

# THE GOSPEL OF GOD-LOVE

**NARADA BHAKTI SUTRAS**

*By*

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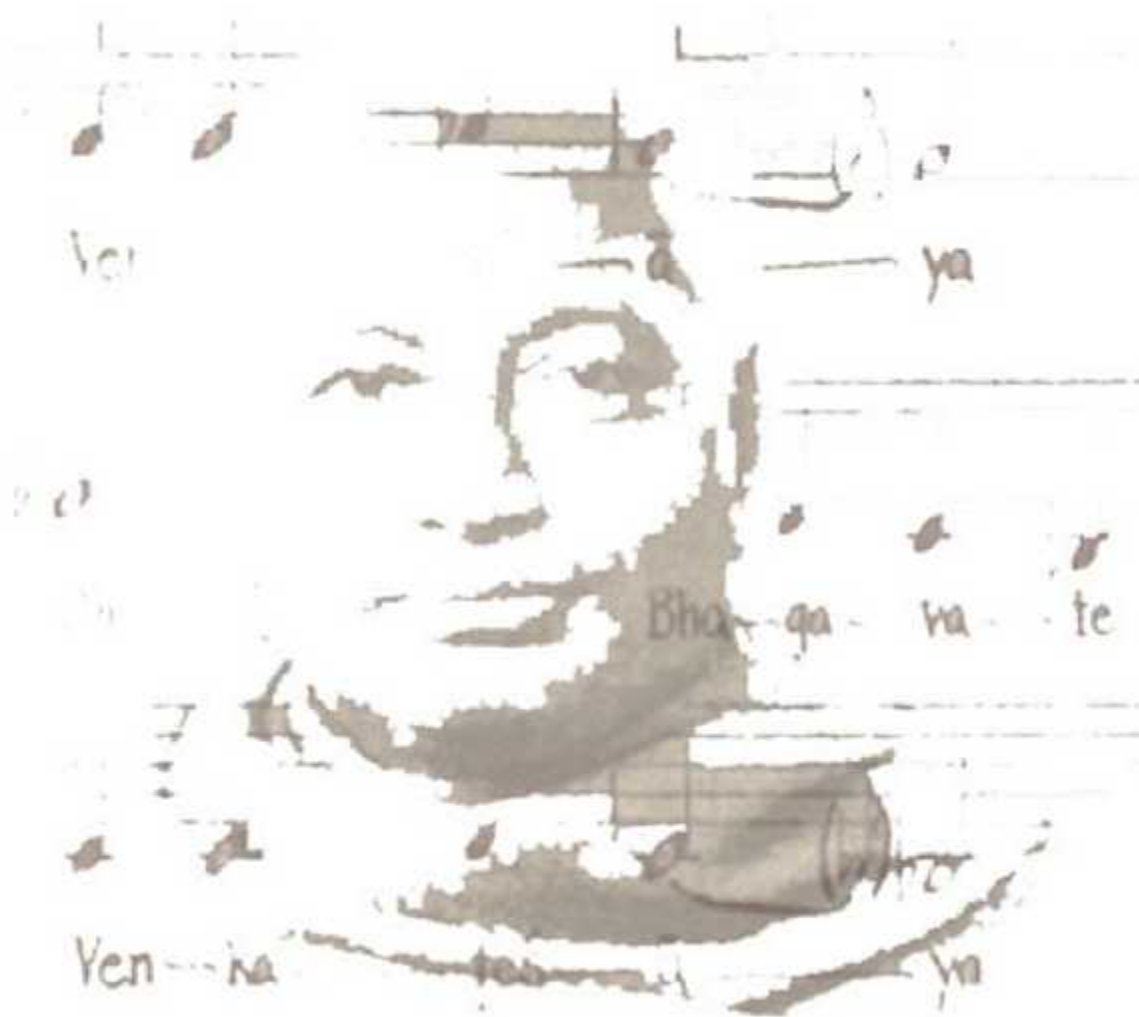
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Om Namah Venkatesaya  
Om Namah Shivaya

The Gospel of God Love  
**Narada Bhakti Sutras**

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# The Gospel of God Love Narada Bhakti Sutras

A Flower at Thy Feet Oh Lord  
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## A Flower At Thy Feet, Oh Lord

Early this year, a few high-souled devotees of Sri Gurudev Sivananda expressed their eagerness to study bhakti yoga at the Yoga Vedanta Forest Academy. At the behest of Sri Gurudev Sivananda, I took that class, with Narada Bhakti Sutras as the text.

It was a revealing experience for me. There we were, all of us, students of Sri Gurudev Sivananda - studying this glorious scripture - and each sutra conjured up before our mind's eye the glorious life of Sri Gurudev Sivananda and His life-transforming teachings. If there was an abstruse idea, Gurudev Sivananda's life - some anecdote - came in handy to make it clear. As we proceeded with the study, we discovered that Gurudev Sivananda's illustrious, fruitful, and divine life itself was the best commentary on 'Narada Bhakti Sutras' - nay, all the important scriptures in the world. I am extremely grateful for this experience.

As I spoke, I realised that I was myself a student in the class - and it is Gurudev Sivananda's own radiant life and teachings that played the part of the preceptor. Not a single idea contained in this volume is mine - every good thought presented herein is a particle of the dust of Sri Gurudev Sivananda's Divine Lotus Feet. May the radiant Dust of His Feet guide us!

The notes I had kept of the talks, assumed the present shape at the holy abode of Sri Rani Sivananda-Kumudini Devi of 'Sivananda Griha', Secunderabad, in her motherly, affectionate and extremely hospitable care. To her I owe inexpressible gratitude.

May God bless them all!

20th November, 1960  
Swami Venkatesananda

## Introduction

Om Sri Satguru Paramatmane Namah.  
Om Namo Bhagavate Vasudevaya.  
Namah Parama Rishibhyo  
Namah Parama Rishibhyah.

Before taking up the study of the Narada Bhakti Sutras themselves, let us for a moment dwell upon the meaning of the three words, which form the title of the book.

In days of yore, before printing was invented, knowledge of scriptures had to be imparted to the student, by the preceptor, by word of mouth. Records could be preserved only on the palm-leaves; each copy was produced at expense of time and energy. Therefore, the preceptors and the students, too, resorted to the sutras. An elaborate discourse was condensed into a brief sutra, which constituted the double-distilled essence of the discourse. The sutra was more an aid to memory. To the 'initiated', each sutra called up a world of thought and ideas.

The various Schools of Philosophy have their own sutras, which are regarded as the primary Source-Books. The sutras are always terse and often enigmatic - and they invariably require a commentary, to be understood.

## Bhakti

Bhakti comes from the root 'bhaj', which means 'to be devoted to', 'to be in love with'. Bhakti is love. It is universal. Everyone has love in his heart. He who has a heart, has love in it. Even the cruelest man loves somebody or something. This is common, not only to all mankind and animals, but even to plant-kingdom. The sun-flower and the lotus are in love with the Sun.

It is true that the modern man is moved more by the heart than by the intellect. Emotions govern and prompt his actions. That is indeed an excellent sign - for he who responds readily to emotion is capable of developing devotion, too. That is why Gurdev Sivananda says that, in kali yuga, bhakti yoga is the quickest, safest, and surest way to self-realisation.

But, the modern man's emotions are stirred more by the instinct than by intelligence! Therefore, he is swayed easily by every passing wind - he swings to the side that stirs his motions more deeply, without pausing to think whether that is the right direction or not.

Bhakti is emotion plus discrimination. Bhakti is love. But all love is not Bhakti, as we shall see later.

## Narada

Before we take up the study of any book, it is better to look at the name of the author. Then we shall know whether the book is authoritative, whether it will guide us aright, or not. Otherwise, we shall suffer the fate of the blind men led by a blind man.

Narada is one of the greatest bhaktas. He is continuously God-conscious. He is roaming the three worlds, singing the Lord's Names, awakening all to the glory of His Names, and instilling in all intense and supreme love for God. Hence, he is an authority on bhakti.

Three stories connected with Narada are of interest to us here. They contain object-lessons which every student of bhakti yoga ought to bear in mind.



## Power of Satsang

The first is about Narada's own previous birth. He was then the son of a non-Brahmin widow, who was serving Mahatmas in a village where he had camped for the rainy season. The boy used to listen to their discourses, and also eat their uchchishtha - leavings. These had purified him and created in him an intense longing to realise God. One day, a cobra bit the old woman and she passed away. The young son was happy! Such was the power of satsang. He felt that the one bond that tied him to samsara - worldly life - had been severed by God. He approached the Mahatmas for their blessings, as they were leaving the village. They blessed him and initiated him into bhakti. He did intense sadhana. The Lord appeared to him and granted him the boon that, in the next birth, he would be born as a great bhakta.

Satsang is indispensable for one to grow in devotion. Name whenever possible, and eventually, always, by force of habit.

## Practice and Experience

Narada was himself restless once, and went to Sanatkumara for guidance. He gave Sanatkumara a long list of all the scriptures that he had studied. Sanatkumara dismissed all that knowledge as mere 'word', without meaning, as a mere intellectual burden, as chaff! He then initiated Narada into Brahma Vidya, and exhorted him to attain the direct realisation of the Infinite.

Whatever be the path we choose, practice, and practice alone, can enable us to reach the goal. No amount of theory - however lofty and good - will be of any avail, unless it is translated into practice.

## The Greatest Devotee

Folklore ascribes the following story to Narada.

Even this divine devotee of the Lord once felt that there was none who excelled him in devotion. The Lord Who is the Indweller knew this and wished to remove this vanity from the heart of Narada.

One day, He called Narada and asked him to 'enquire about the welfare of My greatest devotee on earth', naming a humble householder. Narada was puzzled and disappointed; who could that blessed person be, who excelled even him, Narada? He went to the place mentioned by the Lord and watched the devotee throughout the day. The latter awoke in the morning with the Lord's Name on his lips; and lay down at night uttering the Lord's Name once more. The rest of the day he was busy serving his parents and masters, with narayana-bhav - i.e. feeling that thereby he was serving the Lord Himself. Narada returned to the Lord's abode, and his downcast look expressed his disapproval of the Lord's exaltation of that poor householder over Narada himself, in devotion.

On another occasion, the Lord called Narada again and requested him to take a pot filled to the brim with oil, and hand it over to Lakshmi, the Lord's Contort. Not a drop was to be spilt. Narada, the great yogi, did as the Lord bade him do, and reported back to the Lord. The Lord asked him, "Oh Narada, when you were taking that pot of oil, how many times did you utter My Names?" Narada confessed that he was so completely absorbed in the task on hand that he did not utter His Name even once. The Lord said, "If such was your devotion, is not that man who had to toil throughout the day, serving his parents and masters, the greater devotee for taking My Name twice during the day?" Narada had to agree!

Let us carry on our daily duties, discharging them selflessly, for His sake - and at the same time let us remember Him and repeat His Name whenever possible, and eventually, always, by force of habit.

## chapter I - sutra 1

athato bhaktim vyakhyasyamah  
Now, therefore, we shall expound bhakti.

The first 'atha' is a sacred word. We are told that 'om' and 'atha' were the first sounds that emanated from Brahman - therefore, these two words are auspicious.

omkarascha atha-sabdascha  
dwaavetau brahmanah puraa  
khantham bhitwaa viniryaatau  
tasmad maangalika ubhau

'Athah', therefore, has a significance. Gurudev used to narrate this humorous story to illustrate a great truth. An aged wood-cutter was cutting wood in a forest. A Mahatma, who was passing by, questioned the old man: "Friend, why are you cutting wood?" "Sire, I have to earn my food." "Why should you eat?" "Sire, I have wood." Such is the case with everyone today. This precious human birth is taken as an accident and a burden imposed upon us - and we lead an aimless, purposeless life, just to let the days pass and life come to an end.

"Is there not a nobler mission than eating, drinking, and sleeping?", asks Gurudev, and exhorts us to strive to attain God-realisation. We realise this - and therefore study these Bhakti Sutras.

'Atha', now, also has a significance. It denotes the preparedness of both the preceptor and the disciple. Narada has studied various scriptures, sung His glories and roamed the three worlds - and, now, he is ready to expound the path of devotion.

The student should prepare himself for the reception of the light of devotion. The vessel - heart - should be purified first. The aspirant should cultivate virtues and eradicate vices. Otherwise, the teaching is likely to be misunderstood - just as Brahma's instruction was misunderstood by Virochana.

Even knowledge of scriptures, austerities, etc., if they are acquired by wicked men, will prove to be destructive - as in the case of Ravana.

The fundamental pre-requisites, the qualifications, are common to all the yogas. Viveka - discrimination, vairagya - dispassion, samadhi shat-sampat - self-control, and other virtues, mumukshatwa - desire for liberation; these are indispensable for every spiritual aspirant.

The bhakta must be free from raga and dwesha - attachment and aversion. He should not be led away from the path, whatever be the temptation. When the Lord is taken out in procession and we go to have His Darshan, if we are absorbed in watching the fireworks and listening to the music, we might miss His Darshan. We must discriminate and be dispassionate.

We must remove hatred and contempt from our heart. God may come in any form. A great bhakta had been told by his Guru that Lord Rama would give him Darshan on a certain day. The devotee had prepared a nice feast, a soft bed, and had kept ready milk, sandal paste and flowers for His worship. As he was waiting for the Lord, a buffalo entered the house and trampled upon the articles kept for His worship, ate the food, rolled on the bed, much to the dismay of the devotee, who beat the buffalo with a stick. As the Lord did not come, the devotee went to the Guru Who enlightened him: "Lord Rama did come - you couldn't recognise Him. He Himself ate the Prasad and accepted the articles of worship. But you beat Him and drove Him away. See, I have the marks on my back, too - how cruelly you beat Him?" The Lord had come in the form of the buffalo.

We should cultivate divine virtues, most of all humility. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu says about the eligibility of the aspirant to sing His Names:

trinaadapi suneechena tarorapi sahishnuna  
amaaninaa maanadena kirtaneeya sadaa harih

The Lord's Names should be sung by him, who is humbler than the blade of grass, more patient than a tree - which yields its fruits, etc., to the one who cuts it with an axe - who is free from desire for honour, but who honours and glorifies others.

Vanity leads to great downfall - as in the case of Jaya Vijaya, the gate-keepers of Vaikuntha. They had attained sarupya, i.e., they had attained the same form as Lord Narayana. When the Sanatkumaras came to Vaikuntha and wanted to see the Lord, Jaya-Vijaya refused to admit them inside. They cursed Jaya-Vijaya to be born in the earth. Subtle spiritual egoism is very powerful and should always be guarded against.

'Bhaktim vyakhyasyamah' - the author, Narada himself, does not regard bhakti as a separate yoga or path to God. He says: "We shall expound devotion." Devotion is common to all the paths. The Vedantin is devoted to the Self, Atman or Brahman. The raja yogi is devoted to Iswara and meditates on Him. The karma yogi sees the Self or the Lord in all, and serves Him in all. Therefore, bhakti is universal and common to all the paths. Hence its supreme importance.

## chapter I - sutra 2

sa tv asmin parama-prema-rupa

But, that is of the nature of supreme love to that.

'But' distinguishes Love of God from love of earthly objects and relations.

Supreme Love of God is completely different from the love that we have for anyone or anything in the world. The latter changes, diminishes. Even the most intense love between two people in the world cools off and is in course of time changed to indifference - if not to positive dislike! But, bhakti is supreme love which knows no change.

There is a very good reason for it. Bhakti is unselfish love. Human love is selfish love. We expect the object of our love to reciprocate it; and when there is not adequate reciprocity, the love cools off. Not only this. When the love has served its end, and has fulfilled itself - when the little object of love is attained - then, too, it cools off. The object - being in its very nature limited, finite an imperfect - does not satisfy us for long. Hence, too, love wears out.

In the case of bhakti, however, the object of love is God, Who is Infinite, Eternal, Perfect and Full. Hence bhakti, too, becomes eternal, perfect and unchanging.

That is the ideal. But Lord Krishna, in the Gita, concedes that:

chaturvidhaa bhajante maam janaah sukritinorjuna  
aartho jignaasu artharthee jnaanee cha bharatharshabha  
teshaam jnaani nitya-yuktah eka-bhaktir visishyate

My devotees are of four kinds: the one who is in distress and resorts to Him for relief; the one who prays to Him for wealth; the one who wants to know all about God and His Love; and the man who knows, the wise man. Of them, the jnani is the best.

The jnani knows that God is his very Self, and that it is therefore inevitable that he should be devoted to God. His love of God is motiveless. It is irresistible, too.

The jnani's love is comparable only to the desire of a man to breathe. When one is held down in water, how intensely one longs to breathe! He does not think or ask why - but the desire to breathe is irresistible. Similar is the nature of parama-prema.

'Parama-prema' reminds us of Yagnavalkya's instruction to Maitreyi:

na vaa arey sarvasya kaamaaya sarvam priyam bhavati  
atmanastu kaamaaya sarvam priyam bhavati

Not indeed for the sake of all this is all this dear; but for the sake of the self all this is dear.

One Self dwells in all. Unity is the Ultimate Truth. Hence, there is love for all

these objects. The Self endeavours to realise itself - pervading all and everything.

In fact, that is why love is irresistible and inevitable here. Love is God. God is Love. And, it is God's Love that holds the entire universe together. God's Love holds the planets and stars together, and keeps them moving in their orbits. The force of gravity among planets and stars, the life-giving elements, the higher emotions of compassion, sympathy, etc., in human beings, and the instinctive attachment that even animals exhibit in their behaviour - all these are the manifestations of God's Love, in however limited and imperfect a degree they may be. Hence, that Love is an irresistible and inevitable force. When this is realised, then we shall develop supreme love for God.

'Asmin' gives us freedom to choose our Ishtham, our favourite object of devotion, and reveals the catholicity of the author, and his vision of devotion as a universal spiritual practice, unrestricted to people of any particular sect or religion.

## chapter I - sutra 3

### amrita-svarupa ca

It is of the nature of nectar, too.

'Amritam' is nectar, immortality. Nectar makes us immortal. Amritam is immortality and that which immortalises us. It is a favourite word of the Upanishad-rishis. They again and again exhort us to attain immortality; for, the essential nature of the Self or Atman or Brahman is Immortality.

Bhakti is of the nature of immortality. This declaration confirms that Love is God and God is Love. Love is identical with God. Hence, God's own nature - viz., immortality - is ascribed to God-Love, too.

Moreover, in bhakti, the object of love - viz., God - is Eternal, Infinite and Immortal. This guarantees two things : (1) the love that is directed towards Him, becomes immortal, (2) the lover that is thus linked to the Immortal, is also immortalised. The person who is always facing the sun, knows no shadow or darkness. The person who is in love with God, the Eternal Being, the Satchidananda-Swarupa, knows nothing but Immortality, Infinite Bliss.

The upanishadic seeker after truth, therefore, spurns all other objects and states of existence. We have the two classical examples, viz., Nachiketas and Maitreyi.

Maitreyi was the wife of Yagnavalkya, the sage. The latter wanted to take to the life of a wandering mendicant - sanyasin, renouncing even the forest hermitage. Therefore, he called his two wives to him and said: "I shall divide the properties between you two, and shall embrace sanyasa." Maitreyi asked: "Will that, Oh Lord, make me immortal?" Yagnavalkya's reply is illuminating: "Wealth cannot confer Immortality on you." Maitreyi did not want the wealth; and the delighted sage initiated her into Brahma-Vidya. Immortality - Amritam - is the goal.

When Nachiketas was sent by his father to Lord Yama, he sought the latter's guidance to immortality. Yama tempted the young lad with countless years of life, all luxuries and pleasures. But the wonderful Nachiketas was full of wisdom; he knew that pleasures only exhaust the force and that even at the end of the long life, he would meet only Lord Yama! Pleasures and luxuries are meaningless, when we contemplate the evanescence of life itself. The pleased Guru - Lord Yama - then instructed Nachiketas in Atma-Vidya. What a sublime example for us to emulate!

Nectar is also regarded as the sweetest thing. Reading that meaning into this sutra, we get a delightful vision of three blissful avenues.

(1) The path to self-realisation - Sreya Marga - is considered by the Kathopanishad to be completely different from the path of pleasure - Preya Marga. It is common knowledge that he who would have self-realisation, must



mercilessly destroy all hankerings after pleasure. But in this sutra, Narada assures us that, even though we throw away the pleasures of the world, we shall lose nothing; for devotion itself is all sweetness, all-delight, all-bliss. Once we step on the path of devotion, we shall find that what we renounced - worldly pleasures - were really pains in disguise; and that they who cling to worldly pleasures, who have really renounced something worth having - viz., devotion which is all-bliss - are clinging to pain and suffering. Bhakti, in one sense, transcends even the 'satvic happiness' described in the Gita as being bitter in the beginning but amritam - nectar - in the end. Narada assures us that bhakti is amritam in the beginning, amritam in the middle, and amritam in the end.

(2) It is so sweet, because its joys are untarnished or undiminished by severance of our affections for our relations. etc. The very same emotion, the very same affection, the very same love, is sublimated, transmuted, and transferred to the Lord. The joy is intensified into bliss; the pain that deluded attachment entails is cleverly avoided.

(3) This is perhaps the most important corollary of interpretation. Bhakti is all sweetness. And, it enshrined in the heart of the devotee. Does it need to be emphasised that he will be all sweetness, too? His words, thoughts and deeds will be characterised by sweetness. Not an evil thought, nor a harsh word, nor a vicious or harmful action will emanate from him. Let us never forget this unmistakable sign in a true bhakta.

## chapter I - sutra 4

yal labdhva puman siddho bhavaty amrito bhavati tripto bhavati  
On attaining this supreme love, man becomes perfect, immortal and  
satisfied.

The first two words remind us of Lord Krishna's thrilling utterance the Gita:

yam labdhwa cha-aparam labham manyate na adhikam tatah  
yasmin stitho na dukhena gurunaapi vichalyate

In the Gita it is called 'dukhena gurunaapi yogam' - the yoga who prevents misery. Here, Narada calls it bhakti. Yagnavalkya declares that only jnana can make us immortal. The facility with which these words 'bhakti', 'yoga' and 'jnana' are interchanged and used in the same sense only confirms Gurudev Sivananda's argument that they are in essence one and the same.

But what is of special significance here is that Narada equates bhakti with God Himself. It is not as though man cultivates bhakti, realises God, and that God or God-realisation liberates him and makes him immortal. The attainment of Bhakti itself is the liberator, according to Narada. Bhakti itself is the goal. Hence it was defined as 'Amritam'. It is further confirmed in this sutra.

'Siddho bhavati' - that which is attained by sadhana is siddhi. It is perfection, not just psychic power. It is true that even a bhakta, during the course of his upasana, gets siddhis, unasked. Mantra japa bestows siddhis on him. But he considers them obstacles and does not consciously make any use of them. Moreover, he is a man of prayer who has the well-being of all at heart. He does not interfere with the course of events, nor with the working of the Lord's Will. Therefore, siddhi in this sutra refers only to spiritual perfection. The bhakta has detached himself from the imperfect body and finite mind; he has given up the ego, which is the root of all imperfection. Through self-surrender, he has established unity with the Lord. That is highest devotion. He is no more. The Lord is all-in-all. The Lord is perfect. So, the bhakta has attained perfection.

'Siddhi' reminds us of Lord Krishna's beautiful utterance in the Gita. Lord Krishna has been extolled in the Bhagavata and the Mahabharata, as well as by various great saints, in their compositions - like the Narayaneeyam, Krishna Leela Tarangini - as an Incarnation of God, Statesman, Musician, Dancer, etc. In the Gita, He reveals Himself as a Supreme Artist. Look at the picture he has painted for us:

svakarmana tamabhyarchiya siddhim vindati manavah

That man who worships Him, with his actions, attains to perfection.

At once the picture appears to your mind's eye. There is a true devotee of the Lord. He perceives the Lord in all beings - aham atma gudakesah sarvabhutasya sthi thah. Him he worships. With what flowers? With every one of his daily

actions as the flowers. Thus, he attains siddhi or perfection. What doubt is there that he will quickly get cosmic consciousness if he keeps up this attitude throughout the day and night? This therefore is the yoga that Gurudev Sivananda extols as practical vedanta, dynamic yoga.

Only this will lead us to consummate perfection.

yo vai bhuma tat sukham, na alpe sukham asti

The Infinite alone is Bliss which is absent in finite objects.

declare the Upanishads. And, this is one of the most favourite mantras of Gurudev Sivananda. Bhuma is perfection. What is bhuma?

yatra na anyat pasyati, na anyat srunoti

Where one sees nothing else, hears nothing else, etc.

In other words, where one sees everything as the Self, and the Self as this all. Such a state can be attained only by one who sees and serves the Lord in all,

'Amrito bhavati' - since the nature of bhakti is itself amritam - vide previous sutra, the natural result of getting established in it, is the attainment of immortality. We have. Lord Krishna's own grandest assurance in the Gita:

na me bhakthah pranasyati

My devotee does not perish.

Not only does He grant us this immortality, but He also assures us that

ananyaschintayanto mam ye janah paryupasate  
tesham nityabhiyuktaanaam yogakshemam vahamyaham

I attend to the welfare of all My devotees who constantly think of Me.

We have numerous instances in the lives of bhaktas where the Lord has taken on the devotees' duties upon Himself. When a North Indian saint who was working as a school-master was absent from his post of duty - as he was engaged in bhajan and kirtan, the Lord went to the school in the disguise of the devotee and did his work! When the devotee was shown his signature in the register, he was deeply moved; and he renounced the world that very instant. Such stories are current everywhere in this country, and are too numerous to mention here. Suffice it to say that the moment we take one step towards Him, He runs forward to greet us. May we deserve His Grace!

'Tripto bhavati' - bhakti fills the heart with bliss and peace. He who has tasted the bliss of bhakti, does not long for anything else, as we have already seen. Therefore, there is permanent satisfaction in the bhakta's heart. Desires do not arise in it at all; on the contrary, they find their fulfilment in it. Once again, Lord Krishna's divine art paints a beautiful and inspiring picture for us.

aapwyaanam achala pratishtam samudram apah pravisanti yadvat

tadvat kamah yam pravisanti sarve sa santim aapnoti na kama kaamee

There is the huge ocean - the ocean of the bliss of bhakti. It is all peace. Countless rivers flow into it - the rivers are the desires. They enter the ocean and disappear; and the ocean is not disturbed thereby. The evil element that disturbs the heart of an ordinary worldly man viz, desire, has no power to disturb the heart of a devotee. He has already realised the Bliss in his own heart. Desires do not arise in it, but they get dissolved in it. Hence, in the language of the Upanishads, the devotee is 'aptakamah'.

## chapter I - sutra 5

yat prapya na kincid vanchati na socati na dveshti na ramate notsahi bhavati

After attaining this supreme love, he does not desire anything, does not grieve, does not hate, does not indulge in sensual pleasures, and does not feel any urge to acquire anything.

In the last Sutra we were told that we shall become perfect by obtaining - or getting - bhakti. Now we are told that, after attaining bhakti, we shall not desire anything else, etc. 'Labdhwa' implies getting, not necessarily by self-effort. 'Praapya' is attaining by self-effort. The first connotes Grace; the second self-effort. The implication is that both are necessary for a bhakta. No amount of self-effort without the descent of Grace (\*) will be of any avail, for the ultimate void - the abyss of primordial ignorance - can be crossed only with His Grace. He who idles away his time believing that Grace will descend on him and give him liberation, does not deserve it and will not get it. Both are necessary.

'Na kinchit vaanehati' - again and again, this point is stressed. We are constantly reminded:

aasaa hi paramam dukkham, nirasaa paramam sukham

Desire itself is the greatest misery; and desirelessness itself is the greatest happiness. When the devotee is asked by the Lord Himself what he wants, the answer is often astounding, says Kulasekhara!

nastaa dharmaa na vasunichaye naiva kaamopabhoge  
yat yat bhavyam bhavatu bhagavan purvakarmanurupam  
yetat prarthyam mama bahumatam janmajanmantarapi  
twapaadaamboruhayugala nischala bhaktirastu

I want nothing; let me get whatever is ordained by my past karma. But this I fervently pray for, my Lord - may I ever be blessed with devotion to Thy Lotus-Feet.

The devotee has realised that everything else is impermanent, that nothing else can give permanent satisfaction. To him, therefore, that condition in life is pleasant and blissful in which he is able to think constantly of the Lord. Kunti, the Mother of the Pandavas, knew nothing but unhappiness from birth. This enabled her to think constantly of the Lord. Misery is a boon from God - for it enables us to think of Him! After the Mahabharata War, Krishna asks if she wants anything from Him. Her prayer staggers our imagination: "Give me more and more suffering, Oh Krishna, so that I may never forget you!"

The one thing that all worldly men dread, viz., misery, is welcomed by the bhakta. The wise man welcomes poverty, pain and suffering. There is a subtle secret in this: when a thing is welcomed, it ceases to be undesirable and painful! Therefore, the bhakta rejoices in all conditions. We are reminded of Kuchela's predicament. This incarnate poverty and misery, who had at the same time a

large family to support, was prompted by his wife to seek Krishna's financial help. Krishna was his boyhood friend. First Kuchela refused the suggestion; and then agreed, for he felt that anyhow it offered him an opportunity to have Krishna's Darshan. He went to Dwaraka and was entertained in a royal way by the Lord. The next morning, Kuchela took leave of the Lord and was returning to his cottage. On the way, he suddenly remembered - how could even this thought of want enter his mind in His Presence - the purpose for which he had been sent to Krishna. For a moment he thought: "True, in His Presence I could not think of my poverty and beg for help. But, at least He, the Indweller of all beings, could have divined my heart and blessed me with a bag of gold!" Even this profane thought could not stay in his pure heart for more than a fleeting moment. "No, no," he said to himself, "He did not do so only on account of His supreme compassion for me. He should have felt that if He had given me wealth, I would forget Him. Oh! how loving of You, my Lord! You did not want me to forget You, so You have turned me out empty-handed but with a heart full of love for You!" That is the nature of devotion. That is the fruit of devotion.

'Na sochati' - brings to our mind at once Lord Krishna's admonition - with which He commences and concludes His Gitopadesam. 'Asochyan anaasochastwam' - on grieve for those things for which you should not grieve. And, 'mokshayishyami maa sucha' - I will liberate you, don't worry. The only prize that is worth having this world is devotion to His Lotus-Feet. All else is useless. The aspirant has cultivated bhakti, He cares for naught else. Hence he grieves for nothing, worries over nothing. Isavasya Upanishad questions:

yasmin sarvaani bhutaani atmaivaahhut vijanatah  
tatra ko mohah kah sokah ekatvamanupasyatah

When omnipresence of the Self - or God - is realised, then where is delusion and where is grief or misery? We grieve for those that are dear to us and are taken away from us. Para bhakti - supreme God-love - is itself amritam - immortality; we, the devotees, are immortal; and the Lord is immortal, too. When we have attained the para bhakti, for what, then, shall we grieve?

'Na dweshti' - does not hate - is obvious. Patanjali says in his Yoga Sutras that the individual has five great afflictions. The individual is bound to this samsara by these five. They are avidya, asmita, raga, dwesha and abhinivesha. Avidya is ignorance of our real nature - that we are in reality the Supreme Self. From that ignorance springs asmita or individuality - I am different and distinct from others. Then come raga-dwesha - likes and dislikes, love and hatred. Abhinivesha is clinging to this individual existence. Gurudev has often told us that real samsara is raga-dwesha. "The world is not made of men, women, buildings and motor cars; samsara is not made of relatives, enemies, and other objects of the world. Raga-dwesha constitute the world, samsara." When the seeker goes beyond raga-dwesha, he has crossed this ocean of samsara.

This is what Narada emphasises in this Sutra. 'Na kinchit vaanchati'. 'Na dweshti' imply transcendence of raga and dwesha respectively. Isavasya Upanishad reminds us:

yastu sarvani bhutaani atmanyevaanupasyati  
sarvalhuteshu chaatmaanam tato na vijugupsate

Leave alone hatred. The Upanishad says that 'he who sees his Self in all and all in the Self, does not even have contempt for anything.' He loves all.

'Na ramate' emphasises that the devotee is free from 'raga' or inordinate attachment to any object, and is therefore not elated when he gets anything. This does not mean that the devotee will always put on a castor-oil face and will have a gloomy appearance. On the contrary, he will be the happiest man in the world, ever radiating bliss to all. But the happiness is not derived from objects, but from the constant remembrance of the Lord, God-consciousness. 'Na ramate' - because he is Atma-Rama - one who delights in the Self, as the next sutra tells us.

'Notsaahi bhavati' - he does not seem eager to perform any action which is not directly connected with the keeping up of his love for God. Later we are going to be told that he positively turns away from worldlines and worldly activities. He regards that his only duty is to love God, to have constant remembrance of the Lord. He is introvert. He does not exert in order to get any object of this world. He knows that the Lord will look after him. His faith is duly rewarded; and that is what we learn from the glorious life of Jada Bharata.

When this sage was captured by head-hunters for being offered as a sacrificial-animal to Kali, and when he was led to the altar and prepared to be beheaded, he remained calm and cool. He was inwardly conscious of his Self, the Immortal Absolue. But, the sage was not to be treated so light-heartedly. Ere the knife could fall on his neck, Kali Herself came out of Her image and killed all those who participated in this orgy. Jada Bharata's life was saved.

The devotee does not even defend himself. It is left to God. If it is His Will that he should suffer, he takes it as the working out of his past karma. If it is not, then he knows that He will mysteriously save him. It is said that Krishna did not go to the rescue of Draupadi so long as she depended on her strength, and rushed to help when she threw up both her hands and called upon Him to save her honour.

This seems to suggest that self-effort is anti-devotional. Does self-effort question the existence of God and His Grace? Is a bhakta then expected to be dumb and dead to the world? Yes! But he has already done everything and reached the pinnacle of self-effort by the one single act of self-surrender to Him. And, after that, the only self-effort that he constantly puts forth is constant remembrance of the Lord. That is his only job. It is His job to protect the Bhakta.

This is a very high stage. Till we reach that stage, we ought to adopt one of the several attitudes suggested by the Lord in Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 12, at the same time, cultivating contentment and desirelessness. 'Yadrich chaalaabha santuchthah' - he is satisfied with what he gets accidentally, is one of the ways in which our salvation from samsara lies.

(\*) It is often asked: where does self-effort end and Grace begin to function? What is the line of demarcation? Well, let us take a card-board which has two sides. In the thickness, where is the line of demarcation between the sides? If we want only one side, can we then pare the board into two and achieve our object? Each 'half' will again have two sides. In other words, Grace and self-effort are identical. Without Grace, there can be no self-effort. And, the Grace itself will blossom as self-effort! Without self-effort, one does not obtain Grace - and the self-effort is a mark of the descent of Grace.



## chapter I - sutra 6

yaj jnatva matto bhavati stabdho bhavaty atmaramo bhavati

By knowing this supreme love, man becomes intoxicated, peacefull, and completely immersed in the bliss of the atman.

We are now admitted into the innermost chambers of the Lord, where the devotee 'knows' Him. In philosophical parlance, knowing is used in the sense of realising the identity.

brahmavid brahmaiva bhavati

The knower of Brahman becomes Brahman.

What is the fruit of this knowledge or realisation? How does one who has realised God behave?

He is God-intoxicated. He is dazed. He is tranquil. The functions of his mind and intellect have come to a standstill, as it were. He is completely introvert. He enjoys the Self-Bliss.

That is because he has come face to face with the Supreme Reality or Truth Transcendental.

yato vaacho nivartante apraapya manosaa saha

From which speech turns back, along with the mind, unable to reach,

That is the Reality. It cannot be comprehended by the mind and the intellect. Devotion has granted him a vision of God, through the eye of intuition. Intuition rises over the ashes of the mind and intellect.

Intellect died a natural death. The salt doll tried to measure the depth of the ocean!

This is the reason why Lord Buddha warned the idle speculators - "Don't measure the Immeasurable with words."

vijnaataaram arey kena vijaaneeyat - asks Yagnavalkya.

With what shall we know the Knower?

God is Himself the Light of lights.

jyotishaamapi tat jyotih tamasah param uchyate  
jnanam jneyam jnanagamyam hridi sarvasya tishtitam

He is beyond Darkness. He is Knowledge Itself. He is to be known by identity. He is the goal of that Knowledge or Self-realisation. He is seated in the heart of all.

He who has come face to face with God is spell-bound. How can he express that state of Supreme Bliss? By what analogy and in what words can that inexpressible state be described? When a deaf and dumb person is given a piece of sweetmeat,

how shall he describe the taste to you? 'Mukasvaadanavat'. Even so is the predicament of the devotee of God-realisation.

The para-bhakta remains God-intoxicated and Self-delightful. He may not talk or discourse upon God. He may not engage himself in any activity. Yet, he is the greatest benefactor of humanity. His very presence on this earth is the greatest blessing upon mankind. He is like the Sun who illumines the whole world, without any distinction whatsoever, by his mere presence. The preacher-saint is like the beaconlight, a powerful electric lamp. The latter needs all kinds of gadgets and props to make it useful to humanity; even so, the preacher-saint needs faithful followers to listen to him, the means of the mission, etc.

The vedic seers, when they tried to communicate their experience, uttered "Haa" "U" "Haa" "U" and sang the hymns of the Sama Veda. In the Upanishads, too, we have Yagnavalkya's emphatic assertion that the Atman can only be negatively described - "Neti" "Neti". Few can reach the goal this way. Only the highly purified heart can negate all that is not Atma this way, and reach Atma-Jnana. For the vast majority, however, a positive definition is needed as a prop, to sustain their meditation. It is for their sake that provisional definitions of the Absolute as 'Satchidananda', 'Satyam, Sivam, Sundaram, etc., and the delightful murtis of the Lord have been given.

Several important points are implied in this sutra:

(1) We should not apply our worldly yardstick to measure the greatness of the saints. Some sages might behave like 'Bala, Unmattha and Pisacha - child, madman, or goblin'. Here is an instance in which the converse is not true! Sages may be 'mad'; but mad men are not sages!

(2) We should not imitate the behaviour of these sages. We are unaware of the sadhana that they have done in this birth and in past births.

(3) We should beware of the short-cuts to God-intoxication by resort to actual intoxicants like wine, ganja, bhang, etc. It is a pity that even great thinkers should advocate the use of these intoxicants to 'help meditation'. Though they may produce temporary exhilaration, they cannot transform our inner nature; and, so long of as our heart is impure, we cannot hope to attain God-realisation. We should diligently prepare the vessel by selfless service, pranayama, kirtan, japa, etc., as commanded by Sri Gurudev Sivananda.

## chapter I - sutra 7

sa na kamayamana nirodha-rupatvat

**Bhakti is not of the nature of desire, because it is of the form of renunciation.**

This could well have followed the third sutra, for it seeks to define bhakti further. But the Indian Sage is a great psychologist. He is a pastmaster in the technique of advertisement. After giving a couple of positive definitions of bhakti, he goes off at a tangent to enumerate the glorious fruits of devotion. "Oh ye! People of the world. Come, come! By attaining bhakti, you will become immortal and go beyond grief," says Narada. When tempted by this bait, the seekers assemble around him, he quietly slips into their heart his stern admonitions: "You should cultivate vairagya - dispassion; you should be desireless, etc." Gurudev Sivananda also adopts the same technique. He never frightens people away, but tempts them to take to the spiritual path by making it appear that they can have God-realisation overnight. Once the aspirant comes within his grip, the 'grinding' and 'cutting' start, to make a very good diamond.

'San na kaamayamsanaa' - as it is well said Saint Tulsidasa, "Where there is Kama, there is no Rama; where there is Rama, there is no Kama."

Avidya, kama, and karma - this is the universal three-fold categorisation of Godhead's involution in samsara. First, there is the veil of ignorance - avidya. Under the influence of this avidya, the jiva - individual soul - imagines that it is imperfect, finite, unhappy and mortal. It feels that it is separate from the other jivas and objects of the world. It seeks the Bliss and Peace which are its own nature, in the objects outside. Kama - desire for objects - arises. For the fulfilment of kama, the jiva engages itself in various activities - karma.

This, then, is the triple-walled prison in which the jiva is incarcerated. There are only three open door-ways to this; but all the three lead to hell. To the one imprisoned thus, these three doorways are so tempting that he can hardly resist the temptation to go away through them. But, alas, they lead to a worse condition of life. These three are kama, krodha and lobha - lust, anger and greed. The wise one, however, resists this temptation, and breaks through the triple wall on the fourth side. It demands a lot of self-control - nirodha - to do this.

Bhakti is of the nature of nirodha.

'Nirodha' is one of the basic terms of Raja Yoga of Patanjali Maharishi. He defines yoga itself as 'Chittha-Vritti-Nirodhah', 'restraint of the modifications of the mind'. He says,

*abhyasa vairagyabhyam tannirodhah*

The mind is controlled by practice and dispassion

The mind can do only two things - either think of various objects, through vikshepa sakti, or sleep, through avarana sakti. The vikshepa - conjuring up of objects - may be external - as during waking state - or internal - as during dream state. Hence, it is normally impossible for one to enter a fourth state of consciousness. This is the problem that faces the aspirant who begins to restrain the vrittis of the mind. Either the mind thinks, or it sleeps - it knows no other state. Hence, the great need to have an image and a mantra - form and name - when a novice attempts at meditation.

Why does the mind run after objects? We saw already that it is on account of desire - kama or raga. This is controlled or sublimated by vairagya - dispassion. Foolish, ineffectual vairagya will, through violent inhibition, lead eventually to adverse reactions. Therefore, Gurudev Sivananda exhorts us to cultivate viveka-purva pairagya - dispassion based on discrimination.

Avarana - veil of ignorance - is torn by abhyasa or constant practice. Both Lord Krishna and Patanjali Maharishi are aware of the near-impossibility of controlling the turbulent mind, and therefore insist on constant practice. Patanjali wants us to cultivate nirodha samskaras - habitual self-control. Self-control should become a habit with us. Kama samskaras or the subtle impressions and cravings have accumulated in the mind from birth to birth, since time immemorial. We should build a counter-force of nirodha samskaras of greater power, in order to conquer desire.

However hard we try, we cannot completely eradicate desire before attaining God-realisation. This is revealed by Krishna

*vishayaa vinivartante niraahaarasya dehinah  
rasavarjam rasopyasya param dhristwaa nivartate*

When we starve the senses, the mind seems to turn away from the objects. But it is only when we see - realise - the Supreme that even the taste for objective enjoyment vanishes.

This only reminds us of the extreme caution with which we ought to walk the path of self-control, to borrow one of Gurudev Sivananda's favourite expressions - 'till the end of life'.

## chapter I - sutra 8

### nirodhas tu loka-veda-vyapara-nyasah

On the contrary, control of desires means the resignation to the Lord of all worldly and scripural activities.

But, we have been thrown into this world of pain and death. The Lord Himself calls the world that He has created as 'dukkhalayam and asaswatam - impermanent house of pain. He is the maker of this house; so, we ought to take His description of it as correct. And, we have been 'blessed' with a mind into which the Creator has infused an outgoing tendency, so we are told by Lord Yama in the Kathopanishad.

anityam asukham lokam imam prapya bhaswa mam

Having come into this world of pain and impermanence, worship Me

says the Lord in the Gita. But, the mind has been so 'created' that it does not seek Him, but seeks happiness in external objects.

Hence the supreme need of nirodha - self-control. Lord Yama eulogises him who endeavours to turn the gaze within, as a rare hero - kaschit dheerah. Each one of us ought to strive to be that hero. We should find the happiness and the peace that the mind seeks in external objects in our inner Self.

'Nyasa' can be interpreted in several ways. Renunciation, resignation, proper valuation, and final offering, are all implied in nyasa.

The supreme bhakta - para bhakta - completely renounces all activities calculated to bring any reward either in this world or in heaven. He is one with God. He is ever immersed in the Bliss of God. His body is looked after by God, either for the purpose of enabling him to do lokasamgraha karma - for the spiritual elevation of humanity, or for the purpose of letting his prarabdha karma - which gave him his body - work out. This is extreme self-control, perfect nirodha.

A step lower than that stands the highly evolved devotee who engages himself in the activities which are inevitable, in the circumstances in which he is placed, both secular and scriptural. But he resigns himself to the Will of the Lord. He surrenders himself to God and prays, "I am Thine, all is Thine, my Lord. Thy Will be done." He is working, but feels he is but an instrument in His Hands. Even in the case of this devotee, nirodha - self-control - is effortless.

One who has not reached this stage and in whom the currents of raga-dwesha do operate, is naturally engaged in the activities of the world. He must, in order to practise self-control - nirodha, discriminate and sift essentials from the non-essentials, and understand all the activities in their proper light, and give them their proper value. Activities calculated to promote spiritual growth are given the highest priority and importance, whereas the other activities - which are not

neglected - are performed as inevitable to the carrying on of life. They have to exert a little, in order that they tread the path of self-control, and are not easily led astray.

There are yet others who are still in the sway of rajas and tamas - passion and ignorance - and who have just entered the path of devotion. What should they do? After the performance of their activities, they should offer them to the Lord - krishnarpanamastu. They should surrender the actions and their fruits to the Lord. This, too, will lead to self-control. By and by, they will develop the feeling that the actions which they have to offer to the Lord, should be pure and noble.

Narada does not make a distinction between the 'business-of this world' - loka-vyapara, and the 'business of the other world' - veda-vyapara. The use of the world, 'vyapara' - business - is also significant. It denotes 'selfish action performed with an eye on the return'. Loka-vyapara is 'action performed with a desire to acquire worldly objects'. Veda-vyapara is 'action performed with a desire to go to heaven and enjoy heavenly pleasures.' As the Lord says in the Gita, "Even the men of good deeds who go to heaven, enjoy the pleasures of the heaven and, when the merits are exhausted, return to the mortal plane once again." He wants us to transcend the Vedas - traigunya vishaya vedah, nisthraigunyo bhava arjuna. Saints and sages have exalted human birth as superior even to birth in heaven as a Deva; for the Deva, enjoying the pleasures of the heaven, does not develop dispassion or desire for liberation! He has to return to the earth-plane, and be come a human being, before he strives for Final Liberation.

## chapter I - sutra 9

**tasminn anyata tad-virodhishudasinata ca  
Renunciation also means single minded devotion to the Lord and  
indifference to all that is antagonistic to him.**

Ananya-bhakti - one-pointed devotion - alone can help us get established in self-control. We should want God and God alone; then only will the mind be weaned away from the objects.

In the Bhagavad Gita, the Lord gives us some practical spiritual exercises for the cultivation of Ananya-bhakti. It is also in the dual-form, of ascent of the sadhaka and descent of Divinity.

The former is dealt with in Chapter ten of the Gita - the vibhuti yoga adhyaya. In order to enable us to live immersed in God-consciousness, the Lord describes all the good things that we see around us as His manifestations. He extends this to include the evil-doer also - God is the substratum of all existence. Then He says,

yad yad vibhutimat satvam srimadurjitameva va  
tat tadevavagachcha twam mama tejomsa sambhavam

The Satvic people, the wealthy people, and even the ones who are endowed with strength - of mind, body or the will, are to be looked upon as His manifestation.

Step by step, we are led to feel that He and He alone pervades all. Seeing Him in all is to feel His presence always and in all things. This is ananya-bhakti.

The descent of divinity is described in Chapter twelve of the Gita.

ye tu sarvani karmani mayi sanyasya matparaa  
ananyenaiva yogena mam dhyayanta upasate

These are the people who have established themselves in Him by ananya yoga, as is declared in this sloka - mayyavesita-chetasam. Then the Lord lifts up from the mrityu-samsara-sagaram - ocean of mortality - very quickly. Therefore, the Lord says,

mayyeva mana adhatwa mayi buddhim nivesaya  
nivasishyasi mayyeva atho urdhvam na samsayah

How difficult it is to control the mind! We do not really perform any actions of our own volition. We are driven to do the actions. We are not conscious of our own thoughts. We identify ourselves with every vritti or wave that arises in the mind. Unless we can dissociate ourselves from the mind and the vrittis that arise in it, we cannot really control the mind. Mind is not a thing in our hands with which we can do what we like! But, it is like a prison in which we are imprisoned.

Therefore, if this is found to be difficult, the Lord is ready and eager to come

down a little more.

atha chittham samadhatum na saknoshi mayi sthiram  
abhyasa-yogena tato mamicchaptum dhananjaya

If you cannot do this, then, by practice, try to create a desire for Me.

This is really the most moving sloka in the Gita. The Lord seems to plead for our Love. "Please, try to love Me", says the Lord.

Even this is not so easy. The hidden tendencies in our mind, cloud it, and goad us to indulge in sense-enjoyments again and again. They do not permit a good thought to enter the mind. They do not allow the sapling of devotion to grow in our heart. The Lord comes still further down.

abhyasepyasamarthosi matkarmaparamo bhava  
madarthamapi karmani kurvan siddhim avapsyasi

If you cannot do even this, then do all your actions for My sake; even thus will you attain Perfection.

If you are under the sway of rajas and tamas, and must, therefore, be constantly engaged in activity, then feel that you are doing all your actions for My sake; feel that you are doing My work.

Even this will lead to frequent God-thought, and will eventually remove the evil samskaras - mental habits - and fill the mind with satwa. But the samskaras may be so 'thick' that the compulsion to indulge in selfish actions may be intense enough to prevent the proper attitude to manifest itself. Then,

athaitadapyasaktosi kartum madyogamasritah  
sarvakarmaphalatyagam tatah kuru yatatmavan

If you cannot do even this, then, after doing the actions, surrender them and their fruits to Me.

When the desire has been spent in the enjoyment, then follows the period of satisfaction. During this period, when the mind is calm and free from the distractions of desire - i.e., before the next desire arises! - think of God and offer the actions and the fruits to Him. This is possible for all. God has descended to the level of the common man. From there, He endeavours to lift us up. If we grasp His Helping Hand, He will soon lift us away from the quagmire of Samsara, and place us on His Lap. Gradually, with the growth of devotion, self-control too will grow.

'Tad-virodhishu-utdaseenata' - 'tad-virodhi' may be taken to mean the 'enemies of devotion or the enemies of God.' These enemies may be internal or external. Internal enemies are the evil propensities of the impure mind. External enemies are wicked persons and those whose influence will lead us from away the path of devotion.

The Lord does not want us to attack the evil directly. The inner enemies of devotion, viz., lust, anger, greed, egoism, selfishness, etc., are hard to conquer



through a frontal attack The Vali-episode in the Ramayana gives us a lesson. There are certain evil forces which have a strange power. When they are attacked, they get half of the opponent's strength - that was the boon that Vali enjoyed. Even so is the case with our inner foes. Thinking them makes them wax stronger. Fighting with them forces them into hiding, to gain more strength and attack us during a weak moment. Patanjali Maharishi gives us a method to overcome them: cultivation of the opposite 'virtue'. Gurudev Sivananda adds another: to be constantly engaged in selfless service for the good of humanity, so that the evil has no chance to manifest itself. It dies a natural death, by neglect.

Even in the case of external foes, we should avoid them, and resort to the company of the good. We should not enter into arguments with atheists and materialists. By prayer and by our own example alone can we hope to convert them.

Thus is self-control attained. On the positive side: constant remembrance of God. On the negative side: indifference to the enemies of devotion.

## chapter I - sutra 10

anyasrayanam tyago 'nanyata

Giving up of all other supports is exclusive devotion.

Our mind constantly hangs on to something or other. It jumps from one object of enjoyment to another. It constantly feels that if only the next object is had, it will have perfect happiness. This, incidentally, shows that the nature of the Self - our essential nature - is perfection and bliss. Hence, till this perfect bliss is attained, the mind cannot find rest.

No object can possibly give us permanent satisfaction, eternal bliss. It is simply not in the object. Even the happiness that we get from the enjoyment of the objects of the senses, is not really derived from them, but from our own self. Just as there is the period of sleep - the happiest period of the day! - between two periods of activity, for the attainment of that happiness through the media of the objects, even so, after we have got the object we longed for, and after the enjoyment is over, before the next desire arises in the mind for another object, there is an interval. The mind is tired - that is when we feel it is perfectly satisfied! - and withdraws into itself. We are peaceful and happy. Once again we become restless when the desire for the next object arises. This itself shows that peace and happiness are in the Self, and not the objects.

The true devotee of the Lord convinces his mind of this truth; and, naturally, his mind does not long for the objects of enjoyment.

The term 'renunciation of supports' should not lead us to think that we should renounce all the helpers we have in our march along the path of love. "Is not the Guru one such support? Does not Narada want us to renounce him, too?" - one may ask. No. We cannot do without the Guru in the spiritual path. We cannot do even without the material objects, like food, clothes, shelter, etc. These are like the crutches with which the lame man walks. We cannot renounce them all of a sudden. We must develop inner strength, dispassion, to a high degree, before we can be content with chance alms, the shade of a tree, or near-nudity. If these are like crutches, then the Guru's guidance is Light on the Path. Even if we can give up crutches, we cannot walk the path without the Light. We have to traverse strange lands, in complete darkness. Guru's Light alone can guide us. Even if we have attained a high degree of perfection in bhakti, it is not safe to renounce the Guru. There is fear of downfall till the last moment. Even when one is established in God, it is necessary that one should remain there till the body falls - otherwise there may be a downfall. Moreover, one can never be aware of God-realisation, according to Kena Upanishad. One who has really realised God, does not know that he has. One who thinks or feels he has realised God, has not. Hence, at no stage can we renounce the Guru. To the devotee, Guru and God are one - and, therefore, the Ashraya of Guru is not 'Anyasraya', 'Support other than God'.

## chapter I - sutra 11

loka-vedeshu tad-anukulakaranam tad-virodhishudasinata

By 'indifference to the enemies of devotion' was meant performance of worldly and vedic duties congenial to devotion.

The meaning of 'indifference' is made clearer. We should concentrate on what is good and congenial to the practice of Bhakti Yoga, of the love of God. We should resort to good company, satsanga; and we should avoid had company. This is congenial to the growth of devotion in our heart.

In regard to company, there is this difference among the various yogas. 'The raja yogi - dhyana yogi - prefers solitude. The lesser the company around him, the greater is the concentration he achieves. On the contrary, the karma yogi seeks the crowds! His place is among the sick and the suffering, among the wicked, the poor and the down-trodden. For only among them can he develop true selflessness - egolessness, adaptability, humility and the other virtues which form the bedrock of karma yoga. Though, in one's own home, one can practise karma yoga by dedicating all domestic duties and official activities to Him, it is in serving the sick, the destitute, the down-trodden and the poor that the nishkama karma yogi finds his joy and his fulfilment. The jnani yogi and the bhakta select their company - they resort to satsanga.

Similarly in regard to worldly activities and duties imposed upon him by the Shastras, the bhakta chooses those which are congenial to God-Love. Sandhya-vandana and the performance of homa - e.g., the Arya Samajists' daily ritual - and such other practices which augment his faith in God, he does not give up.

yajno danam-tapah karma na tyajyam karyameva tat

Yajna, charity and austerity, should not be given up, but should be done,

declares the Lord. But He gives a new definition of yajna. He exalts jnana-yajna above all others - the gift of knowledge is the best. Therefore, whenever and wherever possible, we should share this knowledge with others. In regard to tapas - austerity - Lord Krishna has a new vision. He discourages the foolish austerities which torture the body and the Indweller. He prescribes the three-fold tapas; and this is conducive to the practice of God-Love.

devadwijaguruprajna pujanam saucham arjavam  
brahmacharyamahimsam cha sareeram tapa uchyate.

We should worship God, Brahmins - whether they are Brahmins by birth or by karma, e.g., those who have studied the scriptures, and who do japa, dhyana, kirtan, etc.), Guru, and the Wise Ones. A word about the last. We should welcome knowledge from whatever source we can obtain it. The human ego often discounts the knowledge imparted by the men of wisdom, by looking into the personal defects of these men. Our own vanity superimposes defects on them, and refuses to admire their wisdom or knowledge. We are the losers. Even if the

hand that holds the lamp belongs to a lowly being, nothing but our own vanity prevents us from profiting by that light, when we walk along the forest-path in darkness. Let us make the best use of that light. The man who holds it may go to a gambling den, and there we part company and proceed our good way. 'Saucham' - external purity is also necessary. We can easily realise its importance by practising meditation one day, immediately after getting up, without having a wash; and on the next day meditating after a wash. Internal - physical and mental and moral - and external - physical and environmental, purity is necessary. Straightforwardness, continence, and ahimsa are all physical austerities.

anudvegakaram vaakyam satyam priya hitam cha yat  
swadhyay abhyasanam chaiva vangmayam tapa uchyate.

Our speech should not only be not ill-tempered, but should not irritate or annoy others. If, by our words, we irritate someone else, we share the sin. Provocation is a great sin. Our speech should not only be truthful, but pleasant and good - these three together only constitute truth. If one is absent, then it is better we observe silence. Swadhyaya is both study of scriptures and japa also.

manaprasada saumyatvam mounamatmavinigraha  
bhavasamsuddhirityetat tapo manasa uchyate.

Serenity of mind, goodness, silence, self-control, and purity of motive, constitute mental austerity. If the mind is controlled, then the speech and the actions are controlled. If the mental attitude is good, then the words and the deeds are bound to be good. Hence Gurudev Sivananda's insistence on 'Be good, do good'. The two go together. We cannot really do good unless we are good. Mere external hypocritical show will help none - such superficial and artificial goodness will not last. Goodness should become our very nature. Then self-control will be effortless.

There are several other forms of austerity sanctioned by the scriptures: tapas, swadhyaya and iswarapranidhana constitute kriya yoga according to Patanjali Maharishi. Yajna, dana and tapah are the three essentials which the spiritual aspirant should not renounce, according to Sri Krishna.

Tapas purifies. Fasting has been regarded as a form of tapas. Its purificatory value, is admitted by even naturopaths and other health authorities. They feel that fasting enables the life-force in man to concentrate itself on the job of setting the house in order, instead of devoting itself to the digestion of the food he throws in. Healing processes are quickened when one fasts. Spiritual aspirants have resorted to fasting as a measure of self-control. A problem which has baffled one melts away after a couple of days of fast. Fasting exerts a beneficent influence over the nervous system and the psychic counterpart, the nadis. Some subtle obstructions which block these nerves or nadis are removed during the course of the fasting; and there is a more even flow of pranic currents through them. The brain is clear and unclouded. There is more energy for constructive purposes, not spent on digestion of food.

Fasting is considered 'upavasa'. Upavasa means 'living near'. Fasting enables us to live near God. The mind is more satwic. Fasting, particularly on days considered auspicious to the Ishta Deva of the aspirant, is highly efficacious. Apart from other spiritual benefits, fasting on that particular day is bound to help him in constantly remembering the Lord.

Similarly, vigil is a good practice for the development of self-control. Sleep is one of the involuntary functions of the body and mind; and to acquire some amount of control over it, means acquiring control over body and mind. The aspirant spends the period of the vigil in singing kirtan, etc. The benefits are manifold.

## chapter I - sutra 12

bhavatu niscaya-dardhyad urdhvam sastra-rakshanam

Let the devotee protect the scriptures even after getting well established in realisation.

'Rakshanam' in this sutra is to be noted. How can we protect the shastras - scriptures? By perpetuating them, by adhering to them. If we protect dharma, dharma will protect us. If we are good, the whole world will be good to us. Hence Sri Gurudev Sivanandas's constant admonition: 'Be good, do good'. These two protect the scriptures, and, of the two, 'be good' is more important than 'do good'. We should first be good, and then we shall do good automatically. Otherwise, feigned goodness will evaporate soon, leaving only hypocrisy and wickedness - the unregenerate nature - in its wake. Goodness must become our very nature. Gurudev Sivananda used narrate a short story to illustrate this.

A sadhu was taking bath in the Ganga. A scorpion had accidentally got into the water and was drowning. He lifted it out of the water with his right hand; the scorpion stung him. He involuntarily dropped it. But, he again quickly lifted it with his left hand which, too, was stung by the scorpion, which once again fell into the water. With a determined effort, the sadhu used both his hands now, and lifting off the scorpion with a handful of water, threw it ashore. When he was laughed at by the onlookers, he remarked, "There nothing to laugh at in this. I expressed my nature, and the scorpion expressed its nature." That is the ideal.

It is natural to expect this in the case of one who is established in realisation. For, goodness is the indispensable prerequisite in a spiritual aspirant. Without adherence to the disciplines laid down by the shastras, without divine life, without righteousness, we cannot hope to realise God. If we have truly led the divine life, and walked the path of righteousness all through our period of sadhana, then naturally we shall shine as an abode of all divine virtues. It goes without saying that, on attaining perfection, we shall still adhere to shastras, or rather we shall be the exemplars of dharma. We shall be living scriptures, living and moving temples of Divine Life as Gurudev Sivananda wants us to be.

We are unnecessarily prejudiced against the shastras. Many still regard shastras as the tools of priestcraft, to help them exploit others. This is not correct. Shastras are the re-interpretations of the sanatana dharma - eternal good - to suit our needs. They are there for our good only. We ignore their injunctions only to our own loss. Because our forefathers followed them, without question, we do not find any rational or scientific arguments in support of these injunctions; but, are not the health and longevity, mental peace and intellectual brilliance, that our forefathers enjoyed, proof enough to convince us that those who adhered to the injunctions of the shastras were wiser than those who demand explanations?

What is sadhana for the spiritual aspirant is natural for the Siddha. Moreover, the Siddha or the perfected soul has a great responsibility, a sacred duty, viz., to set

an example for others to emulate. He the leader, he is the Sreshta. (\*)

yad yad acharati sreshthastattadeva itaro janah  
sa yat pramanam kurute lokastadanuvartate

is the declaration of the Gita-Acharya Krishna. Even if the spiritual leader is above temptation, beyond good and evil, at least for the sake of his followers, he should 'protect dharma'. Otherwise, they will imitate him and fall into the abyss of temptations.

We have Lord Krishna's own example. How wonderfully He discharged His duties as Arjuna's charioteer. He obeyed His 'master' and took the chariot here and there. He bathed the horses after the day's battle was over, and fed them with His own hands. Thus He set an example to us in nishkamyā karma yoga.

The next sutra administers a grave warning.

(\*) meaning: the masses follow the leader's example and his guidance

## chapter I - sutra 13

anyatha patitya-sankaya

Otherwise there is the risk of a fall.

This refers to even the 'perfected soul! Let us recall to our minds the story of Jaya-Vijaya. They had attained to (\*) Sarupya Mukti and yet had a downfall - they fell a victim to pride.

Let us also recall the story of Jada Bharata. After being established in the highest wisdom, he had to take two more births - one as a deer and the other as the Brahmin's son - because of a little attachment to a deer - attachment born of compassion! Compassion was good and divine; but even the trace of moha or attachment proved 'fatal'.

The spiritual aspirant can imagine his position, when even such great perfected souls topple over. There is need for eternal vigilance. I am reminded of Sri Gurudev Sivananda's oft-repeated phrase 'Till the end', which echoes Lord Krishna's stern declaration

*sthithvasyam antakalepi brahma nirvanamrichchati*

When Sri Gurudev was crossing over to Ceylon from India, during the All-India Tour in 1950, we had an occasion to watch the captain of the ship at his post. He explained to us, "I am guided by this compass. If here I miss the course by a hair's breadth, instead of taking you to Ceylon, I may take you to Malaya! With the proper use of this compass, I am able to take you to the Talaimannar pier, even though from here the whole coast looks like a thin black line, and the pier is not at all visible". Shastras are our compass. They guide us. If we deviate from the path, we may land ourselves far far away from the goal we have set before ourselves.

We all know that a small hole or crack in a dam will break the whole dam and cause untold havoc. The hole could not have broken the dam. But it was the pressure of stored-up water that did it. Similarly, in the spiritual life of an aspirant, a small laxity occurs; the strict discipline is relaxed a bit. That in itself was not much; but the stored up papa-vasana - subtle impressions of past wicked deeds or viciousness - bursts, with the help of the hole, and the entire structure is reduced to nothing. Hence the need for eternal vigilance.

Shastras are endless. One is often bewildered which to choose, especially in these days, when the printing press has brought all scriptures into everyone's hands. Hence we should follow the wise adage:

*srutir vibhinnah smritayopi bhinnah  
tatha muneenam matayopi bhinnah  
dharmasya tatwam nihitam guhayam  
mahajano yena gatah sa panthah (\*\*)*



We should walk the path trodden by sages and saints - more intimately, by our Guru. We should be guided by the Guru. That is the only safe path. Guru and shastra are the two eyes that enable us to see the path ahead clearly, and reach the goal.

(\*) after securing a place in the kingdom of God, the seeker constantly meditates upon Him, and thereby gains His appearance.

(\*\*) scriptures differ amongst themselves; the minds of sages seem to differ - the true meaning of righteousness is hidden; that is the path which is trodden by the Great Ones.

## chapter I - sutra 14

loke 'pi tavad eva bhojanadi-vyaparas tv a-sarira-dharanavadhi  
Social customs and practices also may be followed in like matter, to the same extent only as is conducive to spiritual progress. But eating, drinking, dress, should be continued as long as one has the body.

The Bhakta not an anti-social being. He has to live in the world and this means adapting himself to the conditions around him. This sutra amplifies the meaning of the previous one where we were asked to do 'nyasa' of the sacred and secular business that life involves.

There are endless customs and traditions. They are not always good and acceptable to the bhakta. Traditions are born of the action and re-action of the forces of good and evil. Every now and then reactionary forces disturb the eternal fountain of righteousness - danatana dharma. Sometimes unrighteousness seems to overwhelm righteousness. That, too, is the Play of the Lord. For, remember, the Lord describes Himself

*kalosmi lokakshyayakrit*

Here there is no distinction between the good and the evil. 'Loka-kshaya' - ultimately everything has to be destroyed. If unrighteousness alone is destroyed, and completely rooted out, then where is the need for the re-incarnation of God, for His sending us a ceaseless line of saints and sages? Therefore, periodically, the forces of evil raise their head and seem even to overpower the forces of dharma. At such a period, the tradition will be one of unrighteousness! That will not be acceptable to the bhakta. An instance in point is the period Hiranyakasipu ruled and enslaved even the Devas. 'Hiranyaya namah' was the mantra everyone was initiated into. But Prahlada did not follow that tradition, nor was he bothered about the fact that the wicked person was his own father - he boldly worshipped Lord Narayana.

One has to discriminate and choose only those social customs and practices as are conducive to his spiritual progress. The scriptures and his own Guru will guide him to choose the right ones.

Narada hints at a wholesome truth. The bhakta, regarding this body as an evanescent composite of five elements, will not disregard it. That would be committing suicide, a sin. On the contrary, he will protect it, by giving it food, clothing, and shelter, though he will not pamper it, adore it, adorn it or worship it, as the worldly men do. It is the vehicle to travel to the goal. But even here he will not resort to unrighteous means. He will live; but he will live righteously.

## chapter II - sutra 15

### tal-lakshanani vacyante nana-mata-bhedat

The characteristics of bhakti are described variously on account of difference in viewpoints - according to the different schools.

The seeker after Truth ascends the ladder of yoga; and the Lord in His Supreme Mercy and Grace descends to receive him. However much a man may strive, it is ultimately His Grace that enlightens him. We have the emphatic declaration of the Kathopanishad,

yamaivesha vrenute tena labhyah  
tasyaisha atma vivrinute tanum swam (\*)

which, is echoed in the Bhagavad Gita,

divyam dadami te chakshuh  
pasya me yogamaiswaram (\*\*)

The eye of intuition with which the seeker sees the Lord is His Gift. Man may - and must - deserve and desire; but it is His Grace, when it descends, that lifts man to His Lap.

Now, of the many that are chosen - a number which is but an infinitesimal fraction compared to the number of those that aspire or strive - a few are returned as His gift upon humanity. The others are absorbed in the Cosmic One. They that come back to us are embodiments of His Light, His Grace, His Will. Their individual personality had been burnt as it were in the fire of Divine Love, into which they had offered themselves as ahuti - burnt offering. I-ness, mine-ness, desires and cravings, had all been offered in the Divine Fire of Bhakti. Thus was the soul liberated. The liberated soul attained union with the Supreme Beloved, God. Now, God, in Divine Love for all mankind, sends the particular soul back to the earth. What descends is not the old self of the seeker, but the Light, the Love, the Will of God Himself. That this Light enters the individual body and mind is only a matter of His convenience.

That is why we worship the Guru Himself as God. He is no longer a human personality to us. He is God Himself, clothed in a human body.

This Divine Descent of His Compassion is meant to spiritually elevate mankind. God in His Omniscience knows what conditions prevail in that part of the earth where the yogi 'descends'. He knows our weaknesses and our talents, our needs and our intelligence. His Compassion, therefore, leads us from where we are to where He is. Naturally, the path differs from time to time, from country to country, from one group of people to another.

Even certain contradictions - though minor and superficial - in the teachings of the Great Ones, owe their origin to this factor. When humanity swings from one

extreme to the other, the teaching also has to swing from one extreme to the other. We find this in the case of Sri Gurudev Sivananda Himself. To a lazy man who imagines that his sleep is meditation, Gurudev preaches the gospel of dynamic service. He would, on the contrary, ask the man who is working day and night, to withdraw himself from activity and plunge into silent meditation. Both the admonitions are right, and they apply to the particular individual to whom each admonition is addressed. Even if the teacher is 'extreme' in his admonition, the student will very often not go to that extreme; the admonition acting upon his opposite nature will enable him to find the middle path.

Again, the Divine Light descends into an existing vessel. The vessel - body and mind of the saint - had a certain colouring, even before the Light descended. The Light, as It descends, does not destroy the vessel, nor does It violently alter the colouring. Hence, the Light, when It is radiated, takes on that colouring to some extent. We find this element reflected in the teachings of all the great saints.

But, two important factors should be borne in mind here.

(1) The radiating Light is in all cases absolutely spiritual.

(2) As the Light has descended into the vessel because God willed it so, the choice was His; and there ought to have been very good reason for this choice. It is, therefore, logical to believe that when God chooses to send someone back to guide the world, He has taken into account the nature of the vessel into which He is placing the Light.

The views of some of these Great Souls, on devotion, are discussed now.

(\*) the Self reveals itself to one whom It chooses.

(\*\*) I give you the Divine Eye : behold Me

## chapter II - sutra 16

pujadishv anuraga iti parasaryah

Vyasa, son of Parasara, says it is attachment to worship of God and similar acts.

Worship of God's images is one of the most ancient and recognised practices of devotion. Particularly after the periods of Lord's Incarnation as Rama, Krishna and Venkatesa, this devotional practice has gained great ardency.

The devotee who worships an image does not regard it as a piece of stone or as a doll. To him it is the Living Presence of God Himself. He does not even regard the Image as the channel of communication with God, just as for instance an electric wire may be regarded as a channel for the current generated else-where to flow to our houses. To him the image is God Himself. And, such is His Omnipresence that He has often manifested Himself in such images, thus confirming the devotee's faith.

There have been devotees, especially the Saiva Nayanmars, who have regarded that their only duty is to worship God in the images in the Temples. They have not concerned themselves with anything else. The world, they have felt, is His creation, and its problems His concern! Even thus, by setting an example in renunciation and in goodness, they have been a great blessing upon mankind and thus they, too, have served humanity. Their very presence has been a solace to mankind. But they have not taken an active part in the affairs of the world.

The murthi-puja - idol worship - served as a great sadhana for the seeker after Truth.

When the murthi - image of God - is installed in the house, it - God - takes charge of the entire household. The head of the family becomes the servant of this God. Incidentally, it would be of interest to mention here that at least in two States in India, the rulers regarded themselves as servants of the Presiding Deity of the States. The Maharajah of Tehri-Garhwal was but a representative or agent of Badri-Narayan; and the Maharajah of Travancore was the agent or servant of Lord Anantapadmanabha.

Everything that the devotee and his family took was offered to the Lord. Food was His Prasad. Clothes, ornaments, etc., brought into the house, were brought for Him. Everything was for Him; they all lived for His sake, to serve Him. Thus the spirit of self-surrender is generated in the devotee and his family. It involved the spirit of renunciation. Nothing was his, and he himself belonged to God.

The puja had to be performed regularly and never missed, for they would not take food without offering it to Him! Thus, the greatest enemy of the sadhaka - tamas, lapse, neglect and indifference - was defeated. One should not blaspheme against prasada; and one should not taste the food before it was offered to God, either! If

the lady of the house forgot to salt some dishes, they had to consume them, without 'noticing' it! Self-control, at every turn.

The masses have an imitating mind! As they can see only the external actions of these Great Saints, they imitate them, without understanding the internal attitude. Naturally, the spirit gets lost, and the lifeless form remains. The devotee develops attachment to the image of God. Instead of saying that he himself is His property, he regards the image as his property! He values the gold more than the divinity in it. He is worried when a small ornament he had adorned the image with is lost! The spiritual value of the image is lost, and the material value retained, with all the concomitant evils of attachment, jealousy, pride, etc.

The wise sages endeavoured to divert man's mind away from this degradation. So, they proclaimed that manasic puja - mental worship - was superior to external puja. They exhorted the devotee to construct a huge temple within the heart, to install a golden image of the Lord there, and then to offer Him all the elaborate puja he could. This gave the real devotee unlimited freedom, unfettered by financial and other limitations. For instance, we have the interesting story of Bhima's worship. Arjuna was proud that he was the greatest devotee of the Lord. To quell this pride, Lord Krishna took him to the kingdom of God one day, where they found an army of servants carrying away from the altar cart loads of flowers. When questioned by Arjuna, they revealed that they were flowers offered to the Lord in worship by Bhima, who did manasic puja. In manasic puja the devotee can offer a forest of flowers, a cartload of sweetmeats, an ocean of milk, and tons of camphor.

Even this could not apply to all! If the devotee had not the proper bhav - feeling, the manasic puja will not be effective. Either he will be building castles in the air, or sleeping. The external puja had its rigour and discipline; this was given up, but had not been substituted with a proper and effective sadhana. Sankaracharya stepped in at this juncture.

He introduced the para puja. The entire life of the aspirant-devotee is spiritualised. Idleness is not encouraged. The seeker is asked to be dynamic.

Addressing Lord Siva, he says,

atma twam girija matih sahacharah pranah sariram griham  
puja the vishayopabhogarachana nidra samadhis-sthithih  
sanchara padayo pradakshina vidhih stotrani sarvaa giro  
yad yad karma karomi tad tad akhilam sambho tavaradhanam

You are the Self. The mind is Parvati. Pranas are thy companions. My body is your house. All my sense enjoyments are thy worship. Sleep is the state of Samadhi. Walking is perambulating around you. All my speech is thy praise. Oh Lord! Whatever work I do is all thy worship only.

Similarly, addressing Devi, he says,

japo jalpah silpam sakalam api mudra-virachana

gatih pra-daksinya-kramanam asanady ahuti-vidhih  
pranamah samvesah sukham akhila atmarpandrsa  
saparya-paryayas tava bhavatu tan me vilasitam

Whatever action it is of mine, may it be taken for thy worship; prattle, as muttering prayer; the manifold forms of my manual work, as the mudras - gestures - employed in worship; loitering, as going round Thee; my taking nourishment, as offering oblations to thee; lying down, as prostrating before Thee; and attending to all other comforts, as dedicating my entire self to Thee.

## chapter II - sutra 17

### kathadishv iti garga

The sage Garga thinks that bhakti consists in talks of His Glory and Greatness and the stories of His various sports and the like.

Stories are captivating. A moral conveyed through a discourse is often dry; when it is embedded in a story, it is lively. A spiritual lesson or essay is uninteresting to all, except the keenest seeker after Truth. A story or a parable is liked by all.

From the most ancient times, the story-telling method has been resorted to by our elders to impart moral lessons and spiritual truths to the youngsters.

Just as there have been devotees who have reached the goal of life, by means of puja and puja alone, there have been those who have attained Him by hearing His Lilas alone. The foremost such devotee is, of course, Raja Parikshit. Seven days he continuously listened to the stories of the Lord's incarnations, and attained moksha or liberation thereby.

This is 'Practice of the presence of God' made easy. One who listens to the stories of the Lord, lives in the Presence of God. He completely identifies himself with the story; he forgets all else, his surroundings and even his body. It is said that Raja Kulasekhara, when he was listening to the story of Lord Rama, and heard that Ravana had carried Sita away to Lanka, commanded the army to follow him and jumped into the sea, to go to Lanka and rescue Sita! It is but natural that such great bhaktas should attain union with God, by hearing His Lilas.

To others, listening to the Kathas is akin to the Vedantic Sravana-Manana-Nidhidhyasana. The story is heard. It appeals to the heart. Even after sometime, you go on thinking of it - manana; you reflect over it. It generates deep devotion to God. You naturally meditate upon Him Whose glories you have heard; this is nidhidhyasana. What the jnana-yogi strives hard to attain, the bhakta gets very easily.

Stories are of great value, even to those who do not aspire to reach Him through them. They mould their personality.

After all, this is the only criterion of study or hearing. What we study or listen to, must enter our inmost being. It should be thoroughly assimilated. Otherwise, it is useless for us. Constant hearing of the Lilas of the Lord, like the Bhagavata, Ramayana, etc. are of very great value in this respect. Consciously or unconsciously we will pick out some character out of the stories heard, and endeavour to emulate that character. We shall grow in the virtues of our hero or heroine. We shall gradually elevate ourselves.

Last but not least, stories captivate even the worldly minded man's heart; and, in due course of time, even he is turned into a devotee of the Lord, to grow into a



saint.

Incalculable are the glories of Katha - Stories of the Lord; hence the devotees always talk of the Lilas of God and rejoice, according to Sri Krishna in the Gita.

## chapter II - sutra 18

### atma-raty-avirodheneti sandilyah

The Sage Sandilya thinks that it must be without hindrance to the enjoyment of Bliss in the Atman.

The mind is so constituted that it constantly seeks after sense-pleasure. Till we realise the Self, and become one with Self-Bliss, this tendency of the mind will persist. This is the greatest enemy of the sadhaka. At no stage, and on no account, can he afford to make the fatal mistake of letting the mind wander away in the bye-lanes of sense-pleasure.

Devotional practices, from this point of view, are like a double-edged sword. By the judicious diversion of the attention of the mind to spiritual practices, the devotee endeavours to wean it away from sense-objects. And, till God is realised, he shall have to be chary, lest the mind should get stuck to the means at the cost of the end.

For instance, the wicked mind may instigate the devotee to offer the Lord - the image worshipped - all sorts of dainties, to satisfy his palate! Incidentally, this is how the yajnas came to disrepute - instead of animal sacrifice being incidental to the yajna, yajna was made an excuse for animal sacrifice and flesh-eating!

The tantric practices - considered highly efficacious spiritual exercises for the rapid evolution of the soul - came to be similarly misused by the pleasure-hungry sensualist.

Listening to Kathas and narrating them, too, can mislead the unwary sadhaka. He might indulge in them as an intellectual pastime or means of livelihood, and not as sadhana!

There are gross obstacles.

There are subtle obstacles, too. Doing manasic puja, or thinking of the Lord's Lilas, the sadhaka might live in a kind of dream-world, without proceeding further. He might then develop a subtle pride that he is a great devotee of the Lord. This will not do.

Subtler than this is savikalpa samadhi, where the triputi - knowledge, knower and the known - persists. Patanjali Maharishi regards even this as an obstacle to God-realisation.

Therefore, the aspirant is warned by Sandilya to ensure at every step that his devotional practices do not prove an obstacle to Self-Bliss.

The subtle, middle path, has to be carefully trodden. We should ever keep our vision rivetted on God. You will find that most of the Hindu gods have two Devis,

one on each side. We ought to learn a lesson from this: on either side of the middle path is maya. The subtle, middle path is the path of God. By constant remembrance of God, and constant vigilance, we should march straight to Him, without letting our attention be diverted hither and thither.

## chapter II - sutra 19

naradas tu tad-arpitakhilacarata tad-vismarane parama-vyakulateti  
But Narada is of opinion that the essential characteristics of bhakti are the consecration of all observances and activities, through complete self-surrender to the Lord, and extreme anguish in the event forgetting him.

Now, Narada comes out with his own description of bhakti.

The devotee lives for His sake only. He breathes for His sake, he works for His sake. 'Offering' - arpana has a very great significance. It is not as though we do what we like and then 'offer' everything to Him! If God is standing before us - as He is omni-present - and we wish to offer an action at His Lotus-Feet, we will not stray here and there, but proceed straight to His Lotus-Feet, and make the offering. The path of self-surrender is a straight one. It is the path of dharma. Let us make no mistake about this.

Moreover, one who is sincere, one who - for the sake of attaining Him - offers his actions to Him, would take care that the actions are not tainted by sin. If you intensely love God, you will not like to offer a rotten flower at His Feet. You will not like to - or dare to! - do so, even in the case of your earthly beloved - your wife!

So, let all actions be an offering unto God; and let them all be untainted, pure and divine. Let us live for His sake, and His sake alone.

Now, if Narada had left us at that, there might have been a loop-hole. Even as an american visitor told us some years ago, we might be tempted to deceive ourselves that all the actions we do, are themselves offerings to God, and therefore we are karma yogis!

The second part of the sutra guards us against this dangerous pitfall. It is no use busying ourselves in worldly activities, and once in a while saying "Brahmarpanam" and patting our own back that we are yogis. We should constantly feel the Presence of God in us and all around us. We should be filled with anguish if this constant thought-current is interrupted. That is the acid test to prove that we are living for Him and working for Him.

This part can be interpreted in another way also. When do we experience grief? When we remember something which we have lost, not when we forget it! How, then, can we be filled with anguish if we have forgotten God? At best, this can only mean that when we remember that for a day, an hour or a moment, we had forgotten Him - and only when we do remember this - can we be sorry for the laxity.

Does Narada want to tell us that all our miseries spring from forgetfulness of God? If we constantly recognise His Omnipresence, Omnipotence, and

Omniscience, we cannot grieve, we cannot suffer, we cannot experience pain at all. We shall be convinced that He knows our needs - because He is omniscient, and will - because of His Omnipotence - fulfil them then and there - because He is omnipresent. It is when we forget this that we suffer from want.

It is when we forget Him that we err, we sin, or commit mistakes. If we sincerely believe that He is all-pervading, and that He is the witness of even our thoughts, we shall not commit a thousandth of the sins we do commit; and we shall have saved ourselves from great misery.

The devotee, living for His sake, is free from these shortcomings, for he is constantly in communion with God, and never forgets Him even for a moment.

chapter II - sutra 20

asty evam evam

There are such instances

This is more a parenthesis, and an allusion to the existence of exemplars of devotion in its various aspects, explained in the previous Sutras. The greatest exemplars are mentioned in the next Sutra.

## chapter II - sutra 21

yatha vraja-gopikanam  
like the gopis of Brindavan.

The Gopis of Brindavan are held before us as the greatest exemplars of the devotion described by Narada.

Who were the Gopis ?

Srimad Bhagavata says that they were celestial maidens specially deputed by the Lord to serve Him and to be His consorts when He descended as Lord Krishna. They could in their previous human births have been very great devotees of the Lord, practising the highest type of devotion to Him. It is but reasonable to suppose that some of them would have adopted the madhurya bhava - the lover-beloved attitude - towards Him, some the vatsalya bhava - the mother-son attitude, and others the sakhya bhava - the friend attitude. The fruits of their merits had taken them to the Kingdom of God; but they had yet to attain the goal. An opportunity to attain the goal was given them in the Krishna Avatara. Each seeker was permitted to pursue the course adopted in the previous human birth, i.e., adore Him as child, friend or consort.

Since they had already made very great progress in bhakti, they manifested in their birth, as Gopis, the supreme characteristics of devotion. The very thought of Krishna could make them forget the whole world. Krishna's flute made them run to Him.

A word about the flute here. We know that sound has four stages - para, pasyanti, madhyama and vaikhari. With the audible sound we do transmit inaudible ideas and thought-vibrations. It is certain that with the sound-vibrations of Krishna's flute, He was able to transmit a highly spiritual vibration that could touch the chords of the hearts of the Gopis. They felt that it was the call of the Lord, Whom they loved with all their heart and soul; hence, they knew how to distinguish Krishna's flute from that of other cow-herds, and hence they could not resist its call.

These Gopis had to be led a few steps higher, and then enabled to attain union with Him. These steps are found in Krishna's life in Brindavan.

Krishna was their darling; if He asked for it, they could have given Him a lot of butter, all the butter He could eat. But He was fond of stealing. He stole and distributed the butter to His friends and animals. This was a lesson in charity. "If you do not give in charity, I will steal and distribute in charity!" Sometimes He would break the pots and let the butter be spilled on the ground-wasted! He taught renunciation to the Gopis. To give away in charity is good. But, we may not always give with the real spirit of renunciation and detachment. We may give with some inner motive of a 'return' or 'reward'. This may be latent or patent. The

seeker after God must learn how to renounce absolutely. That is why even Gurudev Sivananda encourages what outwardly looks to us to be a mere waste; that is why devotees throw coins into holy rivers like the Ganga. We must be able to throw worldly objects away, as we throw our body away when we depart from this world. We do not care what happens to it; people may bury it, burn it, cut it, or throw it to the vultures. To infuse in them this spirit of renunciation, Krishna would break the butter pots and let the butter mix with the sand and dust.

By taking away their clothes when they were bathing naked, He taught them that it was unrighteous to bathe in a holy river, naked. Also He wanted to remove their shyness. The devotee should banish shyness. Shyness is a great obstacle to the practice of devotion. We must be able to sing His Name and dance. Gurudev Sivananda used to do that whenever he ascended the platform to deliver a lecture, during his early propaganda tours.

I feel that the Gopis could be divided into two groups: the elderly married women, who adored the Lord as their child, and the younger ones who desired Him as their consort. The latter observed the katyayani vrata, for the fulfilment of their wish. On the Kartik Purnima Day, the Lord felt He should grant them their wish. He played the flute from the banks of the Yamuna. The Gopis came running. When the Lord's call is heard, all worldly duties drop away, without any effort. They dropped whatever they were doing, and rushed out. They were literally mad. They did not care if they were properly dressed, if the ornaments were worn properly. They were a picture of the God-intoxicated devotee that Narada has described earlier in these sutras.

Even the Gods watched the rasa-lila - the dance of Krishna. There was no sensual taint in it. Krishna had multiplied Himself and there was a Krishna for each Gopi. Even so does the great bhakta feel: the all-pervading God is there radiant in everyone's heart - and every bhakta feels there is a God in his heart, his own, his very own.

We found how even the Dwarapalas of Vaikuntha succumbed to vanity. The Gopis were not exempt from this! The proximity of God turned their heads. Pride entered their heart. The Indweller knew. He vanished. Now, the Gopis give vent to extreme anguish. They cry, weep and rave. They lose themselves in His remembrance. Now they begin to see Krishna in each other, to see Krishna in themselves. Their personality had entirely been burnt up. They pray to Him. The surrender is complete. The Lord then reveals Himself to them.

Such is the thrilling story of the Lord's Lilas with the Gopis, who were Para-Bhaktas. The play is full of great lessons for us.



## chapter II - sutra 22

tatrapī na mahatmya-jnana-vismṛity-apavadah

Even there, there is no particular reason for forgetting the Glory and Greatness of the Lord.

The Gopis were not unaware of the divinity of Lord Sri Krishna. Specially if we take the view that these celestials who had descended upon this earth in order to keep Him company, were highly evolved devotees in their previous birth, there is no reason to believe that they were unaware of His Divinity.

They were simple, unlettered and sincere milk-maidens; yet from their mouths issue a great Vedantic utterance. It occurs during the rasa lila. When they pray to Him to reappear in their midst, they say: "You are not the playmate or the darling of the Gopikas! You are the witness of the Antaratma - inner Self - of all beings."

They played with Him; and He responded to them, only in order to reveal that He is near, very close, to the devotee. God's Saulabhya - easy accessibility - is revealed in this relationship.

Moreover, it is rank blasphemy to say that they were unaware of His Divinity. They were devoted to Him, about which there is no question. He was the Lord, whether they recognised so or not. He had come with the express intention of protecting the good, restoring dharma, and to grant Moksha even to His enemies ! He was Himself ever conscious of His Divinity; would He have veiled the Truth from their inner sight?

## chapter II - sutra 23

tad-vihinam jaranam iva

Without such recognition or awareness, it would be simply passion of a woman towards her paramour.

If this was not there, then their love for Him would have been immoral. It is the worst blasphemy to say that Lord Sri Krishna, Whose immortal words inspire men to this very day, was Himself guilty of immorality. He would never have encouraged such a misguided affection on the part of the Gopis. We ought to read the Bhagavata and reflect over His relationship with the Gopis, bearing His own words always in mind

yad yad acharati sreshthastadtadeva itaro janah  
sa yad pramanam kurute lokastadanuvartate (\*)

and

lokasamgrahamevapi sampasyan kartum arhati (\*\*)

The devotion that the Gopis had for Krishna was the irresistible attraction that the soul has for the Oversoul.

(\*) the people follow the leader's example and guidance

(\*\*) for the good of society, you must do your duty

## chapter II - sutra 24

nasty eva tasmims tat-sukha-sukhitvam

In such illicit love there can certainly never be happiness in the happiness of the other party.

The immoral woman who is pining for her paramour is not interested in the latter's happiness! She has no such moral sense. She is interested only in her own happiness, and sacrifices her moral sense, all moral code and, often, the paramour's own happiness, to satisfy her own lust.

This was not the case with the Gopis.

Their sole ambition was to please Krishna; and that is precisely why they were commanded to take birth here. Moreover, it is said that they were all united in their eagerness to see that Radha was with Krishna.

There is an interesting belief about Radha and Krishna. It is said that the Lord Whose very nature is Bliss, wanted to taste the Bliss. In order to do so, He had to 'separate' Bliss from Himself. 'Sat-Chit' - eternal consciousness wanted to taste 'Ananda' - bliss. Krishna was Sat-Chit; and Radha was Ananda. Being an integral part of Sat-Chit, Ananda constantly sought the former! One could not exist without the other, as it were. The Gopis, too, instinctively realised this, and sought to bring the two together.

Whatever brought happiness to Krishna made them rejoice. Because, there was no carnal passion in their attitude to Krishna.

## chapter II - sutra 25

sa tu karma-jnana-yogebhyo 'py adhikatarā  
It is higher than karma, jnana, and yoga

A parallel thought occurs in the Bhagavad Gita where the Lord says

tapasvibhyodhiko yogi jnanibhyopi mato-dhikah  
karmibhyaschaadhiko yogi tasmāt yogi bhavarjuna

The Yogi is superior to the men of austerities, men of knowledge, and men of action; therefore, become a Yogi.

This refers to the dhyana yoga, which the Lord was describing. It is regarded as superior to tapas, jnana, karma. Dhyana is common to raja yoga, jnana yoga and bhakti yoga! Therefore, in the next verse, Krishna singles out the devotee,

yoginamāpi sarvesham mat-gatenantarātmana  
sraddhavan bhajate yo mam sa me yuktatamo matah

He, the faithful devotee, who worships me with all his heart, is superior to all yogis.

The two words 'sraddhavan' and 'bhajate' point to faith and devotion. The devotee who has deposited his Antaratma, as it were, at the Lotus-Feet of the Lord, is exalted above all - 'yuktatamah' is superlative degree. It is, therefore, not merely yoga or communion, but complete unity or identification! Narada borrows this great idea from the Gita; and therefore this sutra is of paramount importance to us.

Bhakti is the greatest of yogas for many reasons. Let us turn to them.

(1) The goal of all the yogas is attainment of union with God. The 'sraddhavan' who worships the Lord, has his entire being offered up to God. Whereas the others try to enthrone the Lord in their heart, the bhakta enthrones himself in the Lord's heart! He throws himself at the feet of the Lord and says: "I am Thine, my Lord. I am not, Thou alone art."

(2) Moreover, several great teachers and bhaktas hold that even jnana is only an auxiliary, and an aid to bhakti! Only if you know the qualities, the glory, and the greatness of some one, will you love him! Therefore, they assert that bhakti is the culmination of karma - which purifies the heart and removes the impurities in the mind, and jnana - which enables us to understand the Reality, and the Glory of God.

(3) It may also be that bhakti is superior to other yogas, because it is the most essential part of all other yogas. Only if you are devoted to the Self, will you wish to listen about it from the Preceptor - sravana, reflect over it - manana, and meditate upon it - nidhidhyasana, according to jnana yoga. Only if you are devoted to the Supreme Purusha will you practise pratyahara, dharana and

dhyana, and attain union with Him in samadhi, according to the raja yoga of Patanjali Maharishi. Only if you are devoted to the Omnipresent God, will you wish to serve all and practise nishkama karma yoga. Minus devotion, these yogas lose their sadhana-character. Bhakti yoga is made of this essential characteristic; and therefore it is exalted.

(4) The eradication of the ego-sense is the primary object of all sadhana. The jnani tries to achieve this by self-analysis; the raja yogi by self-abnegation; and the karma yogi by self-sacrifice. However much they try, till the Lord's Grace descends upon them, the little self cannot be eradicated in-toto. But the bhakta, who does total self-surrender at the very beginning of the sadhana, is saved from this ego-sense at the very beginning. Whereas the others, if they are not extremely vigilant, will let the ego-sense grow subtle and more powerful, the bhakta is guarded by the Lord Himself against this danger. The Lord, when the bhakta surrenders himself, ensures that He does not go away from Him - as we have already seen, the Lord is extremely fond of the simple devotee who is devoted to Him!

The well-known explanations - for the superiority of bhakti over the other yogas, are these

(1) The aspirant treading the other paths, is like the young one of the monkey; he depends upon his strength, his will power, and his abilities, to make spiritual progress - this is called the markata-nyaya. The bhakta, on the other hand, surrenders himself to God, calls upon Him to save him. Like the kitten, he mews - repeats God's Name, and like the mother-cat, God Himself leads him, guides him, and saves him - this is called the marjala nyaya.

(2) The aspirant pursuing the other paths is like the man who tries to swim the ocean of samsara and reach the other shore of immortality; he subjects himself to various dangers on the way. The bhakta calls upon the Lord who takes him in a boat - His Grace - to the other shore, and protects him from all the dangers.

## chapter II - sutra 26

phala-rupatvat  
because of its being of the nature of the fruit.

Union with God is the goal of all yogas. The Bhakta almost starts with that! For, when he places his foot on the very first rung of the ladder of bhakti, he surrenders himself, negates himself, reduces himself to a zero. Thus, bhakti is the fruit that is sought after by the aspirants pursuing the other paths, through arduous struggle.

Bhakti is both the sadhana and the phala - fruit! Bhakti is both the means and the end. In the case of the other yogas, the means are other than the end. The jnani tries to negate the five koshas, three bodies and three states of consciousness; these have nothing to do with the Atma which he realises later. The raja yogi practises yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara - battling with the senses and the mind - in order to isolate the Self and get established in It. The karma yogi serves the names and forms in order to realise the Nameless and Formless all-pervading Self. The means are something, and the end is something else. Not so in the case of bhakti yoga. Bhakti yoga sadhana is itself devotion; at the very first step, the devotee says, "I am nothing. Thou art all" - and this itself is really realised when he merges in God.

## chapter II - sutra 27

isvarasyapy abhimani-dveshitvad dainya-priyatvac ca  
Even God hates pride and loves the meek.

On the face of it, it looks as though God also is subject to raga-dweshha! It is contrary to the Lord's own declaration in the Gita:

samoham sarvabhuteshu, na me dweshyosti na priyah  
All are equal to Me, none dear none inimical.

He is the same in all, the same towards all. But just as when there is a cool, pleasant breeze, he who is in the closed room does not enjoy it, whereas he who is on the open terrace gets the maximum benefit; even so, he who is egotistic, who is self-centred and is full of vanity, shuts out His Grace and the rays of His Light; he who is meek opens out his heart for the reception of His Grace.

This truth is dramatically put by Sri Narada in a little strong language, so that it is well brought home to the seeker after Truth.

No one is pleased with our abhimana - vanity. A proud, vain person is loathed by all. Moreover,

abhimanam surapanam gauravam rauravam samam  
pratishtha sukaree-vishta trayam tyaktwa harim bhajet  
Vanity is like drinking intoxicating liquor.

The intoxication produces clouding of the brain, confusion in the intellect. In taking intoxicants, it is a tragic fact that we voluntarily, wilfully and want-only bring about our buddhi-nasa - destruction of discrimination. That is what happens when a person is swayed by vanity. He wants to appear as he is not, and poses to be great. To sustain this, he indulges in falsehood and other corrupt practices. 'Gaurava' - honour is itself raurava - hell. Under its influence, man loses all aspiration to progress in the spiritual path, commits sins, and falls into hell. 'Pratishtha' - getting established in positions of power and prestige, blocks man's desire for doing sadhana; in order to retain his position, he sins against society, himself, and God. He does not think of God at all. Therefore, the devotee should renounce these three.

This is the Lord's creation; it is His House, as it were. In your house, you do not like your servants behaving arrogantly. What do you do when the servant gets proud and vain? You dismiss him. God does not enjoy his privilege, for the whole creation is His house. The proud man cannot be 'sent out'; but his pride has too be curbed. The Lord, in His Omniscience, contrives ways and means of doing this. Failure, dishonour, pain, suffering, poverty, misery, old age, and death - these are His messengers who come to cure us of this deadliest enemy of sadhana viz., pride.

Meekness, on the other hand, is a great virtue. Everyone loves a meek person, and everyone rushes to serve a meek person. No wonder, God loves him, too.

A meek person bears insult and injury done to him. 'Bear insult, bear injury; this is the highest sadhana' - sings Gurudev Sivananda. This is the best sadhana for the eradication of egoism and cultivation of humility. When you are insulted, the seat of vanity is lifted up, and brought into bold relief. Insult pricks this seat! Therefore, you jump up and revolt. The wise sadhaka, on the contrary, should utilise this as an opportunity to introspect, reflect, and eradicate this inner foe; through self-analysis, he can reach out to the seat of vanity and uproot vanity, once for all. We should welcome insult and injury - they do for us what nothing else in the world can - they enable us to come face to face with our own vanity, the target of all our spiritual fight. Once we get this close-up view of our worst enemy, it should be easy for us to do away with him. We will at once discover that, in the words of Gurudev Sivananda, "He only insults your body and your mind, from which you yourself wish to detach yourself, realising that you are not the body nor the mind." Only His Grace should give us the presence of mind to act at the right moment.

A meek person is not weak! He realises the imperfection or the finiteness of the human being and the Omnipotence, Perfection and Infinitude of God. He realises the supremacy of His Will, and bows in humility to It.

That is what God Himself wants! In the Gita, we find that, as soon as Arjuna 'gave up', Krishna actually taunts him, and calls him impotent. He makes it appear as though that for winning the battle, Arjuna must fight; everything depends upon him! Later, after showing the Viswarupa, He says,

mmayaivaite nihatah purvameva nimittamatram bhava savyasachin

I have killed them already; be thou an instrument in My hands.

to complete this Play!

tasmat twam utthishtha, tasho tabhaswa

Arise, and win fame.

Fame, for killing a dead snake! The act is not man's - the attitude is man's. That is the secret of nimittha-bhavana - living as an instrument in His Hands.

God wants us to realise that we are to play our part as mere instruments in His Hands. He is the Mighty Lord. We shall be meek instruments. Then He will love us, protect us, guide us, and save us from samsara.

This glorious truth is illustrated in Krishna's life. He was a friend of the meek. When He went to Hastinapura to negotiate on behalf of the Pandavas, He had been invited to lunch by Duryodhana. But, as He was passing along the streets, He noticed Vidura standing in front of his house. When the Lord questioned him, he said "It is your house, my Lord." Krishna went in of His own accord - this was



the only man who said his was God's house - and partook of a poor man's fare.  
The haughty Duryodhana was taught a lesson already.

Nothing pleases the Lord as simple, meek devotion.

## chapter II - sutra 28

tasya jnanam eva sadhanam ity eke  
Someone says that knowledge alone is the means.

This sutra silences all notions that the devotee is a man of blind faith, foolish in his notions, quixotic in his behaviour, and ignorant of the true Nature of God. No, says this authority, knowledge is the means to the cultivation of devotion; and, he goes farther than that and asserts that knowledge alone is the means to devotion.

The knowledge meant here is not information with which one stuffs one's brain. A man may be a moving library, but yet a big fool. To gain a lot of information is like acquiring a box of matches and keeping it in your pocket. You have oil, you have lamp, you have the wick; and you have a box of matches. That does not mean you have light and the darkness has gone! The oil has to be poured into the lantern, the match has to be struck and, the wick lighted. The collection of the articles is acquisition of knowledge; the lighting of the lamp is acquiring wisdom. It is wisdom that is referred to in this sutra. A man may be a master of all the scriptures and philosophies in the world, and yet be a spiritual illiterate. On the contrary, a man may have very little information and yet be spiritually wise.

Gurudev Sivananda revealed this to a student in Ceylon, during the All-India Tour. "Study the whole of the Gita, with all the commentaries available, and you will become a Pundit. Study one Sloka and live up to the teaching, and you will realise God."

We should constantly listen to the glories of God and fill our hearts with the Knowledge of His Omnipresence, Omnipotence, Omniscience. The knowledge will evoke devotion in our hearts. The devotion will make us draw nearer to Him. As we draw nearer to Him, we will know more about His Glories. Thus we shall reach Him and in due course become one with Him.

It is this knowledge which enables us to realise our own imperfections and the Perfection That is God; this knowledge, which takes us closer to Him, is meant here.

mayi eva mana adhatsva; mayi buddhim nivesaya

That is devotion! Give your mind up in Me; let your intellect enter into Me.

The intellect, instead of standing as a hindrance to our spiritual progress, should submit itself to and aid our love of God. It should be illumined by the light of faith and devotion. Such a knowledge is the sadhana for the cultivation of God-Love.

## chapter II - sutra 29

anyonyasrayatvam ity eke

Others are of the opinion that there is mutual dependence.

The 'mutual dependence' has been taken to mean mutual dependence between knowledge and devotion. This has already been explained in the previous sutra. Knowledge is that state of mind and intellect which - like the star which led the Wise Men to Bethlehem where Jesus had taken birth - enables us to get closer to God. Devotion, in its turn, by enabling us to get closer, enhances and intensifies that knowledge, by clarifying our vision of God.

The 'mutual dependence' may also be taken to mean the mutual dependence between God and bhakta. One great saint has described it thus beautifully and rather boldly:

tadaham twadrite na nathavan madrite twam dayaneeyavan na vha  
vidhinimitam etadanyam palaya masma jeehapah

But for you, I have no other Lord - I would be orphaned; and but for me You have none to shower your mercy upon - i.e., you will not earn the title of God the Merciful. Such is the relationship ordained by fate, Oh Lord. So, protect me.

Though this is said perhaps in a lighter vein, there is a great truth in this. Without God we cannot exist. God is the very substratum of all that exists. And, curiously enough, it is also true that 'but for the devotee, God, the All-Merciful, does not exist!' For, if only our sadhanas fructify, and the theory of karma operates, and if we get only what we deserve - and not what we pray for, justice may prevail on earth; and there is no place for an All-Merciful God in it. It is only because the meek devotee calls upon Him, and, He, in response, showers His Grace upon the devotee.

dadami buddhi yogam tam yena mam upayanti

I give them the yoga of intelligence, by which they attain Me.

divyam dadami te chakshuh, pasya me yogamaiswaram

I give you the divine eye, behold Me.

which enables him to know God, to see God and to realise that God Himself is worshipped, adored, and meditated upon.

The mutual dependence may also be described thus: it is like the mutual dependence of the father and the sons. But for the father, the sons would not be. And, but for the sons, the man would not be called a father, either! But for God, we have no existence. But for the devotees, God would not be either. In other words, God would have been 'forgotten' and would have become as good as a non-entity!

The mutual dependence only emphasises the inevitability of devotion. Since we are related to God thus, we are bound to Him, by the cords of perpetual devotion.

We are closely related to Him, as it were, and are bound to love Him. Nothing can alter this state of affairs. Consciously or unconsciously we are devoted to Him. To be consciously so, helps our rapid march to His Lotus-Feet.

## chapter II - sutra 30

### svayam phala-rupeti brahma-kumarah

**Bhakti is its own fruit thus opines Brahma Kumaras, the sons of Brahma.**

In sutras, words are not wasted; and sutras are not repeated, except in different contexts. Yet, Sri Narada has found it essential to repeat this one idea again and again: 'bhakti is its own fruit', 'bhakti is both the means and the end'. That is verily the central theme.

In the present context, where the sadhanas for the cultivation of God-love are discussed, it is significant that this great idea is reiterated. What other means can there be for the cultivation of devotion? What is the best way to love God? Obviously, to love Him!

This, however, does not contradict or cancel the previous sutras. It substantiates them. 'Brahma-kumarah' in the plural is generally said of the Sanatkumaras. They are the greatest Jnanis, sages. Narada also is a Brahma-Kumara, son of the Creator. It is, therefore, proper to take this sutra to mean that the view expressed is that of the four Brahma-Kumaras and Narada also. These great Jnanis, who were conscious of the mutual relationship of jnana and bhakti, have boldly asserted that bhakti is attained by bhakti alone. The jnana that was said to be the sadhana for bhakti, is not dry philosophic knowledge, but - as was emphasised in the last Sutra - jnana which strengthened and augmented bhakti. The content of that jnana is also bhakti. In other words, that jnana, too, is bhakti only. This sutra reveals the inner meaning of the last one - the mutual dependence between bhakti and jnana referred to there is this - bhakti is soul, and jnana is the body.

## chapter II - sutra 31

raja-griha-bhojanadishu tathaiva drishtatvat

For it is seen to be just so in the case of the King, home and dinner.

These similes belong to vedantic texts! They are there meant to emphasise that by Self-realisation nothing is gained. The Self has always existed as the self-luminous, self-existent Reality. Sadhana does not create the Self, but merely removes the veil that hides the reality.(\*). Sadhana merely purifies the heart, so that the atman can be realised by intuitive perception. That Narada chooses to employ these similes here shows that he regards bhakti and Self-realisation as synonyms.

This sutra emphasises the second view we took of the meaning of sutra 29. The bond of love forever unites the jiva and the Lord. There has never been a time when we did not love God, and God did not love us, and there never will be. Yet, we have been unaware of this, and have uselessly wandered in samsara, loving perishable objects, and seeking the love of mortals. That we love, and love to be loved, indicates that love is eternal, that love is God. The veil of ignorance has hidden this from us. Bhakti-sadhana is intended to remove this veil, and reveal to us that we have ever been in love with God, Whose love alone has sustained us all along.

A word about the similes themselves:

(1) A Prince had wandered into the forest while he was a small boy, and was brought up in a hunter's household as a foundling. He regarded himself as a hunter, and behaved as such; till one day years later, a member of the royal household discovered him, reminded him of his royal birth and took him back to the palace. Nothing had happened to his inheritance except that he had forgotten it.

(2) A man going on a tour, wanders far away from home, enduring the hardships of the weather, sometimes starving, sometimes feasting, sometimes happy, sometimes miserable; till he decides to return home, to enjoy the security and pleasures of his own household. Though he slept on the roadside and railway station platforms during the period, no one had taken away his home. He had only to return to it, in order to reclaim ownership.

(3) Food, when eaten, does not either create new life force, nor appease hunger once for all; it merely removes a temporary manifestation, for the time being.

The next Sutra, clarifies this.

(\*) Sri Ramana Maharishi used to remark that even the statement 'to realise the reality' was fallacious. To 'realise' is to 'make it real'. Who need make the reality real? Hence, he declared that all that yoga sadhana aimed at was to enable the

aspirant 'unrealise the unreality' - in other words, to rescue him from the wrong belief in the existence in the not-Self.

## chapter II - sutra 32

na tena raja-paritoshah kshuc-chantir va

Not by that does the King become King, nor does the hungry man become satisfied.

The prince was heir-apparent all the time. Nothing was added to his essential nature by the removal of ignorance.

Hunger was not satisfied once for all by eating; a temporary manifestation was removed.

That which is Eternal, is Eternal, is Real. It is Self-existent. Nothing can add to it; nothing can subtract from it.

purnamadah purnamidam purnat purnamudachyate  
purnasya purnamadaya purnamevavasishyate

The Full, Infinite, Eternal Being alone existed, exists, and will exist. This is the Ultimate Truth; anything less than this is untruth, falsehood. The great Gaudapadacharya, therefore, propounded the famous Ajatavada - the theory that One alone exists, and that there has never been a creation, in reality. In order to explain the illusion of objective perception, which obsessed the dull-witted, Sri Sankara propounded the Maya-vada. Maya is that which makes the unreal appear as Real, and which hides the Reality. Maya in itself is neither Sat nor Asat, neither does it really exist, nor does it exist not. It is like a mirage, whose illusory existence cannot be denied together.

Now let us take a good look at the three similes.

(1) The prince had forgotten his real nature, had be told by a third person, and brought back to the palace. Only then could he regain his kingdom. Similarly, the ignorant jiva has to be awakened by the Guru. The study of all the scriptures in the world, the practice of all the austerities and other yogas are of no avail, unless this spiritual awakening has been brought about by the Guru. Right understanding of the Nature of God is imparted by the Guru in a word-less discourse, by direct thought-transference, even as Dakshinamurthy did to Santakumaras. It is the Guru that has to awaken the soul-consciousness in us, and it is He who can lead us to the kingdom of God.

(2) Even if there has been removal of the veil of ignoranc



## chapter II - sutra 33

asmat saiva grahya mumukshubhih

Therefore, devotion alone should be clung to by those who desire liberation.

We have seen how Sri Narada equated God-realisation with supreme devotion. Devotion itself has been reiterated to be the goal. Now we are told that devotion is the same as liberation - moksha. That is what is meant by saying that those who regard the end of life is moksha, should cling to devotion.

Another important point is brought out in this sutra. And, that is the place of purushartha - self-effort - in bhakti. Bhakti is not for the weak-willed idiot, who is asked to worship God just because he can do nothing else. Bhakti is only for the person of strong will, who is at the same time prepared - and strong enough - to surrender it at the Lotus-Feet of the Lord. Even though the bhakta adopts the kitten-attitude towards God and meekly accepts His Will, it is obvious that this itself demands tremendous will-power, and also that it is the result of the greatest purushartha - the self-effort that was necessary to do total self-surrender. Narada alludes to this when he uses the term 'grahya' - grasped, clung to. The devotee must cling to bhakti, to the Lotus-Feet of the Lord, to the exclusion of all else. This requires very great will-power, determination, dispassion, and discrimination.

'Tasmat' concludes the argument. Because, devotion is self-existent Reality - and because it is the sole Reality, one should with all his heart and soul cling to devotion.

### chapter III - sutra 34

tasyah sadhanani gayanty acaryah

The teachers have sung about the methods of cultivating devotion.

Narada is not satisfied merely with establishing, the glory, the supremacy, and the importance of bhakti. Like Gurudev Sivananda, Narada wants to give us practical instructions on the methods to be adopted for the cultivation of devotion.

This has been the uniqueness of Gurudev Sivananda's teachings. A seeker once told me : "I am familiar with the teachings of Sri ... and Swami ... . Their writings are sublime and thought-provoking. True. But, I study them at night and get up in the morning and I do not know what to do! They do not give any practical instructions." This is where Gurudev Sivananda excels. He says, 'Get up at 4 am. and Japo Ram Ram". This is much better than all the philosophy taught without this.

Narada, too, is a practical bhakta. He gives us practical guidance.

'Gayanty' has a significance. When do we sing? When we are happy. The sages, who had a vision of the Truth, sang the hymns of the Sama Veda. In instructing the students on the methods of cultivating devotion, the teachers 'sang' ; they were delighted to find good students, and they rejoiced even while imparting instructions to these students. Bhakti is all-sweetness and all-joy at every stage.

### chapter III - sutra 35

tat tu vishaya-tyagat sanga-tyagac ca

It is by abandonment of sensual objects and of all attachment.

The mainstay of all spiritual practices is the eradication of vishaya vasana - tendency to sense-enjoyment. Vishaya vasana is born of ignorance. It invites repetition of acts of sense-indulgence, which again augments the vasana. Thus a vicious circle is created, which it is very difficult to break. The spiritual hero breaks this vicious circle, by wilfully denying the mind and the senses the pleasures they crave for, and at the same time feeding them with spiritual food - study of scriptures, meditation, japa, pranayama, kirtan, etc. Constant reflection over the great utterance of the Avadhuta,

muktimichchasi chet tata vishayan vishavat tyaja

If you want liberation, renounce the objects of sense-enjoyment as you would shun poison.

The vishayas or objects of enjoyment have in them the poison of ignorance - they thicken the veil of ignorance, they kill spiritual aspiration, and bind the jiva to samsara.

The mind must be convinced of this. Even if you are extremely hungry, and a glass of delicious, pure, cow's milk is placed in front of you, will you taste it if you are told that by mistake a dramful of poison has been dropped into that glass? No! When you look at the objects of sense pleasure, remind yourself of this: they are there only to thicken the veil of ignorance and take you farther away from God. They are poison to your spirit.

Has not everything been said when it is said, "Renounce the objects"? Why then, the addition of 'San gatyagat'?

Gurudev Sivananda has said that the heated iron is more dangerous than coals of fire themselves. Similarly, He says, the debaucherous man is more dangerous than women; the company of a gambler is more dangerous than a visit to the gambling den.

How? Through various ways, a man contracts an evil habit. While it is still 'young' in him, sometimes he realises that it is bad. He is hesitant; he is at the crossroads. If, at this psychological moment, a wicked man keeps him company and encourages him to go the evil way, he is doomed. ' But for the evil company, he might have saved himself and abandoned the evil habit. The evil company gives new lease of life to the evil habit.

Sanga can also be taken to mean the contact with the objects established through thought. We have Lord Krishna's wonderful description of how an evil thought leads one to self-destruction.

dhyayato vishayan pumsah sangasteshupajayate  
sangatsanjayate kamah kamad-krodho-bhijayate  
krodhat bhavati sammohah sammohat smriti vibhramah  
smriti bhramsat buddhinaaso buddhinaasat pranasyati

The moment man thinks of an object of enjoyment, subtle, but all the same highly powerful, the link is born. This link is sanga. The mind flows through this to the object. The desire arises in the mind to possess the object or to enjoy it. If the desire is fulfilled, there is immediate destruction of intelligence, with all that it means. If it is thwarted, then anger arises. Man, under the sway of passion - in the case of fulfilment of the desire - or anger - in case they are not), is like one intoxicated. He is possessed by the wicked thought. He is not really himself. His intellect is clouded. Then comes smriti vibhramah - he forgets who he is, what his ideals are, etc. and plunges headlong in the evil. That is why people under the sway of passion or anger act in a way they would themselves look back with shame. This smriti bhramsas is, on the other hand, a spur to the fulfilment of the desire. The force of the evil plus the mad drive of self-forgetfulness combine to destroy his intelligence buddhi-nasam. From this, he 'perishes' - he falls into abyss of sin or evil.

Thought is a ripple. The moment it arises in the mind, then and there is the time to control it. Even when the 'sanga' or the link has been established, it will be difficult to break it, for the natural tendency of the mind and the senses is to flow outwards, and this force of nature would be difficult to stem. To attempt to control the impulse, after the sanga has been established and the desire has arisen, is a superhuman task - it requires God's Grace.

Narada might mean this 'sanga' also. We should guard ourselves against thinking of the objects and thus establishing a contact with them. The moment the thought arises - that is the moment to quell it - we should supplant it with good, positive, divine thought.

Mental action - thought - is real action. This is recognised even in law. Death of another may be caused by (1) accident, e.g., in a car accident, (2) on sudden and extreme provocation, and (3) as a result of pre-planned action. In the case of (1), the culprit is let-off lightly; in the case of (2), the punishment is very lenient ; but in the 3rd case, where the crime has taken good shape in the mind, the punishment is severe. Our smritis, too, follow this rule. The accidental sins we commit are antidoted by the pancha-maha yajnas that we are asked to perform daily. Sins of the second variety can be wiped off by expiatory acts, like charity or fasting. But where the sins have taken deeper root in the mind, the retribution is severe.

Why? Because, the Sastras lay greater emphasis on the papa-vasana - residual sinful tendency in the mind - than on the sin itself. Even the prayaschittas - expiatory rites - in the case of accidental or impulsive actions are meant only to guard us against repetition of the act, which over-leniency might result in. In the

case of pre-meditated sinful actions, the papa-vasana is greatly strengthened; and if rigorous steps are not taken to arrest this degeneracy, soon there may not be a hope of redemption left.

Therefore, the control should primarily be exercised over the mind. Hence this insistence on 'sanga-tyaga' in addition to vishaya-tyaga. One who renounces the objects, but sits thinking of them, is condemned by Lord Krishna as a hypocrite.

### chapter III - sutra 36

#### avyavritta-bhajanat by uninterrupted bhajana too.

'As he thinks, so he becomes' is a universal truth. If one uninterruptedly thinks of God, he verily becomes God himself. That is the ideal.

Bhajana comes from the root 'bhaj', which means 'to resort to', 'to take refuge in', 'to enjoy the company of'. Any spiritual practice that enables us to live with and in God is 'bhajana'. But, we know that it is used to denote such practices as taking or singing the Name of God or any mantra.

There are various methods of doing this: verbal repetition of the mantra aloud, whispering it, mental repetition, the kirtan-singing form, and music - nada yoga. The effect of manasic repetition is the greatest, but the mind is more easily controlled in the following order. In music, mind is easily lulled into a controllable state. Kirtan-singing comes next. There is a certain rhythm and music, too, in this. Then comes verbal repetition - vaikhari. Upamsu - whispering - comes next. Manasic japa - mental japa - is the most difficult from the point of view of getting the mind one-pointed.

In musicology, we have elaborate thesis on the different vibrations produced by different notes. Certain combinations of these notes have been known to alter the moods of men. Recent scientific discoveries reveal that, with the help of certain machines, the vibrations produced by the human voice can be converted into electricity.

It is therefore understandable that the utterance of certain formulae - mantras, gives rise to certain vibrations and consequent electric charge, or psychic power. The ancient seers - Rishis - found that certain mantras gave rise to certain forms - and they are the Devatas. Continuous utterance of those formulae materialises the form of those Devatas. Manasic japa is still more powerful. Gross infra-red light may relieve us of pain in superficial muscles; but subtler x-ray or radium will penetrate very deep and influence even the bones. Similar is the power of thought. Thoughts are more powerful than words and deeds.

Manasic japa enables the Devata to materialise more quickly. It also builds around us an auric fortress, to protect us from evil influences in the first place, and to act as energy transmission centres in the second place. If we have a powerful aura, those who come within its sphere of influence, will be elevated, peaceful, and happy.

We have instances in the lives of our Gurudev Sivananda and of Saint Ramdas of Kanhangad, how the Mantras that they chanted mentally or verbally, were actually 'received' by even inanimate objects and relayed by them.

Mantra is chaitanya - it is a power, a consciousness. It is not the vain imagination of an ignorant person. When a devotee does japa, meditating upon the Lord, and feels that His Divine Form glows in his heart, it is more real to him than the objects of the world. It talks to him and guides him. Sometimes we have instances of the materialisation of the Divinity, objectively e.g., in the case of Lord Rama Who gave Darshan to Sri Tyagaraja, and of Lord Narayana Whose Darshan Sri Narayana Swami had. Both of them achieved this through incessant japa of the Lord's Name.

When the mantra is repeated with a desire other than for moksha, one has to observe the various rules, and also ensure that the spelling and the pronunciation are correct. Tantrik sadhakas lay great emphasis on this. Especially when one uses the Bija Aksharas, it is important that they must be uttered correctly; otherwise, the effect may often be adverse. The sadhaka projects one mental image - the wish - and quite another through the mantra wrongly pronounced. Naturally, there is a 'clash' between the two, which might affect him mentally, physically, or psychically.

This does not apply, however, to nishkama japa - japa done without any selfish, worldly desire, but with the sole desire of attaining Him. Here, the intense faith and devotion that the aspirant has, open up the channel for the flow of Divine Grace and Grace itself, 'rectifies' whatever defects that might have existed in the intonation of the Mantra or in the external purificatory rites that the aspirant might have ignored.

It is said that, every seven years, we are completely renewed, that in seven years all the cells of our body are renewed. Hence, aspirants are often asked to devote at least seven years for a continuous repetition of the mantra. By this period, if the japa has been done continuously, every cell would have got infused with the mantra chaitanya. He would now be the very embodiment of the mantra-chaitanya, the spirit of the mantra.

For doing incessant japa, Gurudev Sivananda has given some effective practices.

He says "Think of God as soon as you get up; from bed; and just before going to bed." If this is intensified into Dhyana before going to bed, then even during the sleep, the remembrance of the Mantra will be kept up by the sub-conscious mind - 'this will require much practice.

He asks us to close our eyes every hour or so, for a few moments, and repeat the mantra mentally, thus renewing the current of japa frequently. This is also a great spiritual fortress for us, and will save us from great sins. In course of time, we shall be able to keep up continuous nama-smaran, even though we are engaged in the various activities of the day. This is possible, even as we go on breathing, though we are engaged in working with our hands. Only intense, sincere practice is required.

### chapter III - sutra 37

loke 'pi bhagavad-guna-sravana-kirtanat  
in the world also, by listening to and singing the glories of God.

Narada in days of yore, and our Gurudev Sivananda in modern times, have insisted that sadhana should not be confined to a couple of hours in the morning and evening. If we do so, and let the rest of the day be spent in giving a free scope to our lower nature to manifest itself, we shall be behaving like the foolish man who tried to fill a bottomless bucket, or one who tried to row a boat tied to the bank of the river.

"Divine Life is divinising life", insists Gurudev Sivananda. The entire daily life must be divinised, spiritualised. A sincere attempt to do so will yield a rich spiritual harvest.

Narada wants us to sing of the glories of God, and to listen to them. He is keenly aware that we shall not be able to meditate on Him all the twentyfour hours of the day. He knows that we shall have to live and move in the world; and he is anxious that we should not be lost in the world. Whether we want it or not, whether we like it or not, the vibrations of worldly thoughts, words, and actions of those around us do have their subtle if surreptitious influence on us. We ought to exert our utmost to ensure that we are not led away by them, and that, if possible, we endeavour to lead others our way.

Gurudev Sivananda has some very practical instructions to give us:

(1) Whenever you write a letter to a friend or relative, whenever you write an article, or whenever you use your pen - begin with a line of Om Om Om or some mantra. This will put you, and he who reads what you have written, into a divine frame of mind. It will be japa also.

(2) When you greet your friend or relative, say "Om Namah Shivaya" instead of "Good morning" or "Hello" etc. If you meet a hundred persons a day, you have unconsciously done one mala of japa. You have also poured the mantra into the ears of a hundred persons, and purified the atmosphere besides.

People may think you are eccentric; in course of time, they will understand you, and appreciate your way. They will also adopt it; and thus you would be bringing more and more people to the divine path.

Another most glorious sadhana prescribed by Gurudev Sivananda is to see God in all. Thus would we remind ourselves of God frequently.

Look at the sky; its vastness reminds you of the limitlessness of God. Look at the lovely birds, the giant trees, the colourful flowers, the luscious fruits, they remind you of God. Think of your own body, its anatomy - it will remind you of God.



But foolish man ignores them as 'natural'! It is all the work of Nature, no doubt. But, whose nature? Nature means nothing. It is a quality. Whose? The universe represents 'God's Nature'. Philosophers who are fond of splitting hairs, have dropped the most significant word 'God's', or took it for granted. Let us remember this; and let Nature constantly remind us of God.

Similarly, to a sincere devotee, everything in Nature is God's Miracle! A moment's reflection will convince us that even the fact that the sun rises every day in the east and sets in the west is a miracle. Birth, death, breathing, digestion - everything is a miracle. The functions of our body, everything that happens around us are all miracles of His Grace.

But the scientifically inclined modern man would assert that they are natural phenomena! Even if an actual miracle - e.g., the miracle of someone escaping unhurt in a car accident - takes place, he will say that it was chance or accident! What a great loss! He has lost one priceless opportunity of thinking of God and thanking Him for His Mercy. Even if it were regarded by others as just a chance, the devotee of God, on the other hand, would hail it as His Grace, and thus dwell in God for a few moments.

To the devotee of God, God alone exists. The universe is His Nature. Everything in it reminds him of God. He talks about God to everyone, and loves to listen of His Glories.

Thus the devotee grows in devotion in and through the world, and is transformed into divinity.

### chapter III - sutra 38

**mukhyatas tu mahat-kripayaiva bhagavat-kripa-lesad va**  
**Chiefly, by the Grace of Great Ones or a little bit of God's Grace.**

We noticed that the verbal or mental utterance of the mantra awakened the mantra-chaitanya. By self effort, the sadhaka will be able to rise to the heights to which the Thought and the Word can rise. But, the Upanishads declare that the Supreme Being is beyond speech and mind.

tato vacho nivartante aprapya manasa saha  
and  
na tatra chakshur gachchati na vak na mano

The mind and intellect fail to reach It. With what then shall we reach It? Narada answers: "By the Grace of the Great Ones."

Therefore, especially because this is considered the chief sadhana, our main effort in sadhana should be to earn the Grace of the Great Ones, the Men-of-God, the Saints, our Guru. This is echoed in the Bhagavad Gita:

tad viddhi pranipatena pariprasnena sevaya  
upadekshyanti te jnanam jnaninah tatwadarshinah

Know That from the Great Seers of Truth, by prostrating to them, by praying to them for instruction and by service.

Service is important. It is said,

mahat sevam dwaramahur vimukteh

There is a door to moksha: it is service of the Great Ones - the Guru.

By service we earn their Grace. Are they, too, then mercenary in the grant of their grace. Are they not sages of equal vision Whose Grace is available to all?

Yes! The Grace of these Great Ones knocks at the door of every one of us. But only those who serve them, who are devoted to them, open the door of their heart for the reception of this Grace. However glorious may the sunshine be, unless we come out of the caves and dungeons, we cannot benefit by it. It is not the fault of the sun, but ours. Guru Kripa surrounds us. But, Guru Seva and Guru Bhakti are channels or doors as it were, through which Guru Kripa enters the chambers of our heart.

Pranipata means prostration. But mechanical prostration will not do. It must be with bhav. The bhavana is one of self-surrender. "I am Thine my Lord" - is the meaning of the namaskara, salutation or prostration. The crown of our head should be smeared with the dust of the Lotus-Feet of the Great Ones. Remember Jada Bharata's Upadesa to Rahugana Maharajah. He asserts that the knowledge of the supreme reality cannot be had,

visa mahat pada rajo abhishekam

except by bathing ourselves with the dust of the Lotus-Feet of the Great Ones.

Therefore, we are told in the Guru Gita

dhyanamulam guror murtih pujamulam guroh padam  
mantramulam guror vakyam mokshamulam guroh kripa

We ought to meditate upon the physical form of the Guru. When we do so, our mind should dwell on the great ideal He stands for, His divine qualities, etc. Thus would we grow in those qualities and become an embodiment of that ideal.

'Pujamulam guroh padam' - worship is not a mechanical process. All our actions, all our virtues, we offer in the form of flowers. The light of our life and intelligence, we wave before the Deity. We earnestly pray that, like the camphor, we shall be totally consumed by the Ideal, leaving no ashes behind. To emphasise this, we prostrate, fall flat on the ground. "I am not; Thou art", "I am Thine, all is Thine, my Lord, Thy will be done". This is an integral part of guru bhakti.

'Mantramulam guror vakyam' - why that is it that the same admonitions which we have heard or read a thousand times, assume life-transforming power when uttered by the Great Ones. Everyone has said, "Speak the truth"; but when Gurudev Sivananda says it, you actually feel elevated and compelled to obey. Why? Because the words that emanate from Him, rise from the realised Consciousness, a Divine Consciousness. Therefore, they have the power to go right into the innermost core of our heart. We should, on our part, have the firmest conviction that Guru's words are gospel truth. Then and then alone will 'mokshamulam guror kripa' - the Grace of Guru - bestow moksha on us. It is said that really Self-realisation does not take a long time to attain. It takes less time to realise the Self than to squeeze a flower in the hand. But, that is true only of one who has thoroughly prepared the vessel, thoroughly cleansed his heart. All our sadhana is meant only to purify ourselves.

That is the other interpretation of 'mukhyatastut'. Bhakti has been classified into 'mukhya bhakti' and 'gauna bhakti'. The first is the 'sadhya bhakti' and the second 'sadhana bhakti'. The first is the goal; the second the means. The sadhana bhakti is for us to diligently cultivate. We should do japa, kirtan, meditation, worship, study of Bhagavata, etc. We should attend Satsang, cultivate discrimination, dispassion, etc. But, 'mukhya bhakti' can be had only by the Grace of Great Ones. Gauna bhakti is for our part; and mukhya bhakti has to be left to the Grace of Guru and God.

But, God is not a whimsical being; if we do our part, sincerely and well, in due time, His Grace will enable us to reach the goal.

### chapter III - sutra 39

mahat-sangas tu durlabho 'gamyo 'moghas ca

The company of the Great Ones is difficult attainment, is unapproachable and infallible.

That really Great Souls, Men-of-God, or Sages Self-realisation, are rare in this world, needs no comment.

On the platforms of India is frequently heard a cry that there should be a teacher for every 20 students, that there should be a doctor for every 100 people and so on. The teacher imparts just bread-winning education, and the doctor treats this body which in any case is bound to perish. There no one to cry for the culturing of more saints, or even sadhakas; they impart education in the methods of winning freedom from birth and death, and treat the very soul of man for the worst malady - ignorance - that everyone is suffering from. Only Lord Krishna has bemoaned the lot of humanity,

manushyanam sahasreshu kaschit yatati siddhaye  
tatatamapi siddhanam kaschin mam vetti tatwatah

One in a thousand aspires for perfection; again, one in a thousand aspirants, knows Me, in reality.

At every opportunity Gurudev Sivananda has exhorted the public and governmental institutions to stop the misuse of funds for the production of destructive weapons, and to divert them to the creation of more ashrams and spiritual institutions which would promote the growth of more saints and devotees.

There is another aspect to this problem. Real saints are very rare indeed. But, many of even these die unnoticed! Rare is a saint; and rarer in the present-day is the sincere seeker after God who resorts to the company of the saints! Both ways this 'mahat-sanga' suffers; company of the Great Ones is an extremely rare phenomenon.

What does Narada mean by saying that it 'is unapproachable'? Surely, he does not want to tell us not to approach the saints!

Except those Great Ones who have been chosen by benign providence to guide humanity, the others disguise themselves, seclude themselves, and make themselves available only to the very best among the adhikaris, who will in any case seek them out. Even among them, only a few like Sri Gurudev Sivananda are easily approachable by all. The others restrict the admission into the fold of their influence to those who have a genuine hunger for spirituality. Company of such saints is, therefore, beyond the approach of the common man.

Perhaps, Narada does warn us not to 'too close' to the saints. There much good commonsense in it. As the saying goes,

atiparichayadavajna santatagamanat anadaro bhavati  
malaye bhillapurandhri chandanatarukashtam indini kurute (\*)

Familiarity breeds contempt. We should resort to the satsang of the Great Ones. We should aspire to be their disciples. But, at no time in our life should we lose the supreme reverence we have for them. We should keep at a respectable distance - mentally in any case - so that the mischievous mind does not manufacture defects for being superimposed on the Great Ones. However close we may be to the Great Ones physically, we should every moment realise that, spiritually, we are poles apart; they have reached the destination which is still far far from us.

The Great Ones are spiritual fire. We need the warmth of their wisdom, the guidance of their light. But, if we begin to play with them, we are playing with fire. Instead of basking, we may be burnt.

This is perhaps what Narada meant by saying 'mahat-sanga' - unapproachable. Great caution is necessary.

Moreover, it is indispensable for every sadhaka. For, it is infalible in the blessings it confers on him. People who say that they can do sadhana and reach the goal by their own effort, without a Guru, are dreaming, if they are not mad. The three 'taapaas' - adhyatmika, adhibhautika and adhideivika - are more real to the spiritual aspirant than to others. The Guru and the Guru alone will be able to save him from them.

Countless evil tendencies lurk in the mind. The terrible fires of lust, anger, and greed, burn in the heart of man. This is the adhyatmik taapa. Neither indulgence, nor violent restraint will be fruitful. The Guru knows how to manoeuvre the sadhaka's mind in such difficult situations. I have seen Gurudev Sivananda handle such cases. What care! What consideration! What wisdom is needed to guide an aspirant who is struggling with himself! Suppression of the desire might throw his mind out of balance. Pampering to it would make him slide down. Gurudev Sivananda would cautiously allow him to satisfy himself; but immediately bring home to him the danger of continuing to do so. At the same time, He would give a powerful turn, and divert his attention to a great positive effort in the right direction. All this is possible only when we have mahat-sanga; otherwise we would either be in the thick of worldly life, or in a lunatic asylum.

'Adhibhautika' - the elements play their own part in hindering us. In summer we think we shall not strain much and promise to make up for it in winter. The winter, when it comes, makes us hug to warm clothing, and feel summer was better for sadhana. The seasons go round; they literally dance around us, mocking at our impotence. Here, the Guru's admonitions and His practical example save us. We see Gurudev Sivananda attending the satsang and to His work day in and day out, throughout the year, unmindful of the change of

seasons. If the weather changes, His dress changes; the Inner Man never changes. We learn this by His example. We could not have learnt it otherwise.

'Adhideivika taapa' - mainly karma-phala. We reap now the harvest of what we sowed in past births. But, calamities, when they come, might often shake the bravest of men. They would throw us away from the spiritual path. The Guru treats the calamity as a passing show, not worth worrying about. We derive strength from the Guru's words; and, after a time, we look upon the whole event and wonder what great fools we were to have been shaken by it. All the same, at that moment we would have been lost but for the Guru's proximity and saving hand.

Hence, mahat-sanga alone can save us. Though rare, we should resort to it at every opportunity. If we have the yearning, we shall get plenty of opportunities. How? - is explained in the next sutra.

(\*) familiarity breeds contempt; frequent visits invite indifference, just as in a forest of sandalwood, the tribeswoman uses sandalwood as fuel.

### chapter III - sutra 40

labhyate 'pi tat-kripayaiva  
Its is obtained only by His Grace.

This mahat-sanga or company of the Great Ones is obtained by God's Grace. It is God's Grace that enables us to discover the Great Ones, and approach them with the proper bhav. It is God's Grace that enables us to derive inspiration from them.

Thousands pass by Sivanandashram every year. How many enter the gates and have His Darshan?

Yet, again, there are many among Gurudev Sivananda's devout disciples who had walked into the Ashram for a cup of water or a glass of butter-milk, and, in addition, got the nectar of Sri Gurudev Sivananda's Darshan and Upadesh - instruction.

Where lay the difference? In the measure of Grace that they had earned.

As Gurudev Sivananda has beautifully put it: God's Grace, too, is a question of demand and supply. If we earnestly pray for it, if we deserve it - by intensely desiring it - we shall certainly get it.

### chapter III - sutra 41

#### tasmims taj-jane bhedabhavat

Because there is no difference between That and Them, i.e., devotees or Great Ones.

Let us take 'That' to stand for 'Grace', which is the immediately preceding noun. We get the soul-elevating interpretation that God's Grace itself descends on us in the form of the Guru or the Self-realised Sage. There is no difference between God's Grace and the Guru.

Or, we may take 'That' to mean God Himself. There is no difference between God and Guru. Guru is God. In answer to our prayer, in response to our aspiration, He comes to us, to awaken us, guide us, lead us to the goal of life.

Three types people into the jails: (1) the prisoner, (2) the jail visitor and (3) the ruler of the country. The prisoner is, of course, there to undergo the punishment earned by his crime. The others are free to go in and out, at their sweet will. They are not bound. The jail visitors console and instruct the prisoners; the ruler does this and also ensures their comforts, and may even release some of them.

Similarly, sometimes God Incarnates Himself on earth; and sometimes He sends the Great Ones to do His work on earth. They are not like ordinary human beings. The human being is under the sway of maya. The Great Ones are the Lords of Maya and are not deceived by her. In this respect, the Guru is also like an Incarnation of God.

Incidentally, it is said that the difference between God and Sages of Self-realisation is that the latter have no power to grant liberation to jivas - also that they have no powers to create, to protect, or to liberate which belong solely to God, just as the jail visitor can only instruct the prisoners how to get early release by good conduct, and how to avoid getting into prison again by moral life; whereas, the ruler can order the immediate release of the prisoner! Here we are not concerned with the latter. Even in regard to the former: the Guru leads us to the very door of liberation, but the Lord opens it! If this is accepted, then the difference is reduced to a nominal one.



### chapter III - sutra 42

tad eva sadhyatam tad eva sadhyatam

Let that alone be made possible; let that alone made possible.

This instruction is repeated twice, in order to stress its importance and urgency. Otherwise, in sutra-literature, such repetition only means the end of a chapter.

This shows what great importance Narada attaches to satsanga or mahat-sanga. We have already seen how Narada himself was the 'product' of mahat-sanga. It is no wonder, therefore, that he holds that as the foremost sadhana, and emphasises 'tadeva sadhyatam'. In addition to the repetition, he has introduced the word 'eva' - alone - to doubly underline the need for mahat sanga company of the Great Ones.

### chapter III - sutra 43

duhsangam sarvathaiva tyajyah

Evil company should be given up by all means.

Narada is extremely anxious about the company that we keep; for, company has a tremendous influence on us. Narada used the feminine pronoun while referring to devotion. The creeper is feminine. It seeks some prop to entwine itself around. Similarly a bhakta or devotee seeks company. Bhakti yoga and karma yoga are practised more in company than alone. Specially till the bhakta attains to a stage when he can consciously commune with the Lord and keep His company - in deep meditation and samadhi, he will want some company. He experiences joy in singing kirtan; and, in order to share this joy and also to keep up his own spirit, he wants others to sing the Lord's Name with him. He wants to talk about God and His glories; but there should be people to listen. Of course, there are moments when he would want to be alone, to 'weep for Him in solitude, to meditate upon Him in solitude.

Now, if at that psychological moment he falls into evil company, then what spiritual wealth he has acquired is lost, and the little ripples of evil that lurk in his heart are made to assume great proportions.

That is the case of a bhakta.

Moreover, let us see why and when man seeks company. When man is bored with his own self, when he is dissatisfied with his own self, he seeks company. Obviously, he is unable to find peace or happiness within himself. He has been trying. This process has gone on for some time, till he got bored. Now, the mind refuses to be indrawn. It seeks company.

This is the moment when great caution ought to be exercised. A slip here might be fatal.

The wicked worldly man, who has been watching the devotee with a touch of contempt and jealousy, is waiting for his opportunity. He knows why the devotee seeks company. He is ready with his goods, the objects to divert the attention of the devotee. A beginner will easily be led astray.

Even if the sadhaka is not a beginner, it is possible that a wrong suggestion given by the wicked man might have undesirable after-effects, much later in life. The wicked man might cry down all sadhana and proclaim the non-existence of God and the foolishness of depending upon such a non-entity. The sadhaka might at that time be able to resist yielding to this suggestion - his faith is strong. But a time might come when that faith is severely tested. In a weak moment, the wrong suggestion given to the mind earlier might revive to the discomfiture of the sadhaka. These long-range after-effects are the most dangerous consequences of evil company.

We hear of the stories of great bhaktas, like Lord Gouranga, who went over to the wicked people and transformed them. But they were able and they were spiritually powerful enough to do so. To imagine that you and I have that power is to invite a moral catastrophe. Let us beware if we have to move among worldly men. It is question of who is more powerful and whose power is greater! If it is the other man's, we are gone.

The word 'sarvathiva', by all means, should be remembered. There ought to be absolutely no excuse for us to resort to evil company. We have Sri Gurudev Sivananda's own example before us. He knows that the mind revolts against monotony. Therefore, He gives us the yoga of synthesis. We do a little of everything and keep monotony away. Note how He conducts His satsang. He gives a little of everything - discourse, kirtan, humour, song, etc. If you want to see a film, see it in Satsang. If you want a music performance, have it there. If you want to witness a dance, do so in satsang. The basis or substratum should always be satsang. This way we can cleverly avoid straying from the path.

We should particularly beware of the worldly man masquerading in the garb of a religious one, and offering us spiritual guidance. His is evil company of the worst type. The devil quotes scriptures. His intelligence might win our admiration and his words might mislead us.

Even in the case of satsanga, we ought to be careful not to let it be transformed into evil company. The criterion is that satsanga must lead us to seek nissanga. Good company must lead us to seclusion. Then, even in satsanga, we are alone - with God only. We should beware of developing attachment to personalities even in satsang - else, it defeats its own purpose.

### chapter III - sutra 44

kama-krodha-moha-smriti-bhramsa-buddhi-nasa-sarva-nasa-karanatvat  
Because it is the cause of lust, anger, delusion, loss of memory, loss of  
intellect and total ruin.

Brick by brick the devotee builds up the mansion of devotion. A single bombshell from the hands of a wicked man ruins it in a minute.

Struggling and with great difficulty, the young man takes the ball up the flight of steps. A mischief-maker knocks it down from his hands; and the ball bounces down in the twinkling of an eye.

Such is the fate of the devotee who is caught in evil company. A moment of carelessness lands him in the bottom of the abyss of faithlessness. Often even the incentive to further effort is taken away.

I remember an incident in which Gurudev Sivananda went 'all out' to prevent a spiritual aspirant returning to worldly life. For once I noticed He was 'restless', so anxious was He. He explained, "I can send money to his family. If he does not want to do any work, let him not. But let him not leave this path. There will be reaction."

The sadhaka endeavours to practise self-control. He is not at once able to sublimate all his desires. Some amount of repression is inevitable. The mind which had thus been 'controlled' is waiting for an opportunity to burst its bounds. Therefore it is that we find that, when a spiritual aspirant falls, he becomes far worse than he ever was, and far worse than a worldly man.

The little desire that arises in him, is intensified by company. The worldly man's main concern is to play upon the weaknesses of the other man. Worldly life is full of raga-dwesa. He who is able to evoke fanatic attachment to something, and intense hatred to another thing, has a large following. In such company, the sadhaka is also injected with kama, krodha, etc. Kama, krodha - lust, anger - are almost synonymous with raga-rwesa - likes and dislikes. When these enter, moha - delusion - follows. This leads to destruction of memory. The devotee forgets his spiritual status, his aim in life, his goal - everything. Then comes destruction of intelligence. Up to this, Narada followed the 'list' given by Lord Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita. And, Narada concludes it with a very expressive expression - sarva-nasha - destruction of everything! When discrimination is lost, dispassion is lost, and devotion is lost, everything is lost!

### chapter III - sutra 45

tarangita apime sangat samudrayanti

Though they are of the form of a wave, they become like an ocean in evil company.

It is not their fault! The evil person is not our enemy. Our real enemy is within ourselves. It is the impure mind. And, the evil tendency at first manifests in the form of a small wave; evil company enlarges it into an ocean.

To take another illustration. Our own vicious samskaras are like live embers underneath. Over it we have let the ashes of devotional practices accumulate. The live embers have not been put out altogether. Evil company is like a gust of wind that blows away the ashes, and then fans the fire into a big flame and conflagration.

This is the reason why we should never try to test our own strength! We should always assume that some evil is latent in us. We should recall to our minds the lives of great sages, like Jada Bharata, whose attempts to attain liberation were thwarted even at the last moment, by a slight attachment born of such a noble quality as compassion.

Gurudev Sivananda has never tired of warning the sadhakas to beware till the last breath; one slip at any time may prove spiritually fatal. The sight of mating fish caused the downfall of a great sage! Then, what is our fate nowadays when we are surrounded by all kinds of temptations and distractions? God is our sole refuge.

### chapter III - sutra 46

kas tarati kas tarati mayam yah sangam tyajati yo mahanubhavam sevate  
nirmamo bhavati

Who crosses the maya? He who renounces company, who serves the sage -  
guru - and who becomes mine-less.

Who goes beyond maya?

He who renounces all company. As we have already seen, this only means evil company. Satsanga is really no 'sanga' at all. In true satsanga, everyone is alone with God, though in company. But, Narada insists on renunciation of all company, as he is anxious that we should get attached to persons or places in the name of satsanga.

Who goes beyond maya?

He who serves a mahanubhava. Here, the number s singular. We should not miss the significance. Once we have elected to be the disciple of a Mahatma - Great One, we should stick to Him and serve Him. A rolling stone gathers no moss. Nor does one who digs a few feet at several places, find water. We may attend every Saint's Satsang, and listen to all; but we shall serve our Guru and accept only His Upadesha as final.

In the Bhagavad Gita, the Lord points to His own Feet and declares, "He who takes refuge in Me, crosses maya." But here Narada affirms that he who takes refuge at the Lotus-Feet of a Saint crosses maya. The inference is obvious. They are not two, but one. The Lord Himself is manifest for the seeker after truth, as the Guru.

Maya is, according Gita, divine, the Lord's own power, made up of three gunas! She is not to be trifled with. The Lord Himself warns the aspirant that she is difficult to get over. In the individual, she veils the perception of truth. She is avidya - nescience; she is the ego; she is the mind. With what instrument shall we annihilate the mind or assassinate the ego? Whatever steps we take to annihilate the ego are thwarted by the ego assuming countless forms. At the base of the very effort we make to get rid of the ego, the ego itself thrives!

The most sensible method of getting rid of the ego, our arch-enemy, is to hand it over to the Guru, the Enlightened Sage, Who knows how to annihilate it. Therefore, service of the Guru is of paramount importance. He and He alone can remove the egoism in us. And, then,

Who crosses Maya?

He who has got over all mine-ness. When we have surrendered ourselves to the Guru and kept back nothing as ours, then naturally, all sense of possession

disappears. When I-ness and mine-ness vanish, then maya vanishes

### chapter III - sutra 47

yo vivikta-sthanam sevate yo loka-bandham unmulayati nistraigunyo  
bhavati yo yoga-kshemam tyajati

He who resorts to a holy, solitary place; he who roots out all attachments to the world; he who transcends the three gunas; and gives up all ideas of acquisition and preservation.

Who crosses maya?

He who resorts to a holy, lonely place. A place where the devotee can commune with the Lord, in solitude, is a holy place. And, a holy place - e.g., that associated with some aspect of God, or the life of some Great Saint or Yogi - is conducive to the attainment of the proper frame of mind quickly. This aspect of sadhana is emphasised by the Lord in the Gita.

viviktasevi laghvasi  
viviktadesa sevitwam aratir janasamsadi

The devotee does not have plurophobia; he is not afraid of the crowd. He is not afraid to mix with others. But, he is not moved by desire to resort to company for sense-gratification. Even if he is surrounded by a crowd, he lives in his own world. He enjoys solitude, wherever he is. Wherever he is is a holy place. But, till we reach that stage, it is better to make a positive effort to go to solitude. Moreover, even if we are unaffected mentally by the crowd, the din and bustle of a city, they do have a subtle enervating effect on our system. The distractions would make it impossible for us to meditate upon God. Why? It is difficult even to think sublime thoughts in the noisy bazar. Great thoughts, great inventions, and great works of art, are always born in solitude.

Who crosses maya?

He who roots out all attachment to the world. Merely chopping off the branches will not kill a tree. It has to be uprooted. Lord Krishna has manufactured a wonderful axe with which to fell the tree of samsara. It is non-attachment. With the sword of non-attachment, we should sever all connections with the world. God created this world. God maintains it. God knows what is to be done, when and where. Hence, we shall not overstep our bounds, but merely do our duty as an instrument in the hands of God, and avoid getting attached to anything or anybody in the world.

Who crosses maya?

He who goes beyond the three gunas - natural qualities. This is quite obvious. In the Gita it said that maya is made up of three gunas. He who wants to go beyond gaya, naturally goes beyond the three gunas. He eradicates tamas - inertia - by deliberately promoting rajas - dynamism - and becoming dynamic. Then he sublimates rajas into satwa, by saturating himself with satwa - purity. Satwa is



also a bondage; it is golden shackle. But, the devotee, by surrendering himself wholly to the Lord, is enabled by the Lord Himself to transcend this Guna also.

Who crosses maya?

He who renounces all desire to acquire and preserve. God created the world and maintains it. The bhakta knows that God is omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient. God knows the devotee's needs before the bhakta is aware of them. He is present everywhere, and can therefore fulfil these needs anywhere; and He is Omnipotent, and therefore there can be no question of His ability to do so. In fact, the devotee knows that, whether he assumes responsibility for the family or society, or hands it over to the Lord, it is He and He alone Who is looking after the entire creation? For example, isn't he a fool who tries to speed up a railway train by relieving it of the burden of his suit-case and carries it over his head, while he is himself in the railway compartment? In any case, it is the railway train that carries the load. Realising this, the devotee is not at all bothered about what is given to him; and is not worried over the protection of what has been given to him. It is all His responsibility. The bhakta is resigned to the Will of the Lord, or his own prarabdha, and lives an active life, treating his actions as worship of the Omnipresent God.

### chapter III - sutra 48

yah karma-phalam karmani sanyasyati tato nirdvandvo bhavati  
He who renounces the fruits of his actions, and who renounces all actions,  
goes beyond the pairs of opposites.

The entire gospel of the Bhagavad Gita is condensed into this one sutra. The Yoga of the Bhagavad is taught here.

Who crosses maya?

He who renounces the fruits of actions. That is the most sensible thing to do! If you reflect a little over this, you will agree that in reality what we do has no relation to what we achieve! We see this in our everyday life. The sanskrit equivalent to the word 'luck' is 'adrishtam'. It is the unseen power bestowing what it wills upon us. This unseen power is the fructification of our own past karma.

Two boys prepare themselves for the examination. One does not study and wastes most of his time. Just the previous night, he glances through the text; he is able to read only a few pages. The question-paper has questions only relating to those few pages; he has no difficulty in answering them. He passes the examination.

The other boy studies well. But just before the examination, he is laid up with fever. Even if he attends the examination, his mind gets puzzled. Even if he has been able to answer some questions, the mood of the examiner is spoilt by his wife. So many odds against the boy; perhaps he fails.

How are the results related to the actions themselves? Their past karma governed the fruits. It is like the functioning of this typewriter on which I work now. When I touch a particular key, a particular type is raised. Several levers come into operation. Similarly, when the boy sits for his examination, the relative key - that past action which is to bear fruit - operates, and the immediate connecting lever - viz., the exam - is just incidental! The result mainly accrues from the original action, not the immediate action; the latter is only incidental, and the connecting link.

Therefore, the seeker after truth who renounces the fruits of actions alone is wise. The man who expects a particular result to accrue from an action commits a mistake; and, of course, he asks for disappointment. How can one know what the Lord's Will or the effect of past karma will be? If it is favourable, then we feel happy that our action has been successful. If it is not, we blame ourselves and often others for the failure. We grieve.

The sanyasi - one who renounces the fruits of actions, and does not relate the action to its fruits - goes beyond the three-fold classification of desirable, undesirable and mixed results. To him everything is welcome. He knows that whatever happens is only the working out of past karma. The expenditure of the

force of past karma makes him rejoice always; for, he knows that he will attain liberation once this force is spent.

'Karmani sanyasyati' should be taken to mean - not renunciation of actions, but offering of actions at the Lotus-Feet of the Lord. Performance of actions as duties, motivelessly, selflessly, and egolessly, is the ideal. But, people often find it difficult to believe that it is even possible to act thus! One cannot till he becomes one with the Lord's Will - work motivelessly, selflessly and egolessly. Till then we have to entertain good motives, strive to feel constantly that we are but instruments in His Hands, and endeavour to work, not for our own selfish good, but for the good of all. But, this is not liberating action! Since, we have not completely detached ourselves from the action, it is bound to recoil on us. The wise seeker, therefore, offers the actions as flowers of worship of the Lord. Now, the bondage is cut.

How can we know if we are sincere in this 'offering'? This philosophy might often be made a cover for committing sinful deeds and then 'offering' them to the Lord! The test of sincerity here will come when we are faced with the consequences. Are we prepared to take any consequence, coolly, cheerfully and devoutly, welcoming it as God's Will? Then we have achieved some measure of success. After offering the actions as worship of the Lord, we shall not think of them, boast about them, nor even feel proud of what we have done. Then the offering has been true and sincere. We are well on the way to liberation.

If we are successful in this sadhana, we shall naturally go beyond the pairs of opposites. We shall greet every experience as the Grace of the Lord. There will be nothing in our life which will give us pain. Pain, dishonour, failure, even these will be to us the manifestations of His Grace. What we welcome is always pleasurable. To the mountaineer, severe cold, hunger and difficult, risky, and dangerous climbing is pleasant, because he welcomes them! Pain has become pleasure, and pleasure is of course taken in our stride. Then, where is pain for us? That is why it is said that the devotee is always happy. He has crossed this illusion of pairs of opposites - he has crossed maya.

### chapter III - sutra 49

yo vedan api sanyasyati kevalam avicchinnanuragam labhate  
He who renounces even the vedas; and attains only uninterrupted  
devotion.

The frequent repetition of this thought reveals the truth that in those days people had unshakable faith in the Vedas and in Vedic injunctions. Anyone, who questioned the authority of the Vedas was regarded as a heretic and excommunicated. Anyone who failed to perform vedic rites and rituals was condemned. Hence, this repetition of the saving clause,

Who crosses Maya?

He who renounces even the Vedas. 'Trigunya vishaya vedah' - the Vedas deal with the three qualities, says the Lord in the Gita. At another place, He says, 'Gunamayi mama maya' - My Maya is of three gunas. Reading these two together, we get the interpretation that he who wants to go beyond the three gunas - maya - will perforce have to go beyond the Vedas, too. Moreover, Vedas only promise swarga - the pleasures of heaven. The bhakta is not interested in them. He does not want to go to heaven. He wants God and nothing else. Therefore, he does not engage himself in vedic rites and rituals.

Merely renouncing vedic rites and rituals will not bestow moksha on anyone. It will only lead to a downfall. It will only mean gross, unpardonable and sinful neglect of one's duties. In fact, vedic injunctions are not want only renounced by the devotee. In the single minded, uninterrupted devotion to God which occupies his whole heart, worldly duties drop away. This is an important point to be borne in mind. The devotee does not escape from worldly duties; he is engaged in more intense practice of real sadhana viz., ceaseless remembrance of God.

### chapter III - sutra 50

sa tarati sa tarati lokams tarayati  
He crosses; he enables others to cross.

He crosses maya. Verily, he crosses maya. The repetition gives emphasis; beyond doubt such a devotee crosses maya.

There are many types of devotees who cross this ocean of samsara. Some struggle to reach the other shore; it would be a great achievement if they made it.

Some are strong enough to save one or two drowning souls, and help them cross to the other shore.

There are others who, like a small boat, take a few people along with them to the other shore. They are the great Acharyas, the spiritual leaders.

Yet others there are who enable vast numbers of people to cross the ocean of samsara - birth and death. They are like big ocean-going vessels. The Avatars of the Lord, like Sri Rama, Sri Krishna, etc., are such.

This classification is also alluded to by the repetition of the phrase 'sa tarati'.

But, even if the devotee is just an aspirant who struggles along to the other shore - God-realisation, even he enables some others to cross the ocean of samsara, though indirectly. His example inspires some others and they, too, take to the path of devotion. Though the devotee does not have a direct hand in the spiritual evolution of the others, they evolve due to his influence. Even an ordinary bhakta is a great benefactor of humanity.

## chapter IV - sutra 51

anirvacaniyam prema-svarupam  
The nature of Divine Love is indescribable.

How do we describe any object in the world? By comparing and contrasting it with some other object. A thing or an experience is described by comparing it to something else or some other experience with which we are familiar. To what shall we compare Divine Love? There is no feeling, emotion, or experience in the world that can come up to this Divine Love.

As the next sutra declares, those who have experienced Divine Love, have found themselves in the position of a dumb man who has tasted the sweetness of sugar-candy.

Yet, those who have tasted Divine Love could not contain themselves. They had to proclaim to the world the glory of Divine Love. Therefore, we find the strange paradox: we are told that Divine Love is indescribable, and yet we find that countless saints and sages have ceaselessly spoken about Divine Love and sung its glories.

They have tried to draw near-parallels. And, they have been misinterpreted. They found that the ordinary man-of-the-world could understand the nature of human love. The highest degree of love was that of union of husband and wife. Therefore, they said, "The union of the devotee with God is something like that". The impure human mind has clung to the comparison and refused to rise to the ideal. When a comparison is given, when an illustration is cited, it is intended only to indicate the truth; both can never be identical. Where is the base lustful union; and where is Divine Love?

In order to guard against this perversion have other sages adopted the negative definition of Neti-Neti - not this, not this.

The next sutra tellingly describes this state.

## chapter IV - sutra 52

mukasvadana-vat  
like the dumb man's experience of taste.

The dumb man eats a delicious dish. He is full of happy feeling. He wants to tell you how wonderfully sweet it is, in order to make you share it with him. But he is dumb. He is unable to express himself.

Similar is the state of the sage of Self-realisation. He experiences absolute Bliss. But that Bliss is inexpressible. Language can only express relative things or ideas, experiences within the limited range of relativity. Language is powerless when confronted with the transcendental experience. The snake cannot swallow its head. Hence, ashamed, 'speech and mind return from it, unable to grasp it or express it.'

The language of advaita - non-dualism - is silence. The language of the Absolute is silence. When you even open your mouth, there is dvaita or duality already. The devotee who has become one with Him knows no such duality - the parting of the two lips. Therefore that Supreme Love and the divine experience of God-realisation - which are identical - are indescribable.

Look at the dumb man when he tastes the delicacy. You see the joy, the light, and the delight in his eyes, on his face. What the appearance of the face is, cannot be explained either! But, you know he is happy. You know that he has tasted something which has made him very happy. And then you also partake of the dish and experience the same joy. Similarly, when you see a sage of God-realisation, you discover that he has had an experience which enables him to be unruffled and cheerful in all conditions. That experience itself, he cannot describe nor communicate to you. But he indicates the path. "Practise devotion to the Lord," he says. If you do that - and the exalted stage of the sage inspires you to do so, then you will experience that state of supreme bliss yourself.

## chapter IV - sutra 53

prakasyate kvapi patre  
It shines in some vessel.

Once we clearly grasp the truth that this ineffable experience of supreme devotion or communion with God is beyond the intellect and speech, we immediately understand why it is that 'one in thousands strives to attain perfection, and even among those who strive, one in thousands attains it'. The struggle is arduous. The path is thorny. The pitfalls are many. One has to proceed blind-fold, in a strange domain, guided by one who himself cannot describe the way but can only lead us by the hand. If the aspirant does total unreserved self-surrender to the Lord, the path becomes smooth and easy to tread. But such self-surrender is very difficult of achievement. If one has perfect faith in and devotion to the Guru, the path becomes smooth and easy to tread. But the imperfect human mind refuses to do that

Therefore it is that this light of supreme devotion shines in 'some rare vessel', somewhere, at some time. The upanishadic utterance 'yamaivaisha vrunute tena labhyah' sounds arbitrary! 'The Atman chooses Its knower!' We cannot discover the Atman by reason; nor can we, therefore, reason out the 'behaviour' of the Atman or God. The divine laws are not arbitrary, unreasonable or unjust. Only, we do not understand them. Therefore, they appear to be strange and mysterious to us.

'Prakashate' is a significant word. Devotion illumines the vessel - the heart in which it is found. The devotee need not wear an external mark to advertise his devotion. Devotion itself will shine in and through him. We can recognise it. It will express itself through his inspiring and noble words and deeds. This sutra guards us against some charlatans who profess to be 'devotees of the Lord, at heart' who 'do not show-off their inner nature'. 'Prakashate' - it shines. And they cannot help the light shining through them. If it does not, reject him; if he is undivine in his words and deeds, reject him.



## chapter IV - sutra 54

guna-rahitam kamana-rahitam pratikshana-varadhanam avicchinnam  
sukshma-taram anubhava-rupam

Because it is devoid of all attributes, devoid of desires, growing every moment, unbroken, extremely subtle and of the nature of direct, immediate experience.

Pure devotion or para-bhakti is beyond the three gunas - satwa, rajas and tamas. We are all conditioned by these three gunas. The path lies through satwa; but unless even satwa is transcended, one cannot experience para-bhakti. Satwa earns His Grace for us. His Grace alone can lift us above satwa. The man of satwa alone can do total self-surrender and then wait for the Grace to liberate him. Nature is extremely economical in producing Gunatitas - they who have gone beyond gunas! They are found 'somewhere, at some time'.

Again and again, we are told that bhakti is diametrically opposed to kamana or desire. It is based on the recognition of Fullness, Infinitude and Perfection in God, and is the very opposite of desire. The seeker realises that in God attained through para bhakti, all his desires are automatically fulfilled, in the sense that all of them vanish. Desires are thinned out when the senses are 'starved' by the mind refusing to feed them with gratification - on account of spiritual awakening; and they vanish when the Supreme Being is seen, or para -bhakti is attained. Hence, the extreme rarity of one who has attained this state.

The insincerity of persons who proclaim that they have been devotees of the Lord for a long time, but that God has not blessed them, is exposed by the expression 'pratikshana vardhamanam' in this sutra. Devotion grows in intensity every moment. Is that the case with those people? In fact, their very grumbling reveals that they have never had any real devotion to the Lord, and that even if they had a ray of devotion, it had faded out! True love does not ask for anything; and it grows in intensity every moment. It is, therefore, bound to shine through the vessel into which it has descended.

Nor does grow it by fits and starts! Hence it is opposed to the symptoms of hysteria often mistaken for devotion. There is not one moment in the devotee's life when devotion is absent. Let us beware of the devotee who leads an undivine life, till he is called upon by expediency to demonstrate his devotion, for public entertainment, and who 'grows every day' in this art! Devotion has an unbroken, constant growth in the sadhana.

'Sukshma-taram' underlines this still further. Devotion is an extremely subtle state of the inner being of the bhakta. It has nothing whatsoever to do with the external marks that the devotee may or may not have on his person. It is not demonstrable in itself; though, as we have already been told, we cannot mistake a devotee of the Lord when we meet one.

The next definition is a stern warning to the sadhaka himself. We, the devotees of the Lord, should not deceive ourselves or attempt to deceive others, by showing-off our 'devotion'. True devotion is of the nature of anubhava. It is an inner experience. We have the inspiring examples of great devotees of the Lord that this experience, too, is two-fold. When they are conscious that they are apart from the Lord, when they have the individual-consciousness, they are burnt by viraha! They cry out that they are full of defects, ignorant, and miserable. This intense yearning to commune with the Lord burns up the ego, and enables them to have the anubhava or inner experience of the Presence of God. Since the ego is virtually absent now, the experience is one of Divinity as It is; now they know that God is Truth, He is Perfect, Omniscient and All-Blissful. He is Perfect, not I! When the 'I' is present, viraha is experienced. When the 'I' vanishes, well, He and He alone exists. "His Perfection is not my virtue!" When he returns to normal worldly consciousness, he is once again in viraha. He has not a single moment in his life when he could rest on his ears. If he does, he is not a devotee but a religious pedlar.

## chapter IV - sutra 55

tat prapya tad evavalokayati tad eva srinoti tad eva bhashayati tad eva cintayati

Attaining it, one sees it alone, hears that alone, speaks of that alone, and thinks of that alone.

This is the characteristic of nishtha - total dedication. This is the pre-requisite for God-realisation. It is the sign of a purified heart, sublimated emotions, controlled mind and subdued senses. For, only in such a state of our inner being will we with all our heart and soul, wish only for God and for nothing else. Love of God is all-consuming divine passion; if it has truly entered the heart, it will burn up all other desires in the heart. As we have seen earlier, it is this Love itself, by a process of annihilation of the little lower self, that shines as God-realisation. Hence the insistence upon nishtha.

We delight to see what we love, and we turn our eyes away from that which we do not love. The devotee loves to see God always. He practises the different modes of bhakti. And, he practises the vibhuti yoga. He ignores the names and forms, and perceives the hidden Divinity in all beings. The devotee's supreme passion for seeing Him alone and naught else is beautifully illustrated in the story of Bilwamangal; after he had a vision of the Lord, he pulled his fleshy eyes away so that they might not see wordly objects. This is not insanity, but insurance against a downfall. Patriots have cut off their tongues to prevent themselves from revealing their country's secrets to the enemy, even under extreme torture.

He hears that alone. He loves to. He avoids gossip and wordly topics. He runs to where the Lord's leelas are sung, where devotees gather to talk of Divine Love.

He himself constantly speaks of That. He thinks of That alone. For, he has realised that That alone is the reality and that all else is unreal. Why waste breath on illusory phenomena? Why let the mind run after the shadow? With all his being he loves God. With all his being, he yearns to attain Him. He cares for naught else, even as an extremely greedy miser cares for naught other than wealth; only the spiritual yearning is far deeper and blissful door to liberation.

## chapter IV - sutra 56

### gauni tridha guna-bhedad artadi-bhedad va

The secondary devotion is of three types, based on differences in gunas or on differences of aartha etc. - i.e., aartha, jignasu, artharthi, jnani.

Para bhakti or supreme devotion has been elaborately described and dealt with. The para bhakta is the jnani, the greatest yogi, who does not exist as an individual, but as God on earth. That is the goal or perfection.

But there is a secondary bhakti or devotion which is within the realm of the three gunas - satwa, rajas and tamas. This bhakti is of three types - satvic, rajasic and tamasic - and there are distinct differences between them.

Briefly,

A tamasic bhakta performs upasana or practises bhakti of this secondary type, for bringing harm to others. He is the devil's disciple; he is brought in to exemplify the lowest category of bhakta, only because he resorts to upasana - and not to physical violence or criminal ways - to achieve his nefarious object.

A rajasic bhakta's sole aim in resorting to upasana is to gain something for himself. He has desires, as distinct from the para bhakta who has none; but he seeks to fulfil those desires, not by resorting to foul means, but by praying to the Lord to fulfil those desires. In due time, there is a chance that this bhakti will be turned satvic. When his desires are granted by the Lord, he will discover that their fulfilment cannot give him his permanent happiness, which can be had only in the annihilation of desires and attainment of God-realisation.

A satvic bhakta's love of God is completely motiveless. He can't help loving God! It is his nature. Therefore, there is no veil of selfishness or impurity in his devotion. He is a paroksha jnani, one who is firmly, convinced of the existence of God as one's own Self, on account of his study of scriptures, Guru's upadesha, etc. This, in good time, leads to para bhakti or aparoksha jnana, or direct immediate experience.

The other classification of bhaktas - aartha, gnasu, artharthi and jnani. Aartha wants relief from suffering. Artharthi wants wealth. But they seek it from God. Jignasu wants knowledge from God. The jnani is one who knows, and he is, therefore, of the superior type among these four, and his bhakti is para-bhakti.

## chapter IV - sutra 57

uttarasmad uttarasmat purva-purvo sreyaaya bhavati  
Each previous one is better than the succeeding one.

Among the satwic, rajasic and tamasic modes of devotion, the satwic is better than the rajasic, and the rajasic is better than the tamasic type.

Progressive purification of the heart and mind leads progressive ennoblement of the character of bhakti itself.

When we adopt the other classification, we have first to re-arrange the four, to suit the meaning of the sutra to the Lord's own exaltation of the jnani bhakta. In which case the jnani will come first, then the jignasu, then artharathi and then the aartha. One who prays for relief from pain completely misses the meaning of pain. "Pain is God's own messenger", says Gurudev Sivananda. "Pain is a blessing in disguise. It makes you think of God. It instils mercy in your heart. It turns your mind away from God." No one who has understood this clearly will run away from pain. The artharathi is superior in that he asks for something positive; and, since he gets that wealth from God Himself, through prayer, there is a chance that he will utilise it for dharmic - righteous - purposes. 'Dhanaad-dharmah tatah sukham.' A Jignasu or a seeker after real knowledge obviously excels them; and, the jnani, according to the Lord Himself, is the best among them.

## chapter IV - sutra 58

anyasmat saulabhyam bhaktau  
Bhakti is easier than the others.

Love is more natural to all beings than the other aspects. Therefore, God is approached more readily, easily and rapidly by the path of Love than the path of metaphysical speculation - jnana yoga, mystic experience - raja yoga, etc.

Jnana yoga demands a mighty, keen and powerful intellect, which can split a hair a thousand-fold and yet regret that the one-thousandth part is gross. For the five koshas - annamaya kosha, pranamaya kosha, manomaya kosha, vijnanamaya kosha, and anandamaya kosha, have to be actually 'seen' if they are to be pierced through and the Atman realised. An intellectual understanding of them will only remain a dead-weight.

Success in the practice of raja yoga depends upon the preparedness of the seeker. It may take us several births to get established in yama-niyama. But, till we are perfect in yama-niyama, we may get sleep when we attempt to meditate, not samadhi!

We have to beware of obstacles in yoga. Even the psychic experiences in yoga are regarded as obstacles to the attainment of perfection. But, in bhakti, on account of the very nature of love, there are no obstacles. It is common knowledge that a lover regards all obstacles as challenges to his own sincerity and ardent love, and they only augment his love. Moreover, at every stage, the bhakta receives God's Grace in abundance, which removes all obstacles.

## chapter IV - sutra 59

pramanantarasyanapekshatvat svayam pramanatvat  
Because, being self-evident, it does not require a proof.

God exists. This is boldly and unequivocally declared by all sages and saints. Just as we do not ask for proof of our own existence, just as our hunger does not depend upon another's confirmation or denial, God exists, and His existence is self-evident.

In the same way, when bhakti or supreme love exists in our heart, we shall experience its presence; no other proof will be needed.

Thus, the goal and the path in bhakti yoga are self-evident, and their comprehension presents no difficulty at all. Whereas, in the other paths, such difficulties do arise. One has clearly to grasp the distinction between jnana, ajnana and vipareeta-jnana, paroksha jnana and aparoksha jnana. One should know the distinction between jada samadhi and chaitanva samadhi. One should know what is reality and what is false appearance.

Therefore, it is easier than, the other paths.

## chapter IV - sutra 60

santi-rupat paramananda-rupac ca  
Because it is of its nature of peace and supreme bliss.

Once again we get a definition that covers both the path and the goal. 'It' refers both to bhakti and its Goal, God.

God is peace. God Bliss. Therefore, we want to commune with God in all. Hence, we look into the eyes of our dear and near ones, when we talk to them. We want to commune with their souls; and the eyes are the windows of the soul. The next higher stage, when we experience intense happiness, we close our eyes; obviously the happiness, misunderstood to be in an external object, is recognised to be within ourselves. To commune with the Self is peace and bliss.

The devotee gazes at the Lord, the image he worships. He feels the divine presence. It fills him with inexpressible peace and bliss. He closes his eyes and experiences that peace and that bliss within himself. God is experienced within. Once enthroned there, realised there, and experienced there, God does not vanish. He takes complete possession of the devotee.

Thus, at every step during the devotee's progress towards the destination, he experiences peace and bliss. He does not ask for further external proof. He is satisfied that he is on the right path, and that the goal is near at hand. He reaches the goal in due time - kalena-atmani vindati.

The peace and bliss are uninterrupted. For, when the devotee surrenders himself to the Lord, the Lord takes over his entire being as His property. God Himself then ensures that His property is safe, and does not slip away from His Hands, from the right path. This thread that binds the devotee to the Lord is also made of His 'material' - viz., Bliss, and thus bound to the Feet of the Lord, the devotee constantly enjoys supreme bliss and peace.



## chapter IV - sutra 61

loka-hanau cinta na karya niveditatma-loka-vedatvat

No worry need be entertained about the miseries of the world; because of total surrender of the self, the world, and the vedas, at the feet of the Lord.

'Chinta' is worry. The devotee does not worry at all. For, he has surrendered himself, the entire world, and the Vedas - representing injunctions and prohibitions, righteousness and unrighteousness - at the feet of the Lord.

"I am Thine, all is Thine, my Lord. Thy will be done", is his prayer.

The world's miseries do not touch him. No one can harm him; he is indifferent to people who try to harm him. He bears insults and injuries cheerfully. He endures his destiny wrought by his own past action, and welcomes the suffering it may entail as much as we welcome the return of money loaned to our friends.

What about the miseries of others? Even they do not worry him. He knows 'God knows best'. But then he does not lean back on his arm-chair and look on unconcernedly when people suffer around him. He is not worried. But, the God in him, Who is of the nature of Love, flows out in the form of selfless service and charity. He does not act or do anything; God does through him ! Therefore, he joins the band of His foremost devotees who are sarva-bhuta-hite-ratah - deeply interested in the welfare of all beings. He does not worry, but he works for the welfare of all beings. Nay, he does not work, either, but worships the Omnipresent Being, considering himself as a humble instrument in His Hands.

## chapter IV - sutra 62

na tatsiddhau loka-vyavaharo heyah kintu phala-tyagas tat-sadhanam ca karyam eva

For its attainment, worldly duties are not to be abandoned; but one should abandon fruits of actions and do the sadhana.

So long as we live in this world and 'receive' some benefits from 'our neighbours', and, until, by virtue of our spiritual attainments, we are enabled to give our neighbours the blessings of the Spirit, we shall not abandon our duties by those neighbours, and shall be diligent in our service of the community or society. This is the unalterable rule, stressed and emphasised by Gurudev Sivananda in His own life. He is emphatic that, at every stage of our life, every day of it, our balance sheet should always show an increase of our spiritual assets, and we have 'given' more than we have 'received' from people around us.

'Abandonment of the fruits of actions' includes performance of all our duties in a spirit of worship, without attachment without expectation of any worldly rewards.

At the same time, we should diligently carry on our bhakti sadhana.

This attitude towards the world, and this sadhana, enable us to 'pay off' our debts, instead of accumulating them, to wipe out our past karma also, without accumulating new ones, to do dynamic sadhana, which alone can enable us to introspect and find out our inner defects and weakness to be able to guard against, and eradicate them, and at the same time to grow in devotion, day by day.

## chapter IV - sutra 63

### stri-dhana-nastika-caritram na sravaniyam

Accounts relating to women, wealth, atheists, and enemies should not be listened to.

'Women' represents 'lust'. The meaning will not change if a lady-devotee reads it as 'men'. From time immemorial, lust has been regarded as one of the most powerful enemies of spiritual life. All over the world, great saints and mystics have exalted celibacy as an indispensable virtue for the seeker. The duties of the grihasthasrama - the house-hold life - are heavy enough to demand four shoulders; hence, the need for a partner-ship of man and woman. The narrow spiritual path of the soul alone into the alone, cannot allow two to walk abreast. Hence the warning that the seeker should do the journey alone; a companion would most certainly retard progress, if not make it impossible. It is only to emphasise that what is meant is 'lust' that we are asked not to listen to accounts relating to women; they will engender lust in the heart of the seeker, and lead him to his spiritual ruin.

'Wealth' is another great temptation; for, it is the source for the satisfaction of the instinct of self-preservation, it is a symbol of status or vanity, a passport to pleasure, and hence to hell. In the modern world, wealth itself has been made to do duty for God! With disastrous consequences. When everyone reaches out his hand to grab this limited commodity, there is disharmony, tension, hatred, and warfare. Wealth has been created by man to serve him. Nature's universal blessings are converted by him in to personal property, for the sake of convenience. When this convenient, man-made servant ascends to the master's seat, man, the master, is enslaved! Narada warns us, to prevent this. We know the wealthy people are not happy. Wealth shall not lure us away from the path of love. We shall not lend our ears to the false stories of the blessings of wealth.

artham anartham bhavaya nityam nasti tatah sukhalesa satyam  
putradapi dhanabhaajaam bheetih sarvatrisha vihita reetih

Regard wealth as the source of misfortune. The wealthy dread their own children, and this is the universal rule.

The Nasthikas - atheists - are often more dangerous to the spiritual aspirant than women and wealth. They destroy the very roots of spiritual aspiration. Especially in the early stages, when our own faith has not struck deep roots, we should avoid atheists from a very great distance. It is not our business to 'reform' them. It is God's Task. He knows how best to do it. We should keep ourselves away, and pray for them. We are like fire, and they like water. When these two come together, the result is always unpredictable. It depends upon the relative strength. If the fire is stronger than the water, the water is evaporated. If the fire is weaker than the water, then it will be put out. We should first augment the spiritual fire in us and that is our sole business. If it is God's Will, the atheist will be converted by our own example, without our having to persuade him by argument.

'Accounts of our enemies'. We have no enemies. We shall have none. That is the condition prerequisite if we are to grow in devotion. What is meant here is only those people who regard themselves as our enemies. Why does Narada want the aspirant to avoid listening to stories about them? To avoid gossip. If people around us know that we like to hear stories about 'our enemies', then they will visit us often, with stories - often concocted - about them. They will invent, for their own entertainment, false accounts of what those enemies told about us. Our peace of mind is thus disturbed. In our heart there is no malice. We have no ill-will towards anyone. Why need we bother what others think of us? Let us pray for all, and mind our own business. Let us not lend our ears to gossip. That will save a lot of our time, preserve our peace mind, and prevent malice entering our heart.

## chapter IV - sutra 64

### abhimana-dambhadikam tyajyam

Pride, vanity and other vices must be given up.

When we turn to the sayings and writings of the great devotees of all nations, we are immediately wonderstruck at the humility which characterises them. The Alvars and Nayanmars of the South, the Dasas of Kannada Desa, Tukaram, Mira, Tulasidas, Kabirdas and the Christian saints and mystics - all of them express extreme humility in their hymns in praise of God. As I have already pointed out, when they thought and wrote as individual seekers, aspiring for God - in other words, when they were not in mystic union with God, but were conscious of their physical and mental being, they recognised that, on the human level, they were weak, ignorant, miserable, and worthless.

If we constantly evolve this idea in our mind, we shall be truly humble. The individual is naught, God is everything. The individual minus the individuality is God. We shall then not be fatalistic or pessimistic, but we shall be truly humble, without losing our divine prerogative to serve as channels for His Light, Power, and Wisdom, to flow through.

## chapter IV - sutra 65

tad arpitakhilacarah san kama-krodhabhimanadikam tasminn eva  
karaniyam

Because all our activities have been surrendered to Him, kama, krodha and abrimana, desire, anger and vanity, also are to be directed towards him.

Let us take vanity first. Real humility is difficult to understand. We have to guard ourselves against back-bonelessness. Else, we might fall a prey to any evil force that may assail us. If we make a fetish of our humility, then our vanity will masquerade as humility; we will be proud of our humility. Therefore, Narada asks us to direct our abhimana - vanity - towards God. "I have surrendered to God. I am proud of Him. He is Omniscient, Omnipresent, and Omnipotent. There is nothing He will not do for me." Also, "I am a devotee of the Lord. He will not like my telling lies or entertaining evil thoughts. It is unworthy of a devotee like me." It is vanity, all right! But a necessary sublimation of the evil. In course of time, when the Grace of God descends, this, too, will go, without exposing us to the attacks of evil forces.

'Kama' sublimated becomes passion for liberation or union with God. This one all-consuming desire annihilates all base desires and elevates us to Godhead. Directing it God-wards means saying often to ourselves with intense feeling in the heart, "I desire God, naught else is worth loving. I passionately wish to see Him, and naught else." Gurudev Sivananda's own inspiring example is unequalled. He says, "When I left Malaya and arrived in India in 1923, the one thought I had was 'I must realise god now'".

The aggressive instinct in man, too, ought to find its outlet and channel of sublimation. It might get suppressed and wage guerilla warfare. So, it is directed towards God. We have this demonstrated in the utterances of our great saints and bhaktas, who have occasionally 'taunted' the Lord, and even 'quarrelled' with him. Gurudev Sivananda's 'Song of Grievance' is a parallel. "Why have you neglected me?", He demands of God. "This is not Thy real nature. Give me Thy explanation." Though a devotee is asked to be patient and wait for His Grace to descend, it is not wrong now and then, when the pain of separation becomes intense on his part, to 'chide' the Lord for 'cruelty'.

Thus sublimated, all our natura qualities will find their fulfilment in God.

## chapter IV - sutra 66

tri-rupa-bhanga-purvakam nitya-dasya-nitya-kanta-bhajanatmakam  
prema karyam premaiva karyam

Transcending the three forms, one should practise devotion of the nature of eternal service of God and eternal love. This love alone is to be practised.

All the triplicities should be abandoned. What are they?

1. Satwa, rajas, and tamas - sutra 56;
2. Aartha, jignasu, and artharthi - sutra 56;
3. Kama, krodha, and lobha - desire anger and greed even directed Godward.

The previous sutra gave us the clue to the sublimation of the forces that always operate deep within the nature of man. We shall be fools to ignore them. Puranic stories illustrate the truth that they are extremely powerful, by portraying their power even over celestial beings and great sages and tapasvins. It is the bhakta's privilege to change the direction of these un-divine forces; they are directed towards God and, in a most mysterious manner, divinised!

But that is a concession, not a licence! It does not mean that, even if we don't feel anger within ourselves, we should cultivate 'anger towards God'! Their Godward direction is the most intelligent way of eradicating them. But eradication of these vices is the absolutely necessary pre-requisite. Let us not forget that. God-love alone does it. It enables us to eradicate lust, anger, and greed.

In the second class of triplicity, even the jijnasa or thirst for knowledge is included. Intellectual understanding of the goal, of the path, and of the inner mechanism that makes God-love possible, is definitely necessary. But it is only to enable us to practise this God-love, without encountering the intellect as a barrier. But the development of the intellect without laying the foundation of faith is a danger. Intellect must grow in the soil of faith; then it will yield the luscious fruits of devotion and God-realisation. Let us have a theoretical, intellectual understanding of bhakti yoga; but, let us, then, quickly take up the practice and go Godward.

The nature of the bhakti sadhana is also described paradoxically. It is a dual-relationship of the devotee to God. He loves God, all right. He regards himself as the Lord's consort, and loves Him with all his heart and soul. But, this Love is not to be idle love. We are not allowed to think: "Well, my Lord is the Ruler of the whole universe. I am His consort, entitled to lounge and let myself be served by His servants." In fact, our puranas once again awaken us here, and remind us that Lakshmi, the consort of Lord Narayana, is ever-keen on serving Him. But, lest we should miss this great lesson. Narada specifically mentions that we should be eternal slaves of the Lord, ever eager to do His Will, to serve all humanity, feeling that thus shall we be His best instrument, His best servant and, therefore, His beloved.

Once again, the devotee's privilege is to entertain the triple-attitude simultaneously! Lord Hanuman addresses this sloka to Lord Rama,

dehabudhyatu dasoham jeeva buddhva-twadamsakah  
atma-buddhya tvamevaham, iti me nischaya matih

When I am body-conscious, I am Your slave. When I regard myself as a Jiva, enveloped by ignorance and the five sheaths, I am a spark of the Divine Fire You are. When I transcend these and realise I am the Atman, I am one with you.

This verse, incidentally, reconciles the different view-points of dwaita, visishtadvaita and advaita philosophers.

Most of the time, we only identify ourselves with the body. And, therefore, most of the time, we should serve Him, His Omnipresent Being - humanity, nay the entire universe - as His instrument, without egoism, without kartritwa-bhoktritwa abhimana, feelings 'I am the doer', and 'I am the enjoyer'.

We are His beloved, and therefore, we are His servants.

We are His servants, and therefore, we are His beloved.

Another truth has to be clearly grasped here. Kanta bhava or madhurya bhava - or the relation of the lover and the beloved has nothing whatsoever to do with 'sex'. The bhakti-teachers, who were of a much nobler mind than the modern man, had an entirely different and sublime idea of what kanta-bhav implied. Since the modern man associates sex with lover-beloved relationship, it is better to use the analogy of the wave and the ocean in this context. It is the state of union which is analogous to the inseparability of the wave and the ocean. We are the waves - God is the ocean.



## chapter IV - sutra 67

### bhakta ekantino mukhyah

The foremost among bhaktas - those who practise the primary type of devotion or para bhakti - have one-pointed devotion to the Lord.

The sadhana - practice - enables the sadhaka aspirant to attain siddhi - perfection. It is naishkarmya siddhi. It is an indescribable state of union with God. It is mukhya bhakti, para bhakti or jnana. One cannot attain this prematurely. It is really a gift of the Grace of the Lord. It is the fruit of our sadhana, only in an indirect way. From the top-rung of preparedness, the devotee is lifted to the Lord's Lap, by the Lord Himself,

This is a very rare state. Nature is extremely economical in throwing up specimens of this type. It is no good, therefore, to imitate or deceive ourselves. It is also good to realise that in God's scheme of things, all types of bhaktas have their parts to play. True devotion does not question the role allotted to it, but humbly and joyously plays it.

These God-intoxicated devotees who are unconscious of their body, of their surroundings of anything but God, are charged with self-centredness by the self-styled benefactors of mankind. Are they selfish? Do they confer no benefits on mankind? Are they parasites on society?

Far from it. They are the greatest benefactors of mankind. They ask for nothing from us. They have no desires. They are above wants. It is we who regard it as a great blessing and privilege to serve them. For the little care that we may bestow on their physical existence, they shower great blessings upon us.

In fact, even that price is not demanded by them. Their blessings are showered upon all equally. They themselves are the radiant lamps of Divine Light. Unasked, they give us that Light. Unsolicited, they illumine our path to salvation. They are the greatest benefactors of humanity. They serve even those who do not deserve. Their service is of the highest type. Their gifts are of permanent value.

## chapter IV - sutra 68

kanthavarodha-romasrubhiih parasparam lapamanah pavayanti kulani  
prithivim ca

They talk to each other with choked voice, with hairs standing on end,  
and with tears in their eyes; they purify their families and also the earth.

You find these great para bhaktas constantly speaking of God and His Lilas. And you notice some unmistakable signs of inner enjoyment, of ecstasy. Some of them are mentioned here. Choked voice, hairs standing on end, tears in eyes - classic bhakti literature elaborates these further. They indicate that the talk is not idle gossip or lip-homage to love or intellectual pastime. The words spring from the heart. When they speak of God, it is not as though they are talking of a possible existence of a Yeti in the Himalayas. At that time, the Lord is with them. They actually experience and express His Love. They recognise and admit the Limitless Grace that is Divine. They are thrilled by the thought of His Infinite Nature. Their voices are choked when they refer to His Love. The hairs stand on end when they dwell upon His Power. The thought of His Grace brings tears to their eyes. When they begin to talk among themselves - these ekanta bhaktas, who have no other concern in life - they lose all sense of time or place. They are dead to the world, which, nevertheless is purified by their very presence.

They are like a giant neem tree or sandal tree. The poisonous air we exhale is neutralised by the tree, which in turn gives us the life-giving oxygen we need and also other health-giving elements in the air we breathe. All this is silently done. Even if we don't recognise our benefactors, we are benefited, in any case! The very presence of the great bhaktas similarly purifies the atmosphere, neutralises the evil thoughts that constantly emerge from the impure hearts of worldly men. The families that have given birth to such bhaktas are specially blessed. The members refer to the devotee with pride. "He belongs to our family." Thus, dwelling upon the glory of the devotees, they unconsciously begin to emulate their example and profit by their lives.

Even the devotee's ancestors get the benefit of his saintliness. An invisible thread connects us with our forefathers. We may not be attached to them; but they are attached to us. The offerings - pindas, etc - are made through this invisible but very real channel. When a descendent shines with the Light of God, as a great devotee, or a sage of Self-realisation, the ancestors, too, receive this Divine Light, merely by virtue of their connection with this divine descendent. They, too, are enlightened in accordance with their receptivity. The saint becomes his own ancestors' Guru! And, Saviour, too.

## chapter IV - sutra 69

tirthi-kurvanti tirthani su-karmi-kurvanti karmani sac-chastri-kurvanti  
sastrani

They impart sanctity to places of pilgrimage, they bestow auspiciousness on karmas - actions or rites, the scriptures derive their authority from them.

This easily understandable. I have witnessed it. Rishikesh reminds people all over the world of 'Swami Sivananda's place'. I remember, even thirty years ago, South Indians went out on pilgrimage to only Banaras, and those who dared went up to Hardwar. Hardwar was the pilgrim's limit. Rishikesh was practically unknown. Its present glory is derived from Gurudev Sivananda. People, who go round take the dust of the kutir in which He lived His early life of austerities. Now, there are thousands who go straight to Rishikesh; that is to them the only place of pilgrimage. Gurudev Sivananda has made it so.

Yad tad acharati sreshtah tad tadeva itaro janah, said Lord Krishna. We always look to our spiritual leaders for their sanction of our activities. What they sanction by their precept and practice is adopted by us. I have described in 'Gurudev Sivananda' how by His own soul-force Gurudev Sivananda awakened even advaita vedantins to the glory of the Divine Name, and sankirtan, which was considered unworthy of a Swami! This and several other spiritual practices derive their sanction from Gurudev Sivananda.

We have scriptures galore, especially in India. A seeker without a guide is often bewildered which way to go. It is the Saint Who makes the choice and the scripture He had adopted as His own becomes doubly sacred.

## chapter IV - sutra 70

### tan-mayah

They are of the nature of that, God or devotion.

We are told that once in seven years we are completely renewed. It takes seven years for all the cells that constitute our being to be replaced. A complete transformation takes place during that period. It extends to the mental and psychic spheres also. That is why all important vows and austerities are counted in periods of seven years. If we practise intense devotion for a period of seven years, therefore, our entire nature is transformed into one of God-Love. We become embodiments of God-Love.

There are stages even here. First we express our swabhava - our own nature. By cultivation of virtues, by the practise of sadhana, etc., we elevate ourselves to sat-bhava. Our nature is purified. It is full of satva. Even this is transcended by His Grace, and we enter into mat-bhava, in the words of the Bhagavad Gita: "My bhava". It is God's own Bhava or nature or attitude. Here even the dualities of good and evil, dharma and adharma, right and wrong, vanish, and the entire universe takes on the Virat Swarupa - Cosmic Form - of the Lord Himself. This is not to be simulated, but attained.

A similar three-runged ladder is this. First we do swa-karma. We do what our nature impels us to do. Then we tread the path of righteousness and do sat-karma - only good actions. It is the sadhaka's stage. Then we get established in mat-karma. It is the state of perfection when we no longer exist as individual personalities, but we are He and do His Will. Karma and dharma are synonymous here.

When we reach the third stage of mat-bhava or mat-karma, we become 'tanmayah' or filled with That. That is the goal. Even when we walk the path of goodness, when we are in the sat-bhava stage doing sat-karma - sat-dharma, we are not entirely safe. The separatist ego sense is still there and we are liable to fall into evil. Till the ego-sense vanishes and we become tanmayah, should persist in our sadhana. 'I' can only be a sadhaka.

## chapter IV - sutra 71

modante pitaro nrityanti devatah sa-natha ceyam bhur bhavati  
The forefathers rejoice, the celestials dance, the world has a saviour.

When a sadhaka thus becomes tanmayah, the forefathers rejoice. I have already explained how they benefit by their descendent's spiritual attainments.

We are often told that the austerities of great Rishis etc., are disturbed by the celestials sent by Indra, the Lord of the Devas. Here, in this sutra, we are told, on the contrary, that the celestials rejoice when the bhakta attains the goal. The man of austerities is the celestials' rival; his austerities might even elevate him to the status of Indra. Hence, the fright of the Lord of the Celestials. But, on the contrary, the devotional practices of the bhakta help even the Devas. For, whenever their position becomes insecure, the Devas run to the Lord for help. The Lord has to manifest Himself here to restore the balance of dharma. When a bhakta realises God, this is exactly what happens. In answer to his prayer, the Nameless and Formless Being manifests Itself here, and His Grace flows into our world, sweeping it clean of evil. As we have already seen, the bhakta, by becoming an embodiment of His Light, becomes automatically the greatest promoter of dharma, and, thereby the greatest benefactor of humanity. He relieves the celestials of their fear of demoniacal beings. Therefore, they rejoice when a bhakta attains God-realisation.

Mankind, groping in the darkness of atheism, materialism, and sensual hell, gets a Light, a Blessing and a Saviour, in the God-realised bhakta.

## chapter IV - sutra 72

nasti teshu jati-vidya-rupa-kula-dhana-kriyadi-bhedah

Among them there is no distinction of caste, learning, physical form, race, wealth or profession, etc

Bhakti or love is universal. It transcends all sorts of distinctions. Only the performance of vedic rites was limited to the dwija - the twice-born. But very early in our study of these Sutras, we learnt to give a secondary place or even to renounce vedic rituals, preferring the practice of Divine Love.

But the Param Gati - the Supreme Goal of God-realisation - is open to all, as Lord Sri Krishna says,

*striyo vaishyastatha shudras te-api yati param gatim.*

Women, vaishyas, and even shudras, attain the Supreme Goal.

We have any number of instances of great devotees of the Lord, who belonged to the 'lower' castes. Incidentally, does it not also prove that these caste distinctions are expedient divisions of society without suggestion of superiority or inferiority among them? Unlettered men have realised the Truths of Vedanta, have translated unread scriptures into actual life. As has already been pointed out, scriptures derive their authority from them.

There have been saints among the rich and the poor. Devotion tilts the scales. The rich bhakta feels that he a mendicant in this world; all wealth belongs only to the Lord. The poor man, on the other hand, feels that all the wealth of the world belongs to him, as he has enthroned the Lord of the universe in his heart. Neither of them has a thought for material wealth.

Devotees have come from all professions; often professions that are not normally associated with spiritual life, e.g., a butcher's. But, that did not prevent them from loving God. The butcher-saint regarded it was his duty, his worship of the Lord, to carry on his ancestral trade. No sin accrued to him. "Sahajam karma kaunteya, sa doshamapi na tyajet", says the Lord. "Do not give up your duties, even if they are superficially defective." The devotee regards all his actions as flowers of worship of the Lord. He is un-attached, unaffected.

## chapter IV - sutra 73

yatas tadiyah

Because they belong to Him.

The devotees, to whatever caste, creed, nationality, sex, or social status, they belong, belong to the Lord. The sense of belonging to a particular religion, caste, or nation, can be compared to a small pond on the bank of the Holy Ganga. When the water-level in the Ganga is low, the tank also exists, independently. But when there is a flood the Ganga, the holy waters of the Ganga sweep away all the waters of the tanks that exist on her bank. All distinctions vanish.

All of us belong to Him! No doubt. But, though we are part and parcel of His Omnipresent Being, we lead an egoistic life, deludedly separating ourselves from Him, and from the rest of the universe. The waters of the tanks on the Ganges-bank are all waters of the Ganga. When the Ganges-level went down, they assumed independent existence. They will continue to be 'independent' till another flood sweeps them into the main current. Even so, all of us are in reality of Him. He is the Reality in us. But, when the flood of Divine Light receded from us, we were enveloped by darkness, and we arrogantly assumed egoistic independence. Now we must pray and wait. We should shed tears of viraha, which will make the Ganga of Divinity swell! Then we shall get merged in Him once again.

That is the state of the bhaktas who have attained God-realisation. They are one with Him. They belong to Him, not to any caste, creed, religion, sex, or nationality. They transcend these distinctions and limitations.

One cannot fail to notice the other implication: the true devotee of the Lord will not make such distinctions in his dealings with others, be they devotees or worldly men. They will look upon all as children of the Lord, equally entitled to their love and service.

## chapter V - sutra 74

vado navalambyah

No controversy should be entered into.

Controversy has no meaning in matters which are obviously beyond the reach of speech and intellect. When you have your beloved child on your lap, and both of you gaze at each other in love, if someone turns up and asks you to prove that love, what will you do? How can you ever satisfy the other man that you do love the child and the child reciprocates? To endeavour to satisfy a disbeliever by clever argument is a worthless dream. How shall the devotee describe 'That from which speech returns baffled, along with mind, after having failed to reach It.' How shall the other man understand even the little attempt at such description of That which is beyond the intellect? There is no point in attempting the obviously impossible.

There is something more here than mere impossibility. When the devotee - especially in the early stages of his sadhana - endeavours to argue with a doubter, he - the devotee - lays his mind open to the virus of wrong thoughts. The appearance is more easily discerned than the Reality. Cigarette smoke is more easily seen than good, pure air. But that does not alter the fact that cigarette smoke is unhealthy and pure air is life-giving. The apparent is an illusion, and the hidden Truth is the Reality. Therefore, the deluded person finds it easier to argue his case; his 'truth' is gross, sensual, and tantalising. The 'infant' devotee, who tries to argue with him, runs the risk getting infected.

Let us go our way. For, love cannot be proved - except by loving. Let our example convince others, rather than our arguments. Then others, too, inspired by our example, might take to the practice of devotion; and they will not argue!



## chapter V - sutra 75

bahulyavakasadatvad aniyatatvac ca

Because there is a scope for different views, and because also there can be no exclusiveness about it.

Moreover, in this universe which is the manifestation of the Lord Who is Infinite, there is infinite diversity of temperament and equipment. On the substratum of unity, there is the superstructure of infinite variety. In fact, each man has his own path, his own religion. Each man has his own God, his own conception of the Ultimate Reality, depending upon his equipment and temperament. The infinite can be viewed from infinite angles. The infinite can assume infinite forms! The transcendental Truth is One, all the time; it is transcendental and, therefore, beyond viewing, understanding, and description!

Since the Ultimate Truth is transcendental; and since, as we have seen earlier, even God-Love is anirvachaneeya - indescribable, any argument about them is bound to be inconclusive.

Therefore, bhaktas, when they assemble together, listen to one another's experiences, without entering into any controversy. All those experiences are real. All their views are views of the One God. They rejoice in thus sharing their thoughts and experiences: They do not argue.

All this talk is sadhana. It is satsanga. It is not intended to prove or disprove anything. The conclusion was their premise. They began with the concluding chapter! They do not attempt to draw any different conclusion now, by argumentation or controversy. They 'know' - always 'knew' - God is infinite, and the Infinite may appear in infinite forms, from infinite angles, to infinite viewers.

## chapter V - sutra 76

**bhakti-sastrani mananiyani tad-bodhaka-karmani karaniyani**  
**One should study the bhakti-scriptures, one must practice the sadhana**  
**prescribed in them.**

Nor does the devotee devote all his time merely to talk about God, bhakti, and his experiences, etc. He shall devoutly study the scriptures that deal with bhakti scriptures that are congenial to his nature and his approach to the Reality. 'Manana' is not mere study; it is deeply reflecting over the scriptures thus studied. It is assimilation.

For, it is this assimilation alone that can enable us to practise bhakti-sadhana. And, so he is eager to put into daily practice the sadhana prescribed in the bhakti scriptures. However much we may talk about it, read about it, hear about it, or think about it, the goal is not attained, except by practical, dynamic, intense, and sustained sadhana.

Therefore, Gurudev Sivananda lays the greatest emphasis on practice. He does not waste his breath in excessive theorisation. He never enters into arguments. I have seen it any number of times in the ashram. A humble, sincere, illiterate, and poor sadhaka can ask for and get private interview with Gurudev Sivananda, Who will listen to him for hours and clear all his doubts, and give him further instructions. But, when a great learned Pundit comes to 'discuss' yoga, Gurudev Sivananda would quietly change the topic with, "Have you had your morning coffee? Shall I send for iddies or do you like bread?" - or palm him off on some other inmate or visitor who is fond of such unnecessary discussion. "Practice alone will make you perfect", says Gurudev Sivananda. That is the last word on this topic.

## chapter V - sutra 77

sukha-duhkheccha-labhadi-tyakte kale pratikshamane kshanardham api  
vyartham na neyam

After having renounced the pairs of opposites, like pleasure and pain,  
desire, gain etc., one should not waste even a split-second, but look  
forward to the time when Divine Light will descend.

These sutras which form the epilogue of the glorious scripture are, as it were, the very quintessence of bhakti yoga. The bhakta has been asked to renounce the pairs of opposites, knowing fully well that

- (1) God is the Creator, Preserver, and Destroyer of the universe;
- (2) God is all-love;
- (3) God's Will is done here;
- (4) Karmas of past births rebound as pleasure and pain etc this birth;
- (5) The bhakta's only duty here is to love God with all his heart and soul, without identifying himself with the world, karma or its reactions - pleasure, pain, etc.;
- (6) God will reveal Himself when the time comes.

The life of the bhakta is a synthesis of paradoxes. He is consumed by the fire of God-Love. But he patiently awaits the descent of Light and Grace. He is patient, but is not slack in his sadhana, nor does he waste a single moment, though he is prepared to wait any number of years or life-times to attain Him. He has risen beyond pleasure and pain, but seeks God-realisation, which is Absolute Bliss. He has gone beyond duties and responsibilities; but as an instrument in His Hands, he works constantly for the welfare of all beings. Without relaxing his vigilance over his mind even for a moment, he surrenders himself completely to the Lord. Knowing 'Kaalenaatmani vindati' - one realises the Self, in due time, he utilises every minute in bhakti yoga sadhana.

chapter V - sutra 78

ahimsa-satya-sauca-dayastikyadi-caritryani paripalanyani

Virtues like ahimsa, satyam, purity, and faith in God, Guru and scriptures, are to be preserved.

In summing up, again, Narada emphasises that a devotee is a man of virtue. At no stage can a devotee relax his vigilant watch at the doors of the senses and the mind, and let vice enter his being.

He must love all and injure none, in thought word, and deed. He must be truthful. He must keep his body, mind, and surroundings pure. And his faith in God, Guru, and the Shastras must be unshaken at all times. The importance of all these has already been dealt with.

## chapter V - sutra 79

sarvada sarva-bhavana niscintair bhagavan eva bhajaniyah  
Always, in every way, without any anxiety, the Lord should be adored.

We have already resolved to think of Him always.

'Sarva-bhavana' deserves a little more attention. Bhakti scriptures speak of the five bhavas in which the devotee adores the Lord, viz., santa bhava, vatsalya bhava, sakhya bhava, dasya bhava, and madhurya bhava. One can regard God as the object of peaceful meditation, as a child, as a friend, as a master, and as a lover. Various devotees adopt various bhavas. But, here and in the Bhagavad Gita also, we are asked to approach Him with all the bhavas. It is a grand sublimation technique. All our loves are to be transferred to Him and fulfilled in Him. We should regard Him as the sole object of our love, and we should look upon the objects of our love - e.g., child, friend, etc. - as the manifestations of God. We love them - in the words of Yajnavalkya - because of the Self in which we are all one.

We are again and again told that we should be beyond worry. The presence of worry or anxiety in bhakta is the surest indication of the absence of true devotion. One who is truly devoted to Him, who believes in His Grace and Mercy, cannot worry.

## chapter V - sutra 80

sa kirtyamanah sikhram evavirbhavaty anubhavayati bhaktan  
He, the Lord, when His glories are sung by the bhaktas, reveals Himself,  
and enables the devotees to experience Him.

This is an assurance. Is is a guarantee. It sets at rest any doubt anyone may have about the glorious fruit of God-realisation that Sage Narada holds out before one who practises this yoga.

Everyone likes his names to be uttered. When your name is called out, you naturally answer it by going to that place. When devotees sing His Names, with all their heart and soul, naturally, the Lord 'goes' there, manifests Himself there. The Nameless and Formless Absolute assumes a Name and a Form, by virtue of Its Omnipotence, and manifests Itself instantly by virtue of His Omnipresence.

It is quite obvious that this revelation is His choice. When we go on singing His Names, He reveals Himself when He wills. The other part of the sutra makes this still more explicit.

Bhaktas generally approach a Name and Form of the Lord. The Lord, in His Supreme Compassion, answers their call by revealing Himself in that Name and Form. And 'Anubhavayati' - He enables them to 'experience His presence'. Even to see that Name and Form they have to depend upon Him.

na tu mam shakyase drashtam anunaiva swa chakshusha  
divyam dadami te chakshuh pasya me yogamaishwaram

You cannot see Me with those fleshy eyes of yours; I give you the Divine Eye. See Me now, says Lord Arjuna.

Here and beyond this region - into the region Absolute Truth - it is He, therefore, Who has to lead us. 'Anubhavayati' - He will make us experience Him. We shall then and only then know His Divine Nature, which we have been told any number of times by Narada is describable, but which is the fountain-source of Bliss, Peace, and Eternal Life.

chapter V - sutra 81

tri-satyasya bhaktir eva gariyasi bhaktir eva gariyasi  
Among the three truths, bhakti excels.

Of the paths to God-realisation - jnana bhakti and raja yogas - bhakti excels. Because, as we have seen earlier, it is free from obstacles, and it has been paved with the Grace of the Lord. It is superior to the mere performance of nitya and naimittika Karmas enjoined upon us all by the Vedas.

It is worth noting here: Narada does concede that even the other paths are 'true' paths. He does not under-rate them or condemn them. Of the three, bhakti excels. When bhakti forms the main constituent of either jnana yoga or raja yoga or karma yoga, there is, naturally, a rapid progress towards the goal. The reference here is to jnana or raja yoga sadhana, into which bhakti has not entered.

## chapter V - sutra 82

guna-mahatmyasakti-rupasakti-pujasakti-smaranasak ti-dasyasakti-sakhyasakti-vatsalyasakti-kantasakty-a tma-nivedanasakti-tan-mayasakti-parama-virahasakti-rupai kadhapy ekadasadha bhavati

Devotion, though it is essentially the same in all bhaktas, assumes the forms of (1) love of the attributes and glories of the Lord, (2) love of the form of the Lord, (3) love of puja or worship, (4) love of His remembrance, (5) love of His service, (6) love of treating Him as a companion or friend, (7) love of treating Him as one's lover, (8) love of treating Him as one's child, (9) love of total self-surrender, (10) love of merging oneself in Him, (11) love of constantly feeling intensely the pangs of separation from Him.

The meaning is quite clear. All these attitudes are possible. All these roads lead to Him. In another sutra, we should remember, Narada has asked us to adopt all these attitudes towards Him at appropriate times. In other words, all our thoughts, all our speech and all our actions, are to be unified and directed towards Him.

Hence, the devotee prays;

twameva matha cha pita twameva  
twameva bandhus cha sakha twameva  
twameva vidya dravinam twameva  
twameva sarvam mama devadeva

Oh God of gods, you are my father, mother, relative, friend, learning, wealth - everything You and You Alone are.

This is the goal. This is our foremost duty. This is the purpose and meaning of this human birth. Narada concludes his exposition of devotion with a dramatic declaration.



## chapter V - sutra 83

ity evam vadanti jana-jalpa-nirbhaya eka-matah kumara-vyasa-suka-sandilya-garga-vishnu-kaundilya-seshoddhavaruni-bali-hanumad-vibhishanadayo

This is even so, has been said unanimously by the following preceptors of bhakti, who are not afraid of the prattling criticism of the people:

Sanatkumars, Vyasa, Suka, Shandilya, Garga, Vishnu, Kaundinya, Sesha, Uddhava, Aruni, Bali, Hanuman, Vibhashana, etc.

An ancient and very healthy custom is adopted here. Even sages and saints do not preach, "This is my view", "I declare". They always say, "I heard it from so-and-so." This is a safeguard against vanity.

How far-seeing of Narada to have foretold that the deluded modern man would, in his foolishness, laugh at bhakti and bhaktas. He wants proof for the existence of God, while he accepts without question that he is the son of his father. He decries image worship, while he worships the currency note with somebody's figure printed on it, honours the flag that symbolises his patriotism, and is unshaken in his faith that the photograph his table enables him to experience the living presence of his wife and stirs his heart! He teases a japa yogi - "What's in a name?" - but is angered when he is called a 'fool' and is unable to restrain his tongue watering at the mention of a sweet-meat or pickle. He calls the devotee an old-fashioned fossil, while he is not ashamed to use the same openings in his body for eating and breathing, as used by Adam and Eve.

The true devotee of the Lord is unafraid of these critics. He boldly proclaims the truth, and boldly walks the path of Love, with love in his heart, love lighting the way, love leading him by the hand, and love lightening his burden - and so, aiding his march towards the goal.

May we, too, tread this path of Love, and attain God-realisation in this very birth, by the Grace of Sri Gurudev Sivananda's Lotus-Feet.

Sat Guru Bhagavan Ki Jay  
Om Tat Sat  
Brahmarpanamastu

## chapter V - sutra 84

ya idam narada-proktam sivanusasanam visvasiti sraddhate sa bhaktiman  
bhavati sa preshtham labhate sa preshtham labhata iti

Anyone who trusts these instructions spoken by Narada and is convinced by them will be blessed with devotion and attain the most dear Lord. Yes, he will attain the most dear Lord.

Narada ends the Bhakti Sutras by stating that one has to hear them with faith. Inquiries and even doubts may be placed before the Guru, just as Arjuna expressed his doubts before Lord Krishna. But an attitude of disbelief will prevent us from understanding.

This final sutra declares that if a person hears the sutra with faith, then Narada blesses him with devotion to the Supreme Personality of Godhead. This means that Narada Muni is present and acting through the teachings of the sutras.

Narada assures us twice, so there should be no doubt about it. Although bhakti is very rare and hard to attain, with the blessings of Narada and his representatives, we will attain the Supreme Beloved.