

"Narada-Bhakti-Sutra: The Value of Devotion" by His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada.

NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER: This document contains the first chapter of Narada-Bhakti-Sutra translated and commented on by His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. His disciples have since completed the translation and commentary on the total of 84 "sutras." The complete work is available as the publication, Narada-Bhakti-Sutra: The Secrets of Transcendental Love, by the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust International, at www.Krishna.com.

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Narada-bhakti-sutra

Chapter 1
The Value of Devotion

SUTRA 1*

TEXT

athato bhaktim vyakhyasyamah

SYNONYMS

atha--now; atah--therefore; bhaktim--devotional service; vyakhyasyamah--we shall try to explain.

TRANSLATION

Now, therefore, I will try to explain the process of devotional service.

PURPORT

Devotional service to the Supreme Personality of Godhead is explained in the Bhagavad-gita, where the Lord says that a self-realized person is always in the transcendental state known as brahma-bhuta, which is characterized by joyfulness. When one is self-realized he becomes joyful. In other words, he is free from the material contamination of lamentation and hankering. As long as we are in material existence, we lament for the losses in our life and hanker for that which we do not have. A self-realized person is joyful because he is free from material lamentation and hankering.

A self-realized person also sees all living entities equally. For him, there is no distinction between the higher and lower species of life. It is also stated that a learned man does not distinguish between a wise brahmana and a dog because he sees the soul within the body, not the external bodily features. Such a perfected, self-realized person becomes eligible to understand bhakti, or devotional service to the Lord.

Bhakti is so sublime that only through bhakti can one understand the constitutional position of the Lord. That is clearly stated in the Bhagavad-gita (18.55): bhaktya mam abhijanati. "One can understand the Supreme Lord through devotional service, and by no other process." There are different processes of understanding the Absolute Truth, but if a person wants to understand the Supreme Lord as He is, he has to take to the process of bhakti-yoga. There are other mystic processes, such as karma-yoga, jnana-yoga, and dhyana-yoga, but it is not possible to understand the Supreme Lord, the Personality of Godhead, except through His devotional service. This is confirmed in the Fourth Chapter of the Bhagavad-gita (4.3), where we learn that Krsna spoke the Bhagavad-gita to Arjuna simply because he was the Lord's devotee and friend. The Bhagavad-gita teaches the process of bhakti-yoga, and therefore Lord Krsna explained it to Arjuna because he was a great devotee. As far as spiritual life is concerned, becoming a devotee of the Lord is the high-est perfection.

People are generally misled by the spell of the illusory energy of material nature. There are innumerable living entities within the material nature, and only some of them are human beings. According to the Vedic literature, there are 8,400,000 species of life. In the Padma Purana it is said that there are 900,000 species of life in the water, 2,000,000 species of plants, 1,100,000 species of insects and reptiles, 1,000,000 species of birds, 3,000,000 species of beasts, and only 400,000 species of human beings. So the humans are the least numerous species of all.

All living entities can be divided into two divisions: those that can move and those that are stationary, such as trees. But there are also many further divisions. Some species fly in the air, some live in the water, and some live on the ground. Among the living entities who live on the ground, only 400,000 are human species, and out of these 400,000 human species, many are uncivilized or unclean; they are not up to the standard of proper civilization. From the historical point of view, the Aryans are the most civilized section of human beings, and among the Aryans, the Indians are especially highly cultured. And among the Indians, the brahmanas are the most expert in knowledge of the Vedas.

The Vedic culture is respected all over the world, and there are people everywhere eager to understand it. The highest perfectional stage of understanding Vedic culture is explained in the Bhagavad-gita, in the Fifteenth Chapter (15.15), where the Lord says that the purpose of all the Vedas is to understand Him (Lord Krsna). Fortunate are those who are attracted to the Vedic cultural life.

The Hindus call themselves followers of the Vedas. Some say they follow the Sama Veda, and some say they follow the Rg Veda. Different people claim to follow different sections of the Vedas, but in fact for the most part they are not followers of the Vedas because they do not follow the rules and regulations of the Vedas. Therefore Lord Caitanya says that since the so-called followers of the Vedas perform all kinds of sinful activities, the number of actual followers of the Vedas is very small; and even among this small, exclusive number, most are addicted to the processes described in the Vedas' karma-kanda section, by which one can elevate oneself to the perfectional stage of economic development.

The strict followers of the karma-kanda portions of the Vedas perform various sacrifices for worship of different demigods in order to achieve particular material results. Out of many millions of such worshipers, some may actually engage in the process of understanding the Supreme, the Absolute Truth. They are called jnanis. Perfection for a jnani lies in attaining the stage of brahma-bhuta, or self-realization. Only after self-realization is attained does the

stage of understanding devotional service begin. The conclusion is that one can begin the process of devotional service, or bhakti, when one is actually self-realized. One who is in the bodily concept of existence cannot understand the process of devotional service.

It is for this reason that the Narada-bhakti-sutra begins, "Now, therefore, I shall try to explain the process of devotional service." The word "therefore" indicates that this process of devotional service is for the self-realized soul, one who is already liberated. Similarly, the Vedanta-sutra begins athato brahma-jijnasa. The word brahma-jijnasa refers to inquiry into the Supreme Absolute Truth, and it is recommended for those who have been elevated from the lower stage of addiction to the karma-kanda portion of the Vedas to the position of interest in the jnana-kanda portion. Only when a person is perfectly situated in the realization that he is not the body but a spirit soul can he begin the process of bhakti, or devotional service.

SUTRA 2*

TEXT

sa tv asmin parama-prema-rupa

SYNONYMS

sa--it; tu--and; asmin--for Him (the Supreme Lord); parama--highest; prema--pure love; rupa--having as its form.

TRANSLATION

Devotional service manifests as the most elevated, pure love for God.

PURPORT

As stated before, after attaining the highest stage of self-realization, one becomes situated in devotional service to the Lord. The perfection of devotional service is to attain love of God. Love of God involves the Supreme Personality of Godhead, the devotee, and the process of devotional service. Self-realization, the brahma-bhuta stage, is the beginning of spiritual life; it is not the perfectional stage. If a person understands that he is not his body and that he has nothing to do with this material world, he becomes free from material entanglement. But that realization is not the perfectional stage. The perfectional stage begins with activity in the self-realized position, and that activity is based on the understanding that a living entity is eternally the subordinate servitor of the Supreme Lord. Otherwise, there is no meaning to self-realization. If one is puffed up with the idea that he is the Supreme Brahman, or that he has become one with Narayana, or that he has merged into the brahmajyoti effulgence, then he has not grasped the perfection of life. As the Srimad-Bhagavatam (10.2.32) states,

ye 'nye 'ravindaksa vimukta-maninas
tvayy asta-bhavad avisuddha-buddhayah
aruhya krcchrena param padam tatah
patanty adho 'nadrta-yusmad-anghrayah

Persons who are falsely puffed up, thinking they have become liberated simply by understanding their constitutional position as Brahman, or spirit soul, are factually still contaminated. Their intelligence is impure because they have no understanding of the Personality of Godhead, and ultimately they fall down from their puffed-up position.

According to the Bhagavatam (1.2.11) there are three levels of transcendentalists: the self-realized knowers of the impersonal Brahman feature of the Absolute Truth; the knowers of the Paramatma, the localized aspect of the Supreme, which is understood by the process of mystic yoga; and the bhaktas, who are in knowledge of the Supreme Personality of Godhead and engage in His devotional service. Those who understand simply that the living being is not matter but spirit soul and who desire to merge into the Supreme Spirit Soul are in the lowest transcendental position. Above them are the mystic yogis, who by meditation see within their hearts the four-handed Visnu form of the Paramatma, or Supersoul. But persons who actually associate with the Supreme Lord, Krsna, are the highest among all transcendentalists. In the Sixth Chapter of the Bhagavad-gita (6.47) the Lord confirms this:

yoginam api sarvesam mad-gatenantar-atmana
sraddhavan bhajate yo mam sa me yukta-tamo matah

"And of all yogis, the one with great faith who always abides in Me, thinks of Me within himself, and renders transcendental loving service to Me--he is the most intimately united with Me in yoga and is the highest of all. That is My opinion." This is the highest perfectional stage, known as prema, or love of God.

In the Bhakti-rasamrta-sindhu (1.4.15-16), Srila Rupa Gosvami, a great authority in the devotional line, describes the different stages in coming to the point of love of Godhead:

adau sraddha tatah sadhu-sango 'tha bhajana-kriya
tato 'nartha-nivrttih syat tato nistha rucis tatah
athasaktis tato bhavas tatah premabhyudancati
sadhakanam ayam premnah pradurbhave bhavet kramah

The first requirement is that one should have sufficient faith that the only process for attaining love of Godhead is bhakti, devotional service to the Lord. Throughout the Bhagavad-gita Lord Krsna teaches that one should give up all other processes of self-realization and fully surrender unto Him. That is faith. One who has full faith in Krsna (sraddha) and surrenders unto Him is eligible for being raised to the level of prema, which Lord Caitanya taught as the highest perfectional stage of human life.

Some persons are addicted to materially motivated religion, while others are addicted to economic development, sense gratification, or the idea of salvation from material existence. But prema, love of God, is above all these. This highest stage of love is above mundane religiosity, above economic development, above sense gratification, and above even liberation, or salvation. Thus love of God begins with the firm faith that one who engages in full devotional service has attained perfection in all these processes.

The next stage in the process of elevation to love of God is sadhu-sanga, association with persons already in the highest stage of love of God. One who avoids such association and simply engages in mental speculation or so-called meditation cannot be raised to the perfectional platform. But one who associates with pure devotees or an elevated devotional society goes to the next stage--bhajana-kriya, or acceptance of the regulative principles of worshiping the Supreme Lord. One who associates with a pure devotee of the Lord naturally accepts that person as his spiritual master, and when the neophyte devotee accepts a pure devotee as his spiritual master, the duty of the spiritual master is to train the neophyte in the principles of regulated devotional service, or vaidhi-bhakti. At this stage the devotee's service is based on his capacity to serve the Lord. The expert spiritual master engages his followers in work that will gradually develop their consciousness of service to the Lord. Therefore the preliminary stage of understanding prema, love of God, is to approach a proper

pure devotee, accept him as one's spiritual master, and execute regulated devotional service under his guidance.

The next stage is called anartha-nivrtti, in which all the misgivings of material life are vanquished. A person gradually reaches this stage by regularly performing the primary principles of devotional service under the guidance of the spiritual master. There are many bad habits we acquire in the association of material contamination, chief of which are illicit sexual relationships, eating animal food, indulging in intoxication, and gambling. The first thing the expert spiritual master does when he engages his disciple in regulated devotional service is to instruct him to abstain from these four principles of sinful life.

Since God is supremely pure, one cannot rise to the highest perfectional stage of love of God without being purified. In the Bhagavad-gita (10.12), when Arjuna accepted Krsna as the Supreme Lord, he said, pavitram paramam bhavan: "You are the purest of the pure." The Lord is the purest, and thus anyone who wants to serve the Supreme Lord must also be pure. Unless a person is pure, he can neither understand what the Personality of Godhead is nor engage in His service in love, for devotional service, as stated before, begins from the point of self-realization, when all misgivings of materialistic life are vanquished.

After following the regulative principles and purifying the material senses, one attains the stage of nistha, firm faith in the Lord. When a person has attained this stage, no one can deviate him from the conception of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. No one can persuade him that God is impersonal, without a form, or that any form created by imagination can be accepted as God. Those who espouse these more or less nonsensical conceptions of the Supreme Lord cannot dissuade him from firm faith in the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Krsna.

In the Bhagavad-gita Lord Krsna stresses in many verses that He is the Supreme Personality of Godhead. But despite Lord Krsna's stressing this point, many so-called scholars and commentators still deny the personal conception of the Lord. One famous scholar wrote in his commentary on the Bhagavad-gita that one does not have to surrender to Lord Krsna or even accept Him as the Supreme Personality of Godhead, but that one should rather surrender to "the Supreme within Krsna." Such fools do not know what is within and what is without. They comment on the Bhagavad-gita according to their own whims. Such persons cannot be elevated to the highest stage of love of Godhead. They may be scholarly, and they may be elevated in other departments of knowledge, but they are not even neophytes in the process of attaining the highest stage of perfection, love of Godhead. Nistha implies that one should accept the words of Bhagavad-gita, the words of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, as they are, without any deviation or nonsensical commentary.

If a person is fortunate enough to vanquish all misgivings caused by material existence and rise up to the stage of nistha, he can then rise to the stages of ruci (taste) and asakti (attachment for the Lord). Asakti is the beginning of love of Godhead. By progressing, one then advances to the stage of relishing a reciprocal exchange with the Lord in ecstasy (bhava). Every living entity is eternally related to the Supreme Lord, and this relationship may be in any one of many transcendental humors. At the stage called asakti, attachment, a person can understand his relationship with the Supreme Lord. When he understands his position, he begins reciprocating with the Lord. By constant reciprocation with the Lord, the devotee is elevated to the highest stage of love of Godhead, prema.

SUTRA 3*

TEXT

amrta-svarupa ca

SYNONYMS

amrta--immortality; svarupa--having as its essence; ca--and.

TRANSLATION

This pure love for God is eternal.

PURPORT

When a person attains to the perfectional stage of love of Godhead, he becomes liberated even in his present body and realizes his constitutional position of immortality. In the Bhagavad-gita (4.9), the Lord says,

janma karma ca me divyam evam yo vetti tattvatah
tyaktva deham punar janma naiti mam eti so 'rjuna

Here the Lord says that any person who simply understands His transcendental activities and His appearance and disappearance in this material world becomes liberated, and that after quitting his present body he at once reaches His abode. Therefore it is to be understood that one who has attained the stage of love of God has perfect knowledge, and even if he may fall short of perfect knowledge, he has the preliminary perfection of life that a living entity can attain.

To conceive of oneself as being one with the Supreme is the greatest misconception of self-realization, and this misconception prevents one from rising to the highest stage of love of God. But a person who understands his subordinate position can attain the highest stage of loving service to the Lord. Although the Lord and the living entities are qualitatively one, the living entities are limited, while the Lord is unlimited. This understanding, called amrta-svarupa, makes one eligible for being eternally situated.

In the Srimad-Bhagavatam (10.87.30) the personified Vedas pray to the Lord, "O supreme eternal, if the living entities were equal with You and thus all-pervading and all-powerful like You, there would be no possibility of their being controlled by Your external energy, maya." Therefore, the living entities should be accepted as fragmental portions of the Supreme. This is confirmed in Bhagavad-gita (15.7) when the Lord says, mamaivamso jiva-loke jiva-bhutih sanatanah: "The living entities are My fragmental portions, eternally." As fragmental portions, they are qualitatively one with the Supreme, but they are not unlimited.

One who is convinced that he is eternally a servitor of the Supreme Lord is called immortal because he has realized his constitutional position of immortality. Unless one can understand his position as a living entity and an eternal servitor of the Lord, there is no question of immortality. But one who accepts these facts becomes immortal. In other words, those who are under the misconception that the living entity and the Supreme Lord are equal in all respects, both qualitatively and quantitatively, are mistaken, and they are still bound to remain in the material world. They cannot rise to the position of immortality.

Upon attaining love of God, a person immediately becomes immortal and no longer has to change his material body. But even if a devotee of the Lord has not yet reached the perfectional stage of love of Godhead, his devotional service is considered immortal. Any action in the stage of karma or jnana will be finished with the change of body, but devotional service, even if not executed perfectly, will continue into the next life, and the living entity will be allowed to make further progress.

The constitutional position of the living entity as a fragment of the Supreme Lord is confirmed in the Srimad-Bhagavatam and the Upanisads. The Svetasvatara Upanisad (5.9) states,

balagra-sata-bhagasya satadha kalpitasya ca
bhago jivah sa vijneyah sa canantya kalpate

"If the tip of a hair were divided into one hundred parts, and if one of those parts were again divided into a hundred parts, that one ten-thousandth part of the tip of the hair would be the dimension of the living entity." As already mentioned, this position of the living entity as a fragment of the Supreme Lord is declared in the Bhagavad-gita (15.7) to be eternal; it cannot be changed. A person who understands his constitutional position as a fragment of the Supreme Lord and engages himself in devotional service with all seriousness at once becomes immortal.

SUTRA 4*

TEXT

yal labdhva puman siddho bhavaty amrto bhavati trpto bhavati

SYNONYMS

yat--which; labdhva--having gained; puman--a person; siddhah--perfect; bhavati--becomes; amrtah--immortal; bhavati--becomes; trptah--peaceful; bhavati--becomes.

TRANSLATION

Upon achieving that stage of transcendental devotional service in pure love of God, a person becomes perfect, immortal, and peaceful.

PURPORT

The part-and-parcel living entities are entangled in the conditioned life of material existence. Because of their diverse activities they are wandering all over the universe, transmigrating from one body to another and undergoing various miseries. But when a fortunate living entity somehow comes in contact with a pure devotee of the Lord and engages in devotional service, he enters upon the path of perfection. If someone engages in devotional service in all seriousness, the Lord instructs him in two ways--through the pure devotee and from within--so that he can advance in devotional service. By cultivating such devotional service, he becomes perfect.

Lord Krsna describes this form of complete perfection in the Bhagavad-gita (8.15):

mam upetya punar janma duhkhalayam asasvatam
napnuvanti mahatmanah samsiddhim paramam gatah

"The great souls who engage in My devotional service attain Me, the Supreme Lord, and do not come back to this miserable material life, for they have attained the highest perfection." Both while in the material body and after giving it up, a devotee attains the highest perfection in service to the Lord. As long as a devotee is in his material body, his probational activities in devotional service prepare him for being transferred to the Lord's supreme abode. Only those who are one hundred percent engaged in devotional service can achieve this perfection.

In material, conditioned life a person always feels the full miseries caused by the transmigration of the soul from body to body. Before taking birth, he undergoes the miseries of living in the womb of his mother, and when he comes out he lives for a certain period and then again has to die and enter a mother's womb. But one who attains the highest perfection goes back to Godhead after leaving his present body. Once there, he doesn't have to come back to this material world and transmigrate from one body to another. That transfer to the spiritual world is the highest perfection of life. In other words, the devotee achieves his constitutional position of immortality and thus becomes completely peaceful.

Until a person achieves this perfection, he cannot be peaceful. He may artificially think he is one with the Supreme, but actually he is not; therefore, he has no peace. Similarly, someone may aspire for one of the eight yogic perfections in the mystic yoga process, such as to become the smallest, to become the heaviest, or to acquire anything he desires, but these achievements are material; they are not perfection. Perfection means to regain one's original spiritual form and engage in the loving service of the Lord. The living entity is part and parcel of the Supreme Lord, and if he performs the duties of the part and parcel, without proudly thinking he is one in all respects with the Supreme Lord, he attains real perfection and becomes peaceful.

SUTRA 5*

TEXT

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

SYNONYMS

yat--which; prapya--having attained; na kincit--nothing; vanchati--hankers for; na socati--does not lament; na dvesti--does not hate; na ramate--does not rejoice; na--not; utsahi--materially enthusiastic; bhavati--becomes.

TRANSLATION

A person engaged in such pure devotional service neither desires anything for sense gratification, nor laments for any loss, nor hates anything, nor enjoys anything on his personal account, nor becomes very enthusiastic in material activity.

PURPORT

According to Srila Rupa Gosvami, there are six impediments to the discharge of devotional service, and also six activities favorable to progress in devotional service.

The first impediment is atyahara, overeating or accumulating more wealth than we need. When we give free rein to the senses in an effort to enjoy to the highest degree, we become degraded. A devotee should therefore eat only enough to maintain his body and soul together; he should not allow his tongue unrestricted license to eat anything and everything it likes. The Bhagavad-gita and the great acaryas, or spiritual masters, have prescribed certain foods for human beings, and one who eats these foods eats in the mode of goodness. These foods include grains, fruits, vegetables, milk products, and sugar--and nothing more. A devotee does not eat extravagantly; he simply eats what he offers to the Supreme Lord, Krsna. He is interested in krsna-prasadam (food offered to the Lord) and not in satisfying his tongue. Therefore he does not desire anything extraordinary to eat.

Similarly, a devotee does not wish to accumulate a large bank balance: he simply earns as much as he requires. This is called yavad-arthā or yukta-hara. In the material world everyone is very active in earning more and more money and in increasing eating and sleeping and gratifying the senses; such is the mission of most people's lives. But these activities should be absent from the life of a devotee.

The next impediment Srila Rupa Gosvami mentions is prayasa, endeavoring very hard for material things. A devotee should not be very enthusiastic about attaining any material goal. He should not be like persons who engage in fruitive activities, who work very hard day and night to attain material rewards. All such persons have some ambition--to become a very big businessman, to become a great industrialist, to become a great poet or philosopher. But they do not know that even if their ambition is fulfilled, the result is temporary. As soon as the body is finished, all material achievements are also finished. No one takes with him anything he has achieved materially in this world. The only thing he can carry with him is his asset of devotional service; that alone is never vanquished.

The next impediment to devotional service is prajalpa, talking of mundane subject matter. Many people unnecessarily talk of the daily happenings in the newspapers and pass the time without any profit. A devotee, however, does not indulge in unnecessary talks of politics or economics. Nor is a devotee very strict in following ritualistic rules and regulations mentioned in the Vedas. Becoming enamored of these rituals is the next impediment, called niyamagraha. Because a devotee fully engages in the supreme service of the Lord, he automatically fulfills all other obligations and doesn't have to execute all the details of Vedic rituals. As the Srimad-Bhagavatam (11.5.41) says,

devarsi-bhutapta-nrnam pitrnam
na kinkaro nayam rni ca rajan
sarvatmana yah saranam saranyam
gato mukundam parihrtya kartam

"Every human being born in this world is immediately indebted to the demigods, the great sages, ordinary living entities, the family, society, and so on. But a person who surrenders unto the lotus feet of the Lord and engages fully in His service is no longer indebted to anyone. In other words, he has no obligations to fulfill except executing devotional service."

Finally, a devotee should not be greedy (laulyam), nor should he mix with ordinary materialistic men (jana-sanga).

These are six negatives, or "do-nots," for the devotee; therefore one who wants to attain the perfectional stage of love of Godhead refrains from these things.

Similarly, there are six positive items for advancing in devotional service. First, while one should not be enthusiastic to attain material achievements, one should be very enthusiastic to attain the perfectional stage of devotional service. This enthusiasm is called utsaha. A living entity cannot stop acting. So when he is forbidden to become enthusiastic about material achievements, he should at once be encouraged to be enthusiastic about spiritual achievements. Enthusiasm is a symptom of the living entity; it cannot be stopped. It is just like a powerful engine: if you utilize it properly, it will give immense production. Therefore enthusiasm should be purified. Instead of employing enthusiasm for attaining material goals, one should be enthusiastic about achieving the perfectional stage of devotional service. Indeed, enthusing His devotees in devotional service is the purpose for which Kṛṣṇa descends to this material world.

The next item favorable for devotional service is niscaya, confidence. When one becomes disappointed in his service to the Supreme Lord, that disappointment must be rejected and replaced with confidence in attaining the ultimate goal,

love of Godhead. The devotee should patiently follow the rules and regulations of devotional service so that the day will come when he will achieve, all of a sudden, all the perfection of devotional service. He should not lament for any loss or any reverse in his advancement in spiritual life. This patience (dhairya) is the third positive item for advancing in devotional service.

Furthermore, a pure devotee is not envious, hateful, or lazy in the discharge of devotional service. Confident of his advancement, he continually performs his prescribed devotional duties. This is called tat-tat-karma-pravartana.

The last two items are sanga-tyaga, giving up the association of nondevotees, and sato-vrtti, following in the footsteps of the previous acaryas. These practices greatly help the devotee remain fixed on the path of devotional service and avoid the tendency to enjoy temporary, material things. Thus the activities of a devotee remain always pure and without any contamination of the material world.

SUTRA 6*

TEXT

yaj jnatva matto bhavati stabdho bhavaty atmaramo bhavati

SYNONYMS

yat--which; jnatva--having known; mattah--intoxicated; bhavati--becomes; stabdhah--stunned (in ecstasy); bhavati--becomes; atma-aramah--self-content (because of being engaged in the service of the Lord); bhavati--becomes.

TRANSLATION

One who understands perfectly the process of devotional service in love of Godhead becomes intoxicated in its discharge. Sometimes he becomes stunned in ecstasy and thus enjoys his whole self, being engaged in the service of the Supreme Self.

PURPORT

The Srimad-Bhagavatam (1.7.10) states,

atmaramas ca munayo nirgrantha apy urukrame
kurvanty ahaitukim bhaktim ittham-bhuta-guno harih

"Although those who are atmarama, self-satisfied, are liberated from all material contamination, they are still attracted by the pastimes of the Supreme Lord, and thus they engage themselves in His transcendental service." When Lord Caitanya explained this atmarama verse to Srila Sanatana Gosvami, He described sixty-one meanings, and all of them point toward the devotional service of the Lord.

How one becomes intoxicated in devotional service is very nicely described in the Srimad-Bhagavatam (11.2.40):

evam-vratah sva-priya-nama-kirtya
jatanurago druta-citta uccaih
hasaty atho roditi rauti gayaty
unmada-van nrtyati loka-bahyah

"A person engaged in the devotional service of the Lord in full Krsna consciousness automatically becomes carried away by ecstasy when he chants and hears the holy name of Krsna. His heart becomes slackened while chanting the

holy name, he becomes almost like a madman, and he does not care for any outward social conventions. Thus sometimes he laughs, sometimes he weeps, sometimes he cries out very loudly, sometimes he sings, and sometimes he dances and forgets himself." These are the signs of becoming intoxicated in devotional service. This stage, called the atmarama stage, is possible when the Lord bestows His mercy upon a devotee for his advanced devotional activity. It is the highest perfectional stage because one cannot reach it unless one has attained pure love of God.

Neither formal religious rituals, economic development, sense gratification, nor liberation can compare with this sweet stage of perfection of love of Krsna, love of the Supreme Lord. The Caitanya-caritamrta (Adi-lila 7.97) describes this stage of ecstasy and intoxication as being far above the ecstasy of realizing oneself as Brahman, or the supreme spirit. Lord Caitanya says that the ecstasy of bhakti (love of Godhead) is so vast that it is like an ocean compared to the drop of pleasure derived from understanding oneself as one with Brahman. In all Vedic literature, the highest perfectional stage is said to be the state of intoxication of devotional service. It is not achieved by ordinary persons, the nondevotees.

In the stage of perfection, one's heart becomes slackened and one becomes more and more attached to attaining the lotus feet of the Lord. Srila Rupa Gosvami, a great acarya in the line of devotional service, has described this stage as follows: "Although appearing just like a madman, a person in the ecstasy of devotional service is not mad in the material conception of the term; this ecstasy is the manifestation of the pleasure potency of the Supreme Lord." The Lord has various potencies, one of which is called ahladini-sakti, His internal pleasure potency. Only one who becomes a little conversant with this potency can taste such ecstasy. The Vedanta-sutra (1.1.12) states, ananda-mayo 'bhyasat: "By nature the Lord is always joyful." This joyfulness of the Lord is due to His pleasure potency.

One who becomes affected by the pleasure potency of the Supreme Lord manifests various symptoms of ecstasy, such as slackening of the heart, laughing, crying, shivering, and dancing. These symptoms are not material. However, exhibiting such ecstatic symptoms just to get credit from the public is not approved by pure devotees. Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Prabhupada says, "Persons without attainment of the highest perfectional stage of loving service cannot achieve any auspiciousness simply by artificially laughing, crying, or dancing without any spiritual understanding. Artificial movement of the body... must always be rejected. One should wait for the natural sequence within devotional service, and at that time, when one cries or dances or sings, it is approved. A person artificially showing symptoms of the pleasure potency creates many disturbances in the ordinary way of life."

One who attains the perfectional stage of devotional service under the guidance of a bona fide spiritual master may preach the science of devotion as Lord Caitanya did. When Lord Caitanya preached, He danced and showed other symptoms of ecstasy. Once, in Benares, a Mayavadi sannyasi named Prakasananda Sarasvati objected to these activities. He said that since Lord Caitanya had taken sannyasa, the renounced order of life, He should not act in such an intoxicated way.

The Lord explained that these symptoms of intoxication had automatically arisen when He had chanted the Hare Krsna mantra, and that upon seeing this His spiritual master had ordered Him to preach devotional service all over the world. While speaking with Prakasananda, Lord Caitanya quoted an important verse from the Hari-bhakti-sudhodaya (14.36):

tvat-saksat-karanahlada-visuddhabdhi-sthitasya me
sukhani gospadayante brahmany api jagad-guro

"My dear Lord, O master of the universe, since I have directly seen You, my transcendental bliss has taken the shape of a great ocean. Thus I now regard the happiness derived from understanding impersonal Brahman to be like the water contained in a calf's hoofprint."."

In this way, one who reaches the perfectional stage of devotional service becomes so satisfied that he does not want anything more, and thus he always engages in pure devotional service.

"Narada-Bhakti-Sutra: The Value of Devotion" by His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada.

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SUTRA 7*

TEXT

sa na kamayamana nirodha-rupatvat

SYNONYMS

sa--that devotional service in pure love of God; na--not; kamayamana--like ordinary lust; nirodha--renunciation; rupatvat--because of having as its form.

TRANSLATION

There is no question of lust in the execution of pure devotional service, because in it all material activities are renounced.

PURPORT

In pure devotional service there is no question of sense gratification. Some people mistake the loving affairs between Krsna and the gopis (cowherd girls) for activities of ordinary sense gratification, but these affairs are not lustful because there is no material contamination. As Rupa Gosvami states in his Bhakti-rasamrta-sindhu (1.2.285),

premaiva gopa-ramanam kama ity agamat pratham
ity uddhavadayo 'py etam vanchanti bhagavat-priyah

"Although the dealings of the gopis with Krsna are wrongly celebrated by many as lust, great sages and saintly persons like Uddhava hanker for such loving affairs with Krsna." Srila Krsnadasa Kaviraja, the author of Caitanya-caritamrta, has therefore said,

kama, prema,--donhakara vibhinna laksana
lauha ara hema yaiche svarupe vilaksana

"As there is a difference between iron and gold, so there is a difference between material lust and Krsna's loving affairs with the gopis" (Cc. Adi 4.164). Although such loving affairs may sometimes resemble material lust, the difference is as follows:

atmendriya-priti-vancha--tare bali 'kama'
krsnendriya-priti-iccha dhare 'prema' nama

"The desire to satisfy one's own senses is called lust, while the desire to satisfy the senses of Krsna is called prema, love of God" (Cc. Adi 4.165).

The impersonalists cannot understand the principle of satisfying Krsna's senses because they reject the personality of Godhead. Thus they think God has no senses and therefore no sense satisfaction. But the devotees simply want to satisfy the senses of the Supreme Lord, and so they take part in the pure activities of love of Godhead. There is no question of lust in that category of pure transcendental love.

Lust leads to fruitive activity for sense gratification. There are different kinds of duties for the human being, such as political obligations, performance of Vedic rituals, obligations for maintaining the body, and social formalities and conventions, but all such activities are directed toward satisfying one's own senses. The gopis, however, simply wanted to satisfy Krsna's senses, and thus they completely gave up the conventional path of social restriction, not caring for their relatives or the chastisement of their husbands. They gave up everything for the satisfaction of Krsna, showing their strong attachment to Krsna to be as spotless as washed white cloth.

It is said that when conjugal affection between a lover and beloved comes to the point of being destroyed and yet is not destroyed, such a relationship is pure love, or prema. In the material world it is not possible to find this kind of love, for it exists only between Krsna and His intimate devotees, such as the gopis. The sentiment between the gopis and Krsna was so strong that it could not be destroyed under any circumstances. Krsna praises the gopis' pure love in the Srimad-Bhagavatam (10.32.22):

na paraye 'ham niravadya-samyujam
sva-sadhu-krtyam vibudhayusapi vah
ya mabhajan durjaya-geha-srnkhalah
samvrscya tad vah pratiyatu sadhuna

"My dear gopis, I am not able to repay My debt for your spotless service, even within a lifetime of Brahma. Your connection with Me is beyond reproach. You have worshiped Me, cutting off all domestic ties, which are difficult to break. Therefore please let your own glorious deeds be your compensation."

SUTRA 8*

TEXT

nirodhas tu loka-veda-vyapara-nyasah

SYNONYMS

nirodhah--renunciation; tu--moreover; loka--of social custom; veda--and of the revealed scripture; vyapara--of the engagements; nyasa--renunciation.

TRANSLATION

Such renunciation in devotional service means to give up all kinds of social customs and religious rituals governed by Vedic injunction.

PURPORT

In a verse in the Lalita-madhava (5.2), Srila Rupa Gosvami describes renunciation in devotional service:

rddha siddhi-vraja-vijayita satya-dharma samadhir
brahmanando gurur api camatkarayatya eva tavat
yavat premnam madhu-ripu-vasikara-siddhausadhinam
gandho 'py antah-karana-sarani-panthatam na prayati

"Activities such as mystic trance, becoming one with the Supreme, and the religious principles of brahminism, such as speaking the truth and tolerance, have their own respective attractions, but when one becomes captivated by love of Krsna, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, all attraction for mystic power, monistic pleasure, and mundane religious principles becomes insignificant."

In other words, by discharging pure devotional service one attains the highest stage of love of Godhead and is freed from all other obligations, such as those mentioned in the karma-kanda, jnana-kanda, and yoga-kanda sections of the Vedas. One who engages in pure devotional service has no desire to improve himself--except in the service of the Lord. In such devotional service there cannot be any worship of the impersonal or localized features of the Supreme Lord. The devotee simply performs activities that satisfy the Supreme Personality of Godhead and thus attains pure love for the Lord.

Only by the combined mercy of the pure devotee--the bona fide spiritual master--and the Supreme Lord Himself can one attain pure devotional service to the Lord. If someone is fortunate enough to find a pure devotee and accept him as his spiritual master, then this spiritual master, out of his causeless mercy, will impart the knowledge of pure devotional service. And it is the Lord, out of His causeless mercy, who sends His most confidential servitor to this world to instruct pure devotional service.

By the divine grace of the spiritual master, the seed of pure devotional service, which is completely different from the seed of fruitive activities and speculative knowledge, is sown in the heart of the devotee. Then, when the devotee satisfies the spiritual master and Krsna, this seed of devotional service grows into a plant that gradually reaches up to the spiritual world. An ordinary plant requires shelter for growing. Similarly, the devotional plant grows and grows until it takes shelter in the spiritual world, without taking shelter on any planet in the material world. In other words, those who are captivated by pure devotional service have no desire to elevate themselves to any material planet. The highest planet in the spiritual world is Krsna-loka, or Goloka Vrndavana, and there the devotional plant takes shelter.

The Narada Pancaratra defines pure devotional service as follows:

sarvopadhi-vinirmuktam tat-paratvena nirmalam
hrsikena hrsikesa-sevanam bhaktir ucyate

"Devotional service to the Supreme Lord means engagement of all the senses in His service. In such service there are two important features: First, one must be purified of all designations, and second, the senses should be engaged only in the service of the Supreme Lord, the master of the senses. That is pure devotional service."

Everyone is now contaminated by various designations in relation to the body. Everyone is thinking, "I belong to such-and-such country; I belong to a certain

society; I belong to a certain family." But when a person comes to the stage of pure devotional service, he knows that he does not belong to anything except the service of the Lord.

The symptom of unflinching faith in pure devotional service is that one has overcome the many disruptive desires that impede pure devotional service, such as (1) the desire to worship the demigods, (2) the desire to serve someone other than Krsna, (3) the desire to work for sense gratification, without understanding one's relationship with Krsna, (4) the desire to cultivate impersonal knowledge and thereby forget the Supreme Lord, and (5) the desire to establish oneself as the Supreme, in which endeavor there is no trace of the bliss of devotional service. One should give up all these desires and engage exclusively in the loving devotional service of the Lord. Except for the service of the Lord, anything done is in the service of illusion, or maya.

One should try to get out of illusion and be engaged in the factual service of Krsna. Service to Krsna utilizes all the senses, and when the senses are engaged in the service of Krsna, they become purified. There are ten senses-- five active senses and five knowledge-acquiring senses. The active senses are the power of talking, the hands, the legs, the evacuating outlet, and the generating organ. The knowledge-acquiring senses are the eyes, the ears, the nose, the tongue, and the sense of touch. The mind, the center of all the senses, is sometimes considered the eleventh sense.

One cannot engage in the transcendental loving service of the Lord with these senses in their present materially covered state. Therefore one should take up the process of devotional service to purify them. There are sixty-four items of regulative devotional service for purifying the senses, and one should strenuously undergo such regulative service. Then one can enter into the transcendental loving service of the Lord. (See Sutra 12 for a full discussion of these sixty-four items of devotional service.)

SUTRA 11*

TEXT

loka-vedesu tad-anukulakaranam tad-virodhisudasinata

SYNONYMS

loka--in society and politics; vedesu--and in the Vedic rituals; tat--for that; anukula--of what is favorable; acaranam--performance; tat--for that; virodhisu--for what is opposed; udasinata--indifference.

TRANSLATION

Indifference toward what stands in the way of devotional service means to accept only those activities of social custom and Vedic injunction that are favorable to devotional service.

PURPORT

Material existence is a life of revolt against the Supreme Personality of Godhead. There are many ways in which the living entities can manifest this spirit of revolt, such as engaging in fruitive activities, mental speculation, or mystic yoga to achieve material perfections. Generally, all conditioned souls desire to lord it over the material nature. Everyone wants to become a demilord, either by social or political activities or by Vedic rituals. Everyone wants to elevate himself to a higher status of existence or, out of frustration, become one with the Supreme. All these desires are different types of materialism; they are not favorable for devotional service.

A pure devotee rejects demigod worship and worships only Lord Krsna or His Visnu expansions. Until a person is completely free of material contamination, he might want to worship God in hope of fulfilling material desires. But even if a person has material desires, if he scrupulously worships the Supreme Lord he will very soon become purified of all such desires. On the other hand, persons whose activities are dictated by material desires and who are also addicted to worshipping the demigods cannot become pure devotees at any stage of their lives. The Lord, situated within everyone's heart, fulfills the desires of the demigod-worshippers--but in the Bhagavad-gita the Lord says that such demigod-worshippers are of small intelligence (alpa-medhasah). In other words, as long as one is controlled by the modes of nature, one will be prone to worship the demigods for material purposes, but one who curbs this tendency and worships Krsna exclusively can rise above the modes and attain pure devotional service.

One cannot be situated on the platform of pure devotional service, however, unless one is freed from all kinds of sinful reactions. To counteract various sinful reactions, there are prescribed duties in the ritualistic section of the Vedas, and those in the lower stage of life can become freed from all sinful reactions by strictly following the Vedic ritualistic processes. Then they can become situated in pure devotional service. Thus it should be understood that a person who is situated in pure devotional service must have in his past life already executed all the Vedic rituals with great determination. In other words, after reaching the stage of devotional service, a person does not have to execute any process of atonement mentioned in the ritualistic section of the Vedas. He is already sinless.

SUTRA 12*

TEXT

bhavatu niscaya-dardhyad urdhvam sastra-raksanam

SYNONYMS

bhavatu--let there be; niscaya--of certainty; dardhyat--the firm fixing;
urdhvam--after; sastra--of scripture; raksanam--the observance.

TRANSLATION

One must continue to follow scriptural injunctions even after one is fixed up in determined certainty that devotional service is the only means for reaching the perfection of life.

PURPORT

When a person becomes firmly convinced about the importance of devotional service, he surrenders unto the Supreme Lord. There are six symptoms of surrender: (1) One should perform only those actions favorable for devotional service to Krsna. (2) One should give up everything unfavorable for discharging devotional service. (3) One should firmly believe that Krsna will protect one in all circumstances and that no one is a better protector than Krsna. This conviction should be distinct from the monistic philosophy that one is as good as Krsna. Rather, one should always think that Krsna, or God, is great and that one is always protected by Him. (4) One should have the conviction that Krsna is one's maintainer, and one should not take shelter of any demigod for maintenance. (5) One should always remember that one's activities and desires are not independent. In other words, the devotee should feel completely dependent on Krsna, and thus he should act and think as Krsna desires. (6) One

should always think himself the poorest of the poor and feel totally dependent on the mercy of Krsna.

A devotee who follows these six principles of surrender always thinks, "O Lord, I am Yours in every respect; I am Your eternal servant." In this way a pure devotee becomes cleansed. There is a nice verse in this connection in the Srimad-Bhagavatam (11.29.34):

martyo yada tyakta-samasta-karma
niveditatma vicikirsito me
tadamrtatvam pratipadyamano
mayatma-bhuyaya ca kalpate vai

"A person who gives up all fruitive activities and offers himself entirely unto Me, eagerly desiring to render service unto Me, achieves liberation from birth and death and is promoted to the status of sharing My own opulences." To be elevated to such a point of devotional life, one has to execute the directions of the scriptures. But even after becoming elevated in devotional life, one should not think, "Oh, I am already elevated to the highest stage; therefore I may violate the scriptural regulations for executing devotional service."

Devotional service is dormant in every living being, for by nature every living being is part and parcel of the Supreme Lord and it is the healthy condition of the part to serve the whole. It is just like the situation of the parts of the body. The hand and the leg serve the body; similarly, as part and parcel of the Supreme Lord, every living entity is bound to serve the Supreme Lord in his healthy condition. When he is not thus engaged, he is in a diseased condition, but as soon as he engages all his senses in the transcendental loving service of the Lord, he is in his normal, healthy condition.

The devotee should engage his senses in the Lord's service according to the directions of the authoritative scriptures and under the guidance of a bona fide spiritual master. The beginning of one's devotional training is to engage the ear in aural reception of the teachings of the Bhagavad-gita and the Srimad-Bhagavatam. There are many authoritative books of spiritual knowledge, but all of them are more or less supplements to the Bhagavad-gita and Srimad-Bhagavatam. Even the Narada-bhakti-sutra is a summary of the Bhagavad-gita and the Srimad-Bhagavatam. Therefore the beginning of devotional service is to hear these two important transcendental books of knowledge. Simply by aural reception of these two books from the bona fide spiritual master, one becomes enlightened about devotional service, which is dormant within the heart.

Devotional service executed under the guidance of the spiritual master and according to scriptural injunctions is called vaidhi-bhakti, a part of sadhana-bhakti, or devotional service in practice. The other division of sadhana-bhakti is raganuga-bhakti, spontaneous devotional service.

One who wishes to advance to the platform of raganuga-bhakti must follow the injunctions of the authoritative scriptures under the direction of the spiritual master. According to Sutra 12, even a person on a highly elevated platform of devotional service must execute the rules and regulations of the scripture, what to speak of persons who are not elevated. In other words, neophytes in devotional service must strictly and scrupulously follow the rules and regulations of the scriptures to rise to the platform of unalloyed devotional service.

As mentioned above, a devotee who strictly practices regulative devotional service, or vaidhi-bhakti. The prime principle of vaidhi-bhakti is stated in the Srimad-Bhagavatam (2.1.5):

tasmad bharata sarvatma bhagavan isvaro harih
srotavyah kirtitavyas ca smartavyas cecchatabhayam

"A person serious about making progress in devotional service must always think of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, must always chant His glories, and must always hear about His activities." These are the preliminary principles of following the scriptural rules and regulations.

The Srimad-Bhagavatam (11.5.2) states,

mukha-bahuru-padebhyah purusasyasramaih saha
catvaro jajnire varna gunair vipradayah prthak

Every person, whatever he may be, emanates from some part of the universal form of the Supreme Lord, the virat-purusa. The brahmanas (intelligentsia) emanate from the face, the ksatriyas (warriors and administrators) emanate from the arms, the vaisyas (farmers and merchants) emanate from the thighs, and the sudras (laborers) emanate from the feet. But wherever we may be situated, we have some particular function to execute in the service of the Supreme Whole, the Personality of Godhead. If we do not, therefore, engage our particular propensities in the service of the Lord, then we are fallen, just like a useless limb amputated from the body.

According to the Padma Purana, the sum and substance of all the regulative principles of the scripture is that Lord Visnu, or Krsna, should always be remembered and should never be forgotten. We should therefore mold our lives in such a way that in every activity we shall be able to remember the Supreme Lord. Any activity that reminds one of the Supreme Lord is a regulative principle in devotional service, and any activity that makes one forget the Supreme Lord is a forbidden activity for a devotee.

In the Caitanya-caritamrta (Madhya 22.115-28), Lord Caitanya lists sixty-four regulative principles one must follow to be elevated to the highest platform of devotional service. And, as stressed here in Sutra 12, even after being elevated to the highest platform of devotional service, one must continue following the scriptural injunctions for devotional life. The sixty-four regulative principles are as follows:

(1) To accept a bona fide spiritual master. (2) To become initiated by the spiritual master. (3) To engage oneself in the service of the spiritual master. (4) To receive instructions from the spiritual master and inquire about advancing on the path of devotional service. (5) To follow in the footsteps of previous acaryas and follow the directions given by the spiritual master. (6) To give up anything for the satisfaction of Krsna, and to accept anything for the satisfaction of Krsna. (7) To live in a place where Krsna is present--a city like Vrndavana or Mathura, or a Krsna temple. (8) To minimize one's means of living as much as one can, while living comfortably to execute devotional service. (9) To observe fasting days, such as Ekadasi. (10) To worship cows, brahmanas, Vaisnavas, and sacred trees like the banyan.

These ten principles of devotional service are the beginning. Additional principles are as follows: (11) One should avoid committing offenses against the holy name, the Deity, etc. (12) One should avoid associating with nondevotees. (13) One should not aspire to have many disciples. (14) One should not unnecessarily divert his attention by partially studying many books so as to appear very learned. For devotional service, it is sufficient to scrutinizingly study books like the Bhagavad-gita, the Srimad-Bhagavatam, and the Caitanya-caritamrta. (15) One should not be disturbed in either loss or gain. (16) One should not allow oneself to be overwhelmed by lamentation for any reason. (17) One should not blaspheme the demigods, although one should not worship them. Similarly, one should not criticize other scriptures, although one should not follow the principles therein. (18) One should not tolerate blasphemy of the Supreme Lord or His devotees. (19) One should not indulge in idle talks, such as those about relationships between men and women. (20) One should not unnecessarily disturb any living being, whatever he may be.

The above-mentioned twenty items are the doorway to devotional service. And among them, the first three--namely, acceptance of the spiritual master, initiation by the spiritual master, and service to the spiritual master--are the most important. Then come the following items: (21) To hear about the Lord. (22) To chant His glories. (23) To remember Him. (24) To serve and meditate upon the lotus feet of the Lord and His devotees. (25) To worship Him. (26) To pray to Him. (27) To think of oneself as the Lord's eternal servant. (28) To become the Lord's friend. (29) To offer everything to the Lord. (30) To dance before the Deity. (31) To sing before the Deity. (32) To inform the Lord of everything about one's life. (33) To bow down to the Lord. (34) To offer respect to the spiritual master and the Supreme Lord by standing up at the appropriate time. (35) To follow the spiritual master or the Supreme Lord in procession. (36) To visit places of pilgrimage and temples of the Supreme Lord. (37) To circumambulate the temple. (38) To recite prayers. (39) To chant the Lord's name softly to oneself. (40) To chant the Lord's name loudly in congregation. (41) To smell incense and flowers offered to the Deity. (42) To eat the remnants of food offered to the Deity. (43) To regularly attend the arati offered to the Deity, as well as special festivals. (44) To regularly look upon the Deity. (45) To offer one's dearest possessions to the Supreme Lord. (46) To meditate on the Lord's name, form, pastimes, etc. (47) To water the tulasi plant. (48) To serve the Lord's devotees. (49) To try to live in Vrndavana or Mathura. (50) To relish the topics of the Srimad-Bhagavatam. (51) To take all kinds of risks for Krsna. (52) To always expect the mercy of Krsna. (53) To observe ceremonies like Janmastami (the appearance day of Lord Krsna) and Rama-navami (the appearance day of Lord Ramacandra) with devotees. (54) To fully surrender to Krsna. (55) To observe special regulations like those followed during the month of Kartika (Oct.-Nov.). (56) To mark the body with Vaisnava tilaka (clay markings). (57) To mark the body with the holy names of God. (58) To accept the remnants of garlands that have been offered to the Supreme Lord. (59) To drink caranamrta, the water that has washed the lotus feet of the Deity.

Among these fifty-nine items, five are considered so important that they are mentioned again separately, thus completing the sixty-four items of devotional service. These five are (60) associating with devotees, (61) chanting the holy name of the Lord, (62) hearing the Srimad-Bhagavatam, (63) residing at a place of pilgrimage like Mathura, and (64) worshiping the Deity with faith and veneration.

SUTRA 13*

TEXT

anyatha patitya-sankaya

SYNONYMS

anyatha--otherwise; patitya--of falling down; sankaya--because of anticipating the possibility.

TRANSLATION

Otherwise there is every possibility of falling down.

PURPORT

If a diseased person is being cured of the symptoms of his disease but does not care for the principles of healthy living, there is every possibility of a relapse. Similarly, the neophyte devotee serious about advancing in devotional service must carefully follow the principles of regulative devotional service;

otherwise there is every possibility of his falling down. Strictly speaking, if a devotee ignores the regulative principles and acts according to his whims--if, for example, he does not eat krsna-prasadam but eats anywhere and everywhere, such as in restaurants--there is every possibility of his falling down. If he accumulates money without spending it for devotional service, there is every possibility of his falling down. If he applies his energy not in the service of the Lord but in some material activity, there is every possibility of his falling down. If the devotee does not engage himself always in hearing and chanting the topics of Krsna and His activities but instead indulges in idle talk, there is every chance of his falling down. If a neophyte devotee does not follow the orders of the spiritual master and simply officially sticks to the principles, or if he does not strictly follow the principles, there is every possibility of his falling down. To become greedy is another cause of falldown. And to associate with persons who are not in devotional service is the last word in maya's allurements for causing a devotee to fall down.

In the Bhagavad-gita (18.5), Krsna clearly states that sacrifice, charity, and penance are never to be given up by a transcendentalist. If he is at all intelligent he must continue these three activities, even if he is highly elevated. A devotee is naturally very humble, and even if he is highly elevated he does not consider himself to be so. A practical example is found in the life of the author of the Caitanya-caritamrta, Krsnadasa Kaviraja Gosvami. He was a vastly learned scholar and a first-class devotee, yet he still referred to himself as the lowest of mankind, lower than the bacteria in the stool. He wrote that he was so sinful that no one should even utter his name, lest that person fall down! Of course, when a great devotee speaks this way, we should not believe that he is actually in the lower status of life; we should rather take it as evidence that out of humility a pure devotee never thinks he is elevated. He always thinks he is in the lowest status of spiritual life.

As stated above, in the Bhagavad-gita Krsna states that no one should give up the sacrificial portion of spiritual life. And the scriptures recommend that the best sacrifice in this Age of Kali is to chant Hare Krsna, Hare Krsna, Krsna Krsna, Hare Hare. Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare. Therefore, a devotee's prime duty is to continue chanting this maha-mantra, even if he is highly elevated. Otherwise, at any stage one can fall down.

SUTRA 14*

TEXT

loke 'pi tavad eva bhojanadi-vyaparas tv a-sarira-dharanavadhi

SYNONYMS

loke--in social behavior; api--also; tavat--for that long; eva--indeed; bhojana--eating; adi--and so on; vyaparah--the activity; tu--and; a-sarira-dharana-avadhi--for as long as one still has this body.

TRANSLATION

For as long as the body lasts, one should engage minimally in social and political activities and in such matters as eating.

PURPORT

Spiritual life begins when a person understands that he is not the body. In the material world, all our connections--whether social or political or in the field of eating, sleeping, defending, and mating--are due only to the material

body. Unless one is completely conversant with the fact that one is not the body, it is not possible to become self-realized.

In the Bhagavad-gita (18.54), Lord Krsna describes self-realization as follows:

brahma-bhutaḥ prasannaṭma na soḥati na kanksati
samah sarvesu bhutesu mad-bhaktim labhate param

"Self-realization [the brahma-bhuta stage] is symptomized by joyfulness. One never laments for any loss, nor is one very enthusiastic when there is some gain. One sees everyone on an equal level through spiritual understanding. These qualities are preliminary to entering into pure devotional service."

Pure devotional service is so powerful, however, that one may at once take to it without acquiring the previous qualification of brahma-bhuta life. A sincere devotee who engages in the service of the Lord automatically becomes situated in the brahma-bhuta stage. The devotee's duty is only to strictly follow the principles of regulated devotional service, as previously mentioned. Therefore a devotee should not be too concerned about social and political obligations, since all such activities belong to the body. He should similarly restrict his eating; this is essential to the execution of devotional service. A devotee cannot eat anything and everything he likes; he must eat only foods that have been offered to the Lord. The Lord clearly says (Bhagavad-gita 9.26) that He will accept a flower, a fruit, a leaf, or a little water if they are offered to Him with devotional love. (One should note that the Supreme Lord accepts only foods from the vegetable kingdom, as well as milk products. "Water" includes milk and its products.) The Lord is not hungry or poor, in need of our offering. Actually, it is to our advantage to offer Him something to eat. If the Supreme Lord kindly accepts our offering, then we are benefited. The Lord is full, but to establish the universal principle that everyone can offer something to the Lord, He accepts even the most meager offering--when it is presented with love. Even the poorest of the poor can collect a flower, a leaf, and a little water and offer them to the Supreme Lord.

It is incumbent upon all devotees of Krsna to avoid eating anything that has not been offered to the Supreme Lord. A devotee who does not strictly follow this principle is sure to fall down. Similarly, one who refuses to accept prasadam, the remnants of food offered to Krsna, cannot become a devotee.

In the Srimad-Bhagavatam (5.5.3) Lord Rsabhadeva states that one who is determined to become a pure devotee avoids associating with the general mass of people, who are simply engaged in the animal propensities of eating, sleeping, defending, and mating. The general mass of people mistake the body for the self, and therefore they are always busy trying to maintain the body very nicely. A devotee should not associate with such people. Nor should he be overly attached to his family members, knowing that he has been accidentally thrown together with his wife, children, and so on. Spiritually, no one is a wife, child, husband, or father of anyone else. Everyone comes into this world according to his past deeds and takes shelter of a father and a mother, but actually no one is anyone's father or mother. While a devotee must know this, that does not mean he should neglect his family. As a matter of duty he should maintain his family members without attachment and instruct them in Krsna consciousness.

So, whether in social life or political life, or in the matter of eating, sleeping, mating, and defending, a devotee should avoid performing any action tainted by material attachment. The word used here is bhojanadi, which indicates the four propensities of eating, sleeping, defending, and mating. As the devotee does not eat anything that has not been offered to Krsna, so he does not sleep more than is absolutely necessary. In the lives of the great devotees Sanatana Gosvami and Rupa Gosvami, we see that they did not sleep more than one and a half hours a day, and they were reluctant even to accept that. So sleeping is also restricted. Naturally one who is always engaged in devotional service of

the Lord has very little time to sleep. Sleep is a necessity of the body, not the spirit soul, and therefore as one advances in devotional service one's propensity to sleep decreases.

Similarly, a devotee minimizes his defending propensity. A pure devotee knows he is under the shelter of the all-powerful Supreme Lord, and so he is not very anxious about defending himself. Although he should use his common sense in the matter of defending, he is sure that without being protected by Lord Krsna no one can defend himself, however expert he may be in the art of defense.

In the same way, a devotee minimizes or eliminates sex. He does not indulge indiscriminately in sex, begetting offspring as the cats and dogs do. If he begets any children at all, he takes charge of them to elevate them to Krsna consciousness so that they may not have to suffer in material life again, in future lives. That is the duty of a devotee.

In this material world, people in general engage in sense-gratificatory activities, which keep them bound up by the laws of the material modes of nature. Indeed, the more a person engages in such activities, the more he expands his life in material existence. A devotee acts differently: he knows he is not the body and that as long as he is in his body he will have to suffer the threefold material miseries. Therefore to decrease his material entanglement and help his advancement in spiritual life, he always minimizes his social and political activities and his eating, sleeping, defending, and mating.

SUTRA 15*

TEXT

tal-laksanani vacyante nana-mata-bhedat

SYNONYMS

tat--of it (devotional service); laksanani--the characteristics; vacyante--are enunciated; nana--various; mata--of theories; bhedat--according to the differences.

TRANSLATION

Now the characteristics of devotional service will be described according to various authoritative opinions.

PURPORT

In the Srimad-Bhagavatam (7.5.23), Prahlada Maharaja very clearly states what the essential activities of devotional service are:

sravanam kirtanam visnoh smaranam pada-sevanam
arcanam vandanam dasyam sakhyam atma-nivedanam

"Devotional service consists of (1) hearing about the Lord, (2) chanting His glories, (3) remembering Him, (4) serving and meditating upon His lotus feet, (5) worshiping Him, (6) praying to Him, (7) thinking oneself His eternal servant, (8) becoming His friend, and (9) surrendering everything to Him."

One should surrender to the Lord as much as an animal purchased from the market surrenders to its master. Such an animal never thinks of his maintenance because he knows that his master will look after him. A soul totally surrendered to the Supreme Lord is similarly never anxious for his maintenance. Srila Sanatana Gosvami gives further symptoms of full surrender in his Hari-bhakti-vilasa (11.417):

anukulyasya sankalpah pratikulyasya varjanam
raksisyatiti visvaso goptrtve varanam tatha
atma-niksepa-karpanye sad-vidha saranagatih

"The six divisions of surrender are: accepting those things favorable to devotional service, rejecting unfavorable things, the conviction that Krsna will give protection, accepting the Lord as one's guardian or master, full self-surrender, and humility." Narada will gradually explain these principles of devotion in the remaining sutras.

"Narada-Bhakti-Sutra: The Value of Devotion" by His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada.

NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER: This document contains the first chapter of Narada-Bhakti-Sutra translated and commented on by His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. His disciples have since completed the translation and commentary on the total of 84 "sutras." The complete work is available as the publication, Narada-Bhakti-Sutra: The Secrets of Transcendental Love, by the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust International, at www.Krishna.com.

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