A summary of Swami Tadatmananda's Discourse**  
**February 20, 2007**

We are towards the end of our text (Narada Bhakti Sutra) and what we will see in the remaining sutras is a summary of the whole text. This summary is the very essence of the text that will serve as a "take-home" message. If we have been coming to these lectures every Tuesday for almost 6 months, only as a pleasant diversion, and at the end we walk away without learning how to put in practice what we have learned, then we have been wasting our time. Therefore, these sutras are perhaps the most important part of the text; they summarize what we must practice.

Sutra 79: *Sarvada sarvabhaavena nishchintaihi Bhagavaaneva bhajaneeyaha*

Translation: God indeed is to be worshipped all the time with all one's feelings without a care.

Commentary: It is significant that the sutra says *sarvada*, meaning all the time; non-stop. God is to be worshipped all the time. Life of spiritual growth has no end point; it continues through out one's life. Life is meant for spiritual growth. Also, God is to be worshipped *sarva bhaavena*, which means with all of one's feelings and in all manners, in all possible ways, with a full-hearted commitment. Further, the worship should be *nishchitaiha*, literally meaning without a worry, but in the context of the sutra it means without any care or restraint. It means pursue your *bhakti* with abandon and fully immersed in your worship.

Very often we are afraid of doing something passionately for the fear that it might look silly, and as a result we constraint our behavior. It may sound extreme that one must worship God passionately, but that is what's meant by *nishchitaiha*; it means completely free from hesitation. The focus of the text is *bhakti* and the approach is not going to be wishy-washy. It's not going to say "bahkti is a pretty good idea; try it sometimes". It's going to be said in a powerful way, to enable us to make a change. Often, we get stuck in our ways and let life wither away. For spiritual pursuit, you can't get any where with a laid-back attitude. The text is impressing upon us to make a passionate commitment and worship God in unreserved manner.

Sutra 80: *Sa keertyamaanaha sheeghramevaaavirbhavatyanubhaavayati bhaktaan.*

Translation: Being thus glorified, He quickly appears to devotees and makes them realize.

Commentary: This sutra towards the end of the text appropriately tells what is the result for the person who worships God passionately and free from any reservation. The essence of the sutra is that when the devotee glorifies the Lord,

He (God) will quickly appear before the devotee and bless him with self-realization

We need to understand what God appearing to a devotee means. In Bhagvad Purana, we read the story of Prahalad Bhakta who stood on one leg and meditated to Lord Vishnu for some long period like ten thousand years, and then Lord Vishnu appeared before him. If it took Prahalad that a long a time what does it mean when the above sutra says that the Lord will appear quickly. The time it takes is relative. But, we have to recognize that Bhagavad Purana is a *katha* (story) that is not based on any historic events. Stories in *Puranas* are unlike Ramayana and Mahabharata, which have historic basis, even if the way they are actually narrated is not completely based on historic facts; there are exaggerations. The message behind the story that Prahalad meditated for ten thousand years is to convey an utmost sense of dedication and extraordinary commitment. As a child, when Prahalad meditated for such a long time, it signifies his limitless patience.

Now, when God appeared before Prahalada, did He look like how Lord Vishnu is shown in pictures with four arms, holding His chakra and the mace? No! We must understand that the God of cosmos cannot look like that. God is formless. We visualize Him in many forms because that helps us to relate to God.

To properly understand, how God appears before some one, we need to look at it from a Vedantic perspective. God is the material cause (*upaadana karana*) of the manifest universe of forms; just as clay is material cause of clay pots of many forms. Our reference is always to the form: pot is big or small, has a wide or narrow mouth, etc. At the same time clay is always present in our experience of the pots. Same way in your experience right now as you are reading this, God is present here and now. Your own consciousness is *Bhagavan's* presence. The only thing that exists is God and all this is nothing but God! When God appears before you, it's the moment when this reality suddenly dawns on you, and you realize that indeed God is here! That's how God appeared before Bhakta Prahalad. He makes the devotee to have this experience (i.e., all is God) and reveals Himself. He makes the devotee wake up from the darkness and causes him to realize that *Bhagavan* is the essence of all.

Sutra 81: Tri-satyasya *bhaktireva* gareeyasee, *bhaktireva* gareeyasee

Translation: Of the three truths, *bhakti* alone is the greatest; *bhakti* alone is the greatest.

Commentary: The author as such does not specify what the three truths are. We can surmise that they are *jnyana* (knowledge), *dhyana* (meditation), and *bhakti*. We don't include karma yoga among these three, because karma yoga is a form of *bhakti* itself. As we have observed, *bhakti* does not end after a *puja* at the altar

in your home or a temple. It has to continue afterwards as well, and the way it is to continue is through karma yoga: that is, you see God's hand wherever you go: in the house, in office, and in every action you get involved in. Of these three pursuits (*jnyana*, *dhyaana*, and *bhakti*) the author not only declares *bhakti* as being the best but, he emphasizes it by repeating the same, i.e., "*bhakti* is the best". (Note: it's common in Sanskrit scriptures written as verses to use this form of repetition in the last verse; but that not being the case here, repetition here signifies strong emphasis).

It is not that *jnyanam* and *dhyanam* are considered as being useless by this sutra. Saying that *bhakti* is the best, is a technique representing a style of teaching. For example in *Bhagavad Purana*, Vishnu would be the greatest of the Gods, in *Shiva Purana*, it is Lord Shiva, in *Devi Purana* it is *Devi* who is the greatest. Similarly, in Vedantic texts, it might be *advaita*, *dvaita* or *vishishtadvaita* philosophy that is the best of all three depending on the orientation of the author. This technique is called *stuthi*, meaning praise, or glorification. The idea is to praise the subject matter that is presented and a person excited about that subject. It is to arouse passion in the reader.

In the spirit of unrestrained, unhesitant, and unreserved *bhakti* that was advocated in the previous sutra (number 80), this sutra keeps up that spirit by praising *bhakti* as being the best.

Sutra 82: *Gunamaahaatmyaasakti-rupaasakti-pujaasakti-smaranaasakti-daasyaasakti-sakhyaasakti-vaatsalyaasakti-kaantaasakti-aatmanivedanaasakti-tanmayataasakti-paramavirahaasakti-rupa ekadha api ekaadashadhaa bhavati*

Translation: (*Bhakti*) even though only one is (manifested as) eleven different forms: (listed below).

Commentary: *Bhakti* is summarized as being an eleven-fold approach, although in fact, this number is arbitrary, and represents a random selection from many more than eleven modes of *bhakti* that have been described through out the text. Each form of *bhakti* is described as an *aasakti* for each of the 11 approaches. *Aasakti* generally means attachment, but here it is meant to convey the sense of a passionate commitment for each of the following eleven forms:

1. *Gunamaahaatmya-aasakti*: *Aasakti* for glorifying divine qualities of God. This *bhakti* can be done by chanting *stotras*, which are prayers of praise of God; some tell of stories from *puranas* and others describe power and glory of God.

2. *Rupa-aasakti*: *Aasakti* for form. This *bhakti* means passionate love for the images and *murtis* of God. For example, it's how we take care of deities and how nicely they are presented on the altar beautifully dressed and decorated with ornate accessories. All the

symbolism is properly displayed and the worship is done affectionately by offering flowers and milk, etc. We are fortunate to have a tradition that makes such extensive use of form. There is an esthetic element about all that goes on in worshipping the deities that represent powerful forms of God. A religious scholar some 100 years back made the observation that “worship is the esthetics of religion”. Esthetics is that which appeals to one’s senses. Even in many other walks of life, we observe the value that is placed on esthetics. For example, restaurants take a great deal of effort to add proper accents to their decor, such as lighting, flowers on the tables to create an ambience; they serve the meals craftily presented in fine china dishes, etc. All of this is to appeal to all our senses through esthetics. *Puja* of deities also involves all our five senses through use of bells ringing, chanting, fragrance of incense, offering flowers with the touch of hands, and partaking of *prasad*.

3. *Puja Aasakti: Aasakti* for worship

*Puja* can range from a simple one consisting of lighting up a diya or an *agarbati* on your altar to an elaborate *puja* at a temple; you can go to a big temple and depending on the fee you pay for the service, you can have a priest chant 108 names, or 1008 names or have him conduct an elaborate *abhishekam*. All you are required to do is sit there and try to keep awake during the ceremony. If you ask which of these two forms of *puja* is more powerful, the answer is whichever engages your mind more.

4. *Smarana Aasakti: Aasakti* for remembering God’s name

Passion for remembering God’s name all day long is also a form of *bhakti*

5. *Daasya aasakti: Aasakti* for attitude of a servant

Passionate commitment for serving God as your master describes this form of *bhakti*.

6. *Sakhya aasakti: Aasakti* for attitude of a friend

Firm conviction that God is with you all the time is *sakhya aasakti*.

7. *Vaatsalya aasakti: Aasakti* for attitude of tenderness

In this *bhakti* you love God as a mother loves her child

8. *Kaanta aasakti: Aasakti* for attitude of a beloved as between spouses

9. *Aatma nivedana aasakti: Aasakti* for surrender.

This *aasakti* means having a passionate commitment to submit to Lord

10. *Tanmaya aasakti: Aasakti* for attitude of being that.

This attitude is a passionate commitment for wanting to be utterly non-separate from God. It describes a state of *samadhi* in which your ego melts away and there is no boundary between you and the object of your worship. You come closer and closer to whatever you are focusing on because your individuality is melting away, and it culminates in total dissolution of your ego. Then only God remains and you become one with God. This is called *tanmaya*.

11. *Parama-viraha aasakti: Aasakti* for the pain of longing when separated.

This passionate commitment is exemplified by love of Radha and *Gopis* for Lord Krishna. Radha in absence of Krishna was extremely miserable. This deep love is usually seen between lovers, when the connection is so powerful that upon separation there is extreme longing for what is missing. Same feeling is possible for *Bhagavan*. Another good example is that of Mira Bai's love for Lord Krishna. Mira *Bhajans* depict this kind of love vividly.

This pain of suffering can also occur when the state of *samadhi* comes to an end. *Samadhi*, as described above under *tanmaya aasakti*, only lasts for some finite time-it may last for minutes or may be even an hour or so. But it does come to an end. That may be due to some external stimuli or it may be automatic-ultimately the brain gets fatigued in being *samadhi* state. It is then that the devotee becomes separated from his union with God, and that's when he experiences that pain of separation which is described as *parama-viraha asakti*

These are the eleven forms of *bhakti* that are mentioned in the summary portion of the text. But as we have seen in the earlier portions of the text, there are many other forms as well. Potentially, there can be infinite choices. Every one can have their unique way of doing *bhakti*. As an example, some one can have intense love for nature and recognize the incredible beauty of the lofty mountain peaks, blue oceans, and gushing waterfalls. He might revel in nature as he sees the presence of God in all that magnificence. There is nothing that lays down any valid rules for any *sadhana*. Whatever works for you is your *sadhana* for *bhakti*. That's a healthy perspective. If an unconventional medicine gives you relief from headache, there is no reason why you not consider it as your remedy.

We have the freedom to choose whatever form of God we want to worship; i.e., we can choose our *ishta devata*. In fact this should be considered as our responsibility. Our choice can be tailor-made to fit our needs. But we must cultivate a relationship with God, if we aspire to pursue spiritual growth. Just as there are many techniques for meditation, there are many techniques for *bhakti*. But to find out what works for you, you first have to try out different approaches. Just as for food: if you never try, you will never know whether you like or don't like Thai food or French food, etc. Some healthy experimentation is necessary. You may find devotees in a Krishna temple dancing in a peculiar way jumping up and down and yet they are completely absorbed in their *bhakti*. Will that work for you? You will never know until you try. The more things you try the richer your experience becomes, and more you understand life itself.

It's good to have an attitude of exploration. In his own personal experience Swamiji discovered this attitude to be very enriching. In his spiritual pursuit in the 1970's in California, he visited so many swamis that were coming from India and read so much varied literature that he described it as "shopping in a spiritual supermarket" .He extensively studied major schools of thought in Western philosophy, and explored Taoism and Buddhism quite broadly. Additionally, he studied wide-ranging texts in the Hindu tradition. Even after being well grounded in advaita vedanta after his 3-year course with Pujya Swami Dayananda, he explored Christian mysticism which he found amazingly similar to Vedanta.

It is only in this spirit of exploration that you will find usefulness of *bhakti* as a spiritual practice. Sutra above describes only eleven forms of *bhakti*, but there indeed can be any number: 1,100 or 11,000!

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