

# Nārada Bhakti Sūtrāṇi from the Vision of Vedanta

*Comprehensive Version with All Verses in Sanskrit*



## Introductory Remarks

I propose to take up a text titled the Nārada Bhakti Sūtrāṇi and I would like to begin by giving a general introduction to this topic. I consider this introduction to be very important, and thus you should revisit it regularly, or at the very least until the study of the text is over. The word bhakti, generally translated as devotion, has the primary and popular meaning: reverential love directed towards God—Īśvara viṣayakaṃ sādaraṃ prema. Prema means love, sādaraṃ means reverential, Īśvara viṣayakaṃ means directed toward God. Bhakti is considered an important qualification for gaining both jñānam (Self-knowledge) and mokṣa (liberation). As it says in the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad (Verse 6.23):

**yasya deve parā bhaktiḥ yathā deve tathā gurau  
tasyaite kathitā hy arthāḥ prakāśante mahātmanah<sup>1</sup>**

Vedantic teachings will only be comprehended by students who have two-fold bhakti: deve parābhakti and gurau parābhakti—intense devotion to the Lord and equal devotion to the guru. Toward the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the Gītā (Verse 67), Lord Kṛṣṇa says the Gītā should only be taught to those students who have the following virtues, and goes on to enumerate four of them, of which one is bhakti:

**idam te nātapaskāya, nābhaktāya kadācana  
na cāsuśrūṣave vācyaṃ, na ca māṃ yo'bhyasūyati<sup>2</sup>**

Here, Kṛṣṇa uses a double negative: 'You should not teach the abhakta,' which means you should share only with the bhakta. Thus, for both jñāna prakti and mokṣa prakti—to receive both knowledge and freedom—bhakti is considered a very important qualification. This bhakti is discussed elaborately in the Bhagavad Gītā, particularly in the middle six chapters—from Chapter 7 through 12—and the culmination of that section, the 12<sup>th</sup> Chapter, is itself titled Bhakti Yoga. Thus, bhakti is mentioned in the Upaniṣads and elaborated upon in the Gītā. The very same bhakti that we find in the Gītā has been further elaborated upon in all the Purāṇas, Itihāsas, Āgamas<sup>3</sup>—especially in the Purāṇas, such as the Bhagavata Purāṇa: the glories of the Lord, the exploits of the Lord, and the glories and greatness of great bhaktas are all very elaborately talked about. Thus, bhakti is pervasive in our scriptures. And in the tradition, it is said that one way to cultivate bhakti is by exposing ourselves to the biographies of great saintly bhaktas, such as Prahlada, Dhruva, and others. That is one method of acquiring, preserving, and nourishing bhakti toward the Lord. Accordingly, we have a vast literature on the biographies of bhaktas. We have the biographies of 63 Nayanmars (Śaivite saints), and we have the famous Bhakti Vijayam, which discusses the biographies of bhaktas, not only in Sanskrit, but even in regional languages we have a very vast literature.

When we study the biographies of bhaktas, we learn varieties of devotional exercises from them, such as śravaṇaṃ (listening), kīrtanam (mentioning, chanting, or singing to the Lord), viṣṇoḥ-smaraṇaṃ (remembrance of Viṣṇu), pādasevanam (service), arcanam (ritual worship, or pūjā), vandanaṃ (prostration/namaskāra), etc. All these are considered devotional exercises. Not only can we learn devotional exercises from the great bhaktas, we can also learn about varieties of devotional relationships with the Lord. We find that some bhaktas like to relate to Bhagavān with the affectionate

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<sup>1</sup> Only unto those great souls who have intense devotion to the both Lord and the guru is the full import of Vedic knowledge automatically revealed.

<sup>2</sup> This teaching given to you should never be imparted to the one who is without austerity, nor to the one who is not a devotee, nor to the one who is not desirous of hearing, nor to the one who criticizes me.

<sup>3</sup> Purāṇas are ancient Hindu texts eulogizing various deities, primarily the Trimurti—Brahma, Viṣṇu, and Śiva—through story. Itihāsas are epic histories, principally the Ramāyāna and Mahabharata. Āgamas are non-Vedic scriptures dealing with the spiritual philosophy and practices behind deity worship.

love of a mother, wherein Bhagavān is treated as a baby. This is also considered a form of bhakti, known as vātsalya (affectionate or tender) bhakti. Such a devotee may enjoy waking the Lord, bathing the Lord, clothing the Lord, feeding the Lord, playing with the Lord, talking about the pranks of the Lord. In the Bhagavata Purāṇa, many pranks of the Lord, or lilas, are mentioned and these bhaktas add more to them—every bhakta invents a newer and newer prank to enjoy. Then such bhaktas will put the Lord to sleep, sing lullabies, and so on. This is type of devotional relationship is known as vātsalya bhakti.

There other bhaktas who like to identify with Radha and look upon the Lord as their lover, so there is a lover-beloved relationship, which is referred to as prema bhakti, śṛṅgāra (romantic) bhakti, kanta-kanta bhava (matrimonial) bhakti, nayaka-nayaki bhava (male-female) bhakti, and madhura (passionate) bhakti. Thus, it is another distinct type of lover-beloved relationship. And several poems about this type of bhakti have been composed, the most famous being the Gītā Govindam of Jayadeva, in which he talks about Radha and Kṛṣṇa's bhakti.

Then there are others who like to look upon Bhagavān as the Master Swami and themselves as dāsyas or bhṛityas (slaves or servants). In fact, in his commentary, Adi Śaṅkarācārya often uses the expression: 'Swami bhṛitya nyayaḥ.' This type of bhakti is called dāsyā-bhakti, identifying with Anjaneya (Hanuman). We are already monkeys, so it may be more convenient to identify with Anjaneya than other forms.

Still other bhaktas like to look upon God as a parent, either the father or the mother. Mother worship is widespread. All over India, there is the practice of looking at Bhagavān as the mother. It is very convenient because I can make a lot of mistakes and ask for forgiveness, and the mother is known for having a melting heart. Therefore, there is mātṛ bhakti and pitṛ bhakti. We learn all these are types of devotional relationships and exercises from the bhaktas, and they have composed many songs and words so the bhakti literature has become very vast.

The beauty of this bhakti literature is that it is full of stories—either stories of Bhagavān or stories of bhaktas. It is also very media-friendly because you can have any number of bhakti-based movies or television series. In fact, they are also inventing new stories that are not in any of the Purāṇas, but people always assume they are Purāṇic because nobody has read all of the Purāṇas to be able to verify this. Thus, there are stories upon stories of Bhagavān and stories upon stories of bhaktas. They can be made into movies, television serials, songs, and rituals; and they can be watched, sung, or acted out. It is available for dramatization.

As a consequence of the vastness and popularity of this type of bhakti, Hinduism has practically become equated with it. Although it is certainly wonderful for people to be exposed to the bhakti-grantha (body of literature on devotion) and its expressions in various media, there are also certain serious problems with it. These problems are not generally talked about, and this is OK because lay people need not get into them. But if a person becomes a serious seeker of mokṣa, then this seeker needs to know what these problems are. You need not discuss this problem with everyone. I am really addressing only serious seekers of mokṣa who need to be aware of the problem. Broadly speaking, the entire bhakti-grantha talks about two topics. The first is bhakti sādhanā—devotional exercises, devotional relationships, worries of the Lord, etc. But alongside this topic of bhakti sādhanā, the bhaktas, in their grantha, introduce a philosophy of their own, in which they talk about the highest goal of life, or mokṣa, samsara, and the relationship between bhakti and mokṣa. Once we enter the topic of mokṣa, we have entered a philosophy. Therefore all the bhakti granthas have an integral philosophy as well, which is called bhakti darśanam, or bhakti varga, but the appropriate term is really bhakti darśanam. In English, this is translated as the philosophy of divine love. Thus all of the bhakti granthas deal with bhakti sādhanā and bhakti darśanam, so we have two connotations for the word bhakti—sādhanā bhakti and darśana bhakti, the latter referring to a philosophy of their own.

What serious seekers of mokṣa should notice is that the bhakti sādhanā contained in all the bhakti granthas is acceptable to us. But bhakti darśanam, the philosophy or view of the bhakti schools, is not at all acceptable to us, even though it is also called bhakti. So if someone asks whether bhakti is acceptable or not, you should not answer. Instead, you should ask a counter-question: “Are you referring to bhakti sādhanā or bhakti darśana?” And if that person replies “bhakti sādhanā,” we will say: “Wonderfully acceptable!” But if the person says “bhakti darśana” we will say: “Not acceptable to us,” even though it is also called bhakti. This is like cholesterol: if it is HDL, it is good, but if it is LDL, it is not. We disapprove of the bhakti darśanam contained in the bhakti granthas because it is an obstacle to advaita jñānam (non-dual wisdom) and mokṣa and we should thus reject it. Conversely, bhakti sādhanā is favorable to advaita jñānam and mokṣa and we should retain this aspect alone.

If we want to study bhakti darśanam at all, it should be treated only as the pūrvapakṣa—the opposing, to-be-rejected view—that it is. We should see the fallacies of bhakti darśanam and reject it as is done in the Brahma Sutras. In the Brahma Sutras, there is an analysis of different darśanas, or philosophies, and then the siddhānta darśanam is accepted and all others, such as the yoga-granths, are rejected as fallacious. There are so many yoga śāstra granthas. If we are studying yoga śāstra, there too, we should recognize that yoga sādhanā is one thing and yoga darśana another. Śaṅkarācārya tells us that yoga sādhanā is wonderful—the yamas, niyamas, āsanās, prāṇāyāma; all are wonderful, but yoga darśanam should be rejected. Similarly, in the Brahma Sutras, bhakti darśanam is analyzed and refuted by showing śrūti nirodha—all bhakti darśanas are contradictory to Vedic teaching. All bhakti darśanas are full of yukti nirodha, or logical fallacies. They have also got anubhava nirodha.<sup>4</sup> Thus, śrūti yukti anubhava virodhat; bhakti darśanam contradicts Vedānta vicāra and should not be accepted.

I will not go into all of the fallacies of bhakti darśanam, but the main doṣa (defect) in all bhakti systems of philosophy is that they retain jīva-Īśvara bheda (difference) permanently. Vedānta darśanam involves temporary acceptance of jīva-Īśvara bheda—this is useful, so not a problem. But bhakti darśanam accepts jīva-Īśvara bheda permanently, which is a problem. In the Māṇḍūkya Karika, Gaudapādācārya strongly criticizes those who follow bhakti darśanam as unfortunate because such people remain as dvaita bhaktas, permanently seeing Bhagavān as distinct from themselves. They want to retain bhakti-bhakta-Bhagavān-bheda permanently—even in mokṣa—whereas all the Vedas uniformly declare that dvaitam is saṃsāra. Therefore, dvaitam may be a stepping-stone, but it should never be the destination. This important advaita teaching, this abheda (non-difference) teaching that is the core of all the Vedas, is rejected by all the bhakti darśanas. All bhakti darśanas are Veda-virodha darśanam (contradictory to the Vedas), they are Veda-bāhya darśanam (opposed to the Vedas), they are anti-Veda. Therefore, what is the serious problem? When we expose ourselves to the bhakti grantha, we should know that it is a mixture of bhakti sādhanā and bhakti darśanam, and we should have a filter to remove the bhakti darśanam and retain the bhakti sādhanā. If we expose ourselves to the bhakti grantha without that sieve, we will mistakenly take bhakti darśanam to be the real philosophy. Bhakti darśanam is the pūrvapakṣa, but we will mistake it for the siddhānta—the philosophy to be followed—and never come to advaita jñānam, or mokṣa. Thus, bhakti granthas will become an obstacle to mokṣa if we study it without this crucial sieve.

So the natural next question is this: If all bhakti darśanas are pūrvapakṣa, what is siddhānta darśanam? No bhakti darśanam is our darśanam, let there not be any confusion about this; our darśanam is Vedānta darśanam and we should never stray from the Vedas. Unfortunately, bhakti darśanas have dropped the Vedas. Vedānta darśanam has been established in prasthanatrayam<sup>5</sup>—the Upaniṣads,

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<sup>4</sup> Vedāntic inquiry (vicāra) progresses through three phases: śrūti, yukti, and anubhava. Śrūti refers to scriptural authority and corresponds to śravaṇa, or listening. Yukti refers to logic and reasoning and corresponds to manana, reflecting deeply upon what was heard and resolving any doubts. Anubhava refers to experience and corresponds to nididhyāsana, or contemplation and assimilation of Self-knowledge.

<sup>5</sup> The three canonical and authoritative texts of Vedānta—namely, the Upaniṣads, the Bhagavad Gītā, and the Brahma Sutras. The Upaniṣads are the śrūti prasthāna, or revealed texts; the Bhagavad Gītā is the smṛti prasthāna, composed by rishis based

Bhagavad Gītā, and Brahma Sutras. In these three fundamental books, we have established Vedanta darśanam, keeping the threefold yardstick of śrūti yukti anubhava. Vedanta darśanam has been carefully protected and preserved by a fantastic guru- śiṣya paramparā (Guru Stotram, Verses 20-21):

**nārāyanam padmabhavam vasiṣṭham śaktim cha thath puthra parāśaram cha  
vyāsam śukam gauḍapāda mahāntam govinda yogīndram athāsyā śiṣyam**

**śrī śaṅkarācāryamathāsyā padmapādaṃ ca hastāmalakaṃ cha śiṣyam,  
taṃ trotakam vārtikakāramanyān asmad gurūn santatamānato'smi<sup>6</sup>**

This Vedanta darśanam must be remembered. That remembrance is the filter. Thus we should read the bhakti granthas without forgetting Vedanta darśanam so that we know how to filter and retain the sādhanā part and reject the darśanam part. So if you are asked whether Vedanta darśanam accepts bhakti or not, what will we answer? We will not answer. Instead, we will ask the questioner: “Are you talking about sādhanā bhakti or darśana bhakti?” If the questioner is referring to bhakti sādhanā, which is temporary dvaitam, we will say that we happily accept it because karma yoga and upāsana are both forms of dvaita bhakti. But jñāna yoga is not dvaita bhakti; jñāna yoga is advaita siddhi. Therefore, we accept bhakti sādhanā, but we reject bhakti darśanam wherein dvaitam is retained permanently. What I am saying here is for the serious spiritual seeker. The layperson, who is not interested in mokṣa, does not need these things. He goes to the Lord for the marriage of his eldest daughter. For such people, I need not talk about sādhanā and darśanam. Therefore, a word of warning: don't bother sharing this with ordinary bhaktas, as it will only confuse them. These things are to be learned when one is mumukṣu (desirous of liberation).

Then comes the next question: what are the fundamentals of Vedanta darśanam? You are supposed to know this, but I don't want to take anything for granted. Every serious spiritual seeker should keep that filter known as the remembrance of the fundamentals of Vedanta darśanam before studying any bhakti grantha. And what are these fundamentals? First, that mokṣa is the highest goal of human life. Anyone who says: “I don't want mokṣa, I want something superior to mokṣa” is not clear. This person clearly does not know what mokṣa is. Mokṣa is the highest puruṣārtha (aim of life), called parama-puruṣārtha.<sup>7</sup> These people are like politicians who are constantly switching parties. One magazine jokes that a politician's secretary had to ask him: “Which party are we in now?” Let the fundamentals be clear: we are following Vedanta darśanam.

Having established that mokṣa is the highest goal, we should ask the question: Can it be achieved by one means or by many means? Certain goals can be reached by one means, whereas others can be reached by several means. From example, darkness can only be removed by one method. We have to introduce light. Therefore the goal can be accomplished by one method alone. That goal, which we call eka-sādhanā-sādhyam, is attainable only through one method. There are certain other destinations or goals that can be attained through several methods, these are called aneka-adhana-sadhyam. Vedanta asks the question: is mokṣa eka-sādhanā-sadhyam or aneka-sādhanā-sadhyam? Then it conducts a thorough study and establishes via the Brahma Sutras that mokṣa is eka-sādhanā-sadhyam. The

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on their understanding of the Vedas; the Brahma Sutras are the nyāya prasthāna, the logical text that sets forth the philosophy systematically. No study of Vedanta is considered complete without close examination of the prasthānatrayam.

<sup>6</sup> [Salutations to] Lord Nārāyaṇa, his disciple Padma bhava, his disciple Vasiṣṭha, his disciple Śakti, his son Sage Parasara, his son Vyasa, his son Shukha, his disciple the great Padmapada, his disciple the great Yogī Govinda, his disciple Śaṅkarācārya, his disciples Padmapada, Hasthamalaka, Thodagascharya, and Sureshwaraācārya, who wrote the vartikas (commentaries). To our tradition of gurus, I bow down.

<sup>7</sup> According to Vedanta, all human goals can be reduced to four types: (1) artha, or security; (2) kama, or pleasure; (3) dharma, or virtue; and (4) mokṣa, or liberation. The pursuit of artha, kama, and dharma is a permanent struggle. In mokṣa, all struggle ends because I discover security and joy in myself. Thus the four puruṣarthas can be reduced to two: artha-kama-dharma, the apparent, and mokṣa, the real.

Vedas make this very clear. Therefore if any darśanam says there are many methods for attaining mokṣa, they are all Veda-virodha darśanam, or anti-Vedic. Mokṣa is attainable only through one method and that method is jñānam. And what jñānam? As we saw in Śrūtisara Samudharanam:

**brahma satyam, jagan mithyā, jīvo brahmaiva nāparaḥ<sup>8</sup>**

This is non-negotiable. This advaita-jñāna mokṣa is Vedanta fundamental number two. If somebody asks the question: “Can bhakti give mokṣa?” We will ask the question: “What do you mean by bhakti?” If the person says bhakti is advaita jñānam, then we will say: “Yes, bhakti gives mokṣa” but if the person says bhakti is anything else, we will say that it cannot give mokṣa. These are all the filters we must keep in hand while reading any bhakti grantha. Thus, the second fundamental is that mokṣa is eka-sādhāna-sadhyam, and that eka-sādhāna is advaita jñānam.

The third fundamental of Vedanta concerns whether advaita jñānam itself is eka-sādhāna-sadhyam or aneka sādhāna sadhyam. In other words, can advaita jñānam be attained by one or many methods? Can you buy it at the local mall, or dig it up from the soil, or drill a hole in your brain and dump in some knowledge? We must be clear that jñānam is also eka sādhāna sadhyam—it is attained only through one method. The Vedas make it very clear that this method is Vedanta śravaṇa, manana, nididhyāsana<sup>9</sup> under a guru’s guidance.

**\*\*\*End of Teaching 1\*\*\***

In the last class I pointed out that every serious spiritual seeker who studies any bhakti-grantha faces a serious problem. This problem stems from the fact that all the bhakti-granthas deal with two subjects: one is bhakti sādhāna and the other is bhakti darśanam. Whereas the sādhāna part of the bhakti-grantha is very useful for a spiritual seeker, the darśanam part—the underlying philosophy of the bhakti literature—is not because all bhakti darśanas are obstacles to advaita jñānam and mokṣa. Therefore, bhakti sādhāna is favorable, but bhakti darśanam is unfavorable. This is because bhakti darśanam is not in keeping with śrūti yukti anubhava pramāṇam. They are all śrūti yukti anubhava virodha, and thus obstacles to advaita jñānam and mokṣa. Accordingly, the serious spiritual seeker who studies bhakti literature should know how to filter out the bhakti darśanam part and keep the bhakti sādhāna part. Whereas bhakti darśanam will perpetrate jīva-Īśvara bheda, bhakti sādhāna will maintain jīva-Isvvara only temporarily, eventually leading us to jīva-Īśvara abheda. Therefore, we should know how to filter these two.

This filtration can only be done properly if we know that we are followers of Vedanta darśanam and we remember the fundamentals of Vedanta darśanam when studying any bhakti grantha. It was on this basis that I began introducing the fundamentals of Vedanta darśanam. The first fundamental is that mokṣa is the highest purashārta, or goal, we have to attain. The second fundamental is that mokṣa is eka-sādhāna-sadhyam, or attainable only through one method, and that method is advaita jñānam. The third fundamental is that advaita jñānam does not happen automatically. Advaita jñānam is also eka-sādhāna-sadhyam; it can be attained by one method alone and that method is guru upadeśa pūrvakāt Vedanta śravaṇa, manana, nididhyāsanaḥ—supported by a guru of the teaching, the student follows Vedanta śravaṇa, manana, nididhyāsana. Thus, only through Vedanta śravaṇa, manana, nididhyāsana

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<sup>8</sup> Brahman alone is real, the universe is apparent, individual self is none other than Brahman.

<sup>9</sup> Śravaṇa refers to listening to the logic of Vedanta unfolded by a competent teacher. Crucially, this listening requires full openness and receptivity, which means a temporary suspension all personal notions and objections. Manana involves contemplating this logic in conjunction with our moment-to-moment experience, and using the logic to examine and resolve the doubts that invariably arise. Nididhyāsana is the long process of assimilating this logic, or truth, so that it goes from being indirect to direct, from mere words to a deep and unshakeable conviction.

do we get advaita jñānam, and only through advaita jñānam do we get mokṣa. These are the three fundamentals of Vedanta that we should never forget at any time.

Now to the fourth fundamental: Vedanta śravaṇa, manana, nididhyāsana is possible only when the student has a refined mind, a prepared mind, a fit mind, a qualified mind. This is a necessary prerequisite for Vedanta śravaṇa, manana, nididhyāsanaṃ. This refinement of mind can happen only through karma yoga and upāsana yoga. So the fourth lesson is that only through karma yoga and upāsana yoga can a spiritual seeker obtain a mind fit for Vedanta śravaṇa-manana- nididhyāsanaṃ. Both karma yoga and upāsana yoga require Īśvara bhakti. In karma yoga, one has to dedicate or offer every single action reverentially to the Lord—be it a mundane worldly action or a religious action. Upāsana yoga requires reverential thinking of the Lord, reverential dwelling upon the Lord as upāsya devatām (an object of worship). Thus, karma yoga and upāsana yoga both require bhakti, and accordingly, bhakti is very much a part of Vedanta darśanam. In these forms of bhakti, the spiritual seeker looks upon God as something or someone different from himself. As a karma yogī, I look upon God as someone different from myself who is receiving my offering. Thus, karma yoga involves jīva-Īśvara bheda. Similarly, in upāsana yoga, I look upon Īśvara as the object of meditation, an upāsya devatā. Therefore, in both karma yoga and upāsana yoga there is jīva-Īśvara bheda, and this is why it is called bheda bhakti or dvaita bhakti.

Dvaita bhakti, in the form of karma yoga and upāsana yoga, is incorporated into Vedanta darśanam; one should never think that Vedanta is against bhakti. Nonetheless, when Vedanta darśanam incorporates dvaita bhakti, the method is to follow dvaita bhakti as karma yoga and upāsana yoga sādhanas, but we say that sooner or later one must come to Vedanta śravaṇa, manana, nididhyāsanaṃ, and from there to advaita jñānam, or advaita bhakti. So every dvaita bhakti should come to Vedanta śravaṇa, manana, nididhyāsanaṃ to attain advaita jñānam, which is otherwise known as advaita bhakti. It is through advaita jñānam alone that mokṣa can be attained. This is the route map. Again, the route map to mokṣa given by Vedanta darśanam is dvaita bhakti in the form of karma yoga and upāsana yoga, then Vedanta vicāra (self-inquiry), then advaita jñānam, which is also termed advaita bhakti. No bhakti darśanam gives this route map; in fact, not only do bhakti schools of philosophy not recommend this route map, they sometimes even criticize it. Therefore we should ignore bhakti darśanam and remember Vedanta darśanam and this Vedantic route map.

Now all the bhakti granthas talk about dvaita bhakti elaborately, so in this sense they are very useful as part of karma yoga and upāsana yoga, which are forms of dvaita bhakti. But the dvaita bhakti discussed in the bhakti granthas also includes some unique features, which makes reading them instructive. In all the bhakti granthas, Bhagavān is brought down to our level as human beings. This humanization of the Divine is a unique feature of the bhakti granthas. What is our real goal as serious spiritual seekers? Our real goal is raising the level of the human being to the Divine. Divinization of human beings is our ultimate goal, but instead of raising our level, we manage to bring poor Bhagavān down to ours—an extraordinary assessment, really. It is like a person extending a hand to lift a person, but the other person down below is so strong that he winds up bringing the helper down. This humanization of all divine beings is the first unique feature of all the stories in the bhakti granthas.

The second feature is that after making God a human being, all the bhakti granthas entreat the spiritual seeker to strike a relationship with this humanized God. And in this, a wide choice is given. So Bhagavān can be reduced to a human baby or made into an adult, such as a fatherly or motherly figure; there are many varieties of relationships with this humanized God.

The third feature is that after striking this relationship with God, all the bhakti granthas enter a regular interaction with the Lord. It is akin to interacting with any other family member—a regular, intimate interaction with a humanized God in which no rules and regulations are prescribed. Thus, we can interact with God at any time, in any place, and in any manner. We can talk to God, kiss and caress God, cry to God, and even scold and fight with God—all these are allowed without the fear of God

ditching us. In human relationships, there is always the fear of the other person ditching us. Here, you can do anything without the fear of losing the relationship, which is not possible in the other formal bhakti of a shoḍaśa-upacāra-pūjā<sup>10</sup>. If you want to have dvaita pūjā in the form of shoḍaśa-upacāra-pūjā, you don't have this sort of freedom because only certain types of upādānas are allowed—there are specific things that can and cannot be offered to the deity. And there is no provision for scolding or kissing in shoḍaśa-upacāra-pūjā. But the dvaita bhakti of the bhakti granthas is an informal dvaita bhakti. Thus, we have two types of dvaita bhakti: One is the formal dvaita bhakti that is prescribed in the scriptures in the form of specific pūjās, as well as karma yoga and upāsana yoga; the other is an informal dvaita bhakti prescribed in the bhakti-grantha, wherein we interact with the Lord in any way we like. Crucially, neither of these dvaita bhaktis is intended for mokṣa; both are meant for refining the mind. Thereafter, one must go to Vedānta vicāra, advaita jñānam (otherwise known as advaita bhakti), and mokṣa. The bhakti granthas merely provide informal dvaita bhakti practices for the karma yogī and the upāsana yogī.

Formal dvaita bhakti, in the form of karma yoga and upāsana yoga, is compulsory for all spiritual seekers because formal dvaita bhakti is specially designed for sādhanā chatuṣṭaya sampatti—attaining the fourfold qualification for Vedānta.<sup>11</sup> Informal dvaita bhakti, by contrast, is an optional add-on to this formal dvaita bhakti. Why do we say that it is optional? Because this informal dvaita bhakti of humanizing God—of waking up God, talking to God, feeding God, and so on—requires a particular type of mindset; not everyone can follow this, so I would not feel comfortable prescribing this for all. Those people who do have such a mindset and can enjoy this type of relationship are encouraged to practice this, but it should never be prescribed as compulsory. The pañca mahāyajñas<sup>12</sup> are compulsory, but this informal dvaita bhakti wherein you regularly relate to God as a person is not. There are some people who have a special room in their home for God. The room is air conditioned, or if they cannot afford air conditioning, they have a mosquito net above the Lord's bed. And they carefully lay the Lord down to sleep, singing lullabies and tucking in the Lord. Then early in the morning, they come and wake the Lord as well. Everything is provided; they treat God as one of the family members and spend thousands of rupees on various rituals every month. You may laugh but it is very, very important for them. Unfortunately, not everybody can practice this informal dvaita bhakti, but some people can and do enjoy it, and the bhakti granthas entreats such people to do so.

Informal dvaita bhakti also has the benefit of refining emotionally disturbed minds, especially for people with challenging familial relationships. When certain relationships are unhealthy, and cause us problems, we need to develop healthy relationships in order to neutralize them. A human being who does not have any healthy relationships is at risk of becoming emotionally disturbed. Such a person desperately looks for companionship because the human mind requires good relationships for

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<sup>10</sup> A ritualistic form of worship involving 16 steps: offering dhyānam (prayer), āvāhana (invocation), āsana (offering seating), pādya (washing of feet), arghya (washing of hands), āchamana (offering water to drink), snāna (bathing with water or pañcāmṛtam), vastra (new clothes), yajñopavīta (sacred thread), gandha (sandal paste), arcana (flowers), dhūpam (incense), dīpam (oil lamp), naivedhyam (offering specially prepared food), tāmḃūlam (offering betel leaves and betel nuts), āratī (camphor lamp is shown to God).

<sup>11</sup> These four qualifications, all beginning with the letter 'd', are as follows: discrimination (viveka), dispassion (vairāgya), discipline (śaṭka-sampatti; sixfold inner disciplines), and desire for liberation (mumukṣutvam). The sixfold inner disciplines are: śama (mind control), dama (sense control), uparama (withdrawal; i.e., not being too extraverted), titikṣā (forbearance), śraddhā (faith in the validity of the scripture), samādhānam (freedom from distraction). One who has all four of these qualities is called a qualified student, or adhikārī.

<sup>12</sup> The five great yajñas, or acts of worship, to be performed daily as a way of offsetting harm, expressing gratitude, and purifying the mind. These are (1) deva yajña, homage to God and the elements, which includes meditation; (2) pitryajña, homage to our parents and ancestors (e.g., taking good care of one's parents); (3) manuṣya yajña, homage to humanity (e.g., charity, social service, physical help, or teaching—anything that one has to give); (4) bhūta yajña, homage to beings in the plant and animal kingdom (e.g., offering food and water), as well as preservation of the environment; (5) brahma yajña — worship of Vedic knowledge by studying the scriptures oneself and offering this knowledge to others.

emotional health. Psychologists talk a lot about such healthy relationships. When a spiritual seeker does not have an emotionally healthy mind because of disturbed family relationships, this informal dvaita bhakti can be quite useful. When an emotionally disturbed person keeps his head on the lap of the mother—whether actual or imagined—the pain is easier to bear. People often say that in the joint families of the past the children were more emotionally healthy because an empty lap was available all the time. Therefore, the child always had a lap to cry on. Nowadays we have the nuclear family, in which both father and mother are stressed and yelling. There are no empty laps at all and even if there is an empty lap, there is a lap dog on them. So emotional disturbance requires a strong, good consoling relationship. When the spiritual seeker does not have a sound mind, *aham brahma asmi* won't work. Therefore, certain people will require informal dvaita bhakti. Not all people require it because many have families in which there are one or more other healthy relationships, and thus no emotional problems. But there are certain minds requiring such a separate relationship, and for such people, informal dvaita bhakti will be useful. Therefore, those who can and who need to take to informal dvaita bhakti should do so, and those who cannot and need not take to informal dvaita bhakti do not have to do so. We can all read the books of the bhakti grantha, but one need not practice the informal dvaita bhakti that they describe. On the other hand, formal dvaita bhakti in the form of karma yoga and upāsana yoga will help everyone, and sādhanā does require some practice. Now is Vedanta darśanam clear? Follow formal dvaita bhakti with or without informal dvaita bhakti, then come to Vedanta vicāra, then come to advaita jñānam—otherwise called advaita bhakti—and become a jīvanmukta. These fundamental features of Vedanta darśanam must be very clear when we read the dvaita bhakti grantas, otherwise we risk getting trapped in bhakti darśanam and getting permanently stalled.

The next point is that we have numerous bhakti literatures. Almost every Purāṇam and every UpaPurāṇam is a bhakti-grantha. And all the stories of bhaktas, the bhakta vijayams in different languages, are all considered bhakti-granthas. We also have several bhakti sutra granthas, such as the Śāṅḍilya Bhakti Sūtrāṇi, written by Śāṅḍilya Ṛṣi and the Nārada Bhakti Sūtrāṇi, written by Nārada Ṛṣi. All these bhakti granthas are useful. But when we study them our interpretation must be in keeping with Vedanta darśanam. In fact, many people have written commentaries on the Nārada Bhakti Sutras, but unfortunately, most of these commentaries conform to bhakti darśanam as opposed to Vedanta darśanam. Consequently, we have to handle the Nārada Bhakti Sutras carefully and create our own paramparā of interpretation. Swami Dayānandaji has brilliantly done the interpretation of the Nārada Bhakti Sutras and the uniqueness of our paramparā is that we study the Nārada Bhakti Sutras without following any bhakti darśana approach; rather, we follow the Vedanta darśana approach.

Turning to the Nārada Bhakti Sutra text proper. The author is the famous Nārada Maharṣi, who is very well known in all the Purāṇas; without Nārada, there are no Purāṇas. He is considered to be a great sage. In fact, in the Bhagavad Gītā (10.26), Lord Kṛṣṇa says: **devarṣiṇām ca nāradaḥ**—among the divine sages, I am Nārada. Thus, Nārada has been validated by Bhagavān himself, making his text worth studying. So will Devarṣi Nārada follow bhakti darśanam or Vedanta darśanam? To answer this, we need only to remember the Chāndogya Upaniṣad. In the 7<sup>th</sup> Chapter, known as Bhūma Vidya, we come to learn that Nārada Maharṣi studied Vedanta under a great guru by the name of Sanatkumara. In fact, the 7<sup>th</sup> chapter begins with this story. Nārada goes to Sanatkumara with a beautiful statement: **śrutham hyeva me bhagavad-drsebhyaḥ tarathi śokaṃ ātmāvit iti**—I have indeed heard from teachers like you that a knower of self goes beyond this ocean of sorrow, **so'ham bhagavaḥ, śocāmi**—here I am a specimen of sorrow seated before you, **tam mā, bhagavān, śokasya param tārayatv iti**—I have no other resort except you, O great master. Take me beyond this ocean of sorrow (Chāndogya Upaniṣad, 7.1.3).

So Nārada reasons that dvaita bhakti alone would not lead to mokṣa; dvaita bhakti can only give citta śuddhi (mental purification). We should all come to ātmā jñānam, as ātmā jñānam alone will take us across shoka sagara (the ocean of grief). As the famous vākyam says: **Tarathi śokaṃ ātmāvit iti śruthēḥ**—the knower of the self goes beyond all sorrows (Tattva Bodha, Verse 38.3). And is this ātman dvaitam or advaitam? This is defined in Chandogya, which tells us that advaita ātma jñānam is

required for mokṣa. This is a statement coming from Nārada himself, and he studied Vedānta under Sanatkumara. Therefore, Nārada can be considered an advaita ācārya. And therefore we should study the Nārada Bhakti Sūtra in keeping with advaita Vedānta darśanam as opposed to dvaita bhakti darśanam. That is to say, we should carefully extract the meaning.

As the title suggests, the Nārada Bhakti Sūtrāṇi is in the form of sūtras. Sūtras are capsule statements, axiomatic or maxim-like statements. But even though this is called a sūtra grantha and is in the form of pithy statements, it is distinct from the Brahma Sūtras, which is a text unfolded by a teacher and thus comes under jñāna prasthanam, wherein each verse is in the form of a logical proposition and the entire text is written in a rigid logical format. The Nārada Bhakti Sūtrāṇi is, thank goodness, not in the form of jñāna grantha. It is a comprehensive presentation and elucidation of bhakti in 84 sūtras, which are in this version, published by the RamaKṛṣṇa Math, divided into five chapters. There are commentaries for the Nārada Bhakti Sūtra available as well, but unfortunately as I mentioned earlier, most of these follow the bhakti darśanam route map. This route is appealing because it is easy, just keep chanting 'Brahma nama, Kṛṣṇa nama' and at the appropriate time, Bhagavān will deliver mokṣa. The greatest advantage to this approach is that we need not take responsibility; taking responsibility is burdensome. Therefore, present bhakti as only śaranagati (surrender), and you can simply give yourself to God and chant his name, and at the appropriate time he will descend and give liberation. This may be very cool to hear, but unfortunately it is not in keeping with śrūti yukti anubhava. In the Bhagavad Gītā, Kṛṣṇa himself says (6.5):

**uddhared ātmanātmānaṃ, nātmānam avasādayet<sup>13</sup>**

Don't wash your hands of responsibility and put all the responsibilities on God. You have to take responsibility. Bhakti darśanam is like the kitten to the cat: whenever the kitten has a problem, it cries to its mother, who hears its call and lifts it to safety. Similarly, we think Bhagavān will lift us to liberation. This is all very nice but it is not in keeping with śrūti yukti anubhava. Therefore, we have to reinterpret the Nārada Bhakti Sūtras in keeping with prasthanatrayam.

**\*\*\*End of Teaching 2\*\*\***

I have pointed out that every serious spiritual seeker should have clear knowledge regarding the role of bhakti in spirituality, and this is the role of bhakti as revealed in Vedānta darśanam. In the last two introductory talks I dealt with five important topics and I would like to consolidate this introduction by summarizing those five topics. The five topics that I mentioned are: (1) informal dvaita bhakti, (2) formal dvaita bhakti, (3) Vedānta vicāra, (4) advaita bhakti, and (5) mokṣa. We should clearly define all five of these topics.

The first one is informal dvaita bhakti, wherein a bhakti invokes the Lord as a person or human being. Here there is personification or humanization of God and then the bhakti relates to that personified god in any manner that suits his temperament: parent/child, lover/loved, master/servant, etc. Having visualized God as a person, and having struck a clear relationship with the Lord, the bhakta regularly interacts with the Lord exactly as he or she would interact with any other human being. In this interaction, no śāstric rules and regulations are involved—that is, no deśa-niyama, kāla-niyama, or śāstra-niyama (spatial, temporal, or scriptural precepts, respectively) needs to be followed. Indeed, many models in the Purāṇa who followed this informal dvaita bhakti were not even aware of the śāstra and śāstric rules—and therefore we call it informal dvaita bhakti. This informal dvaita bhakti is very useful for a spiritual student, as it has many psychological benefits. Therefore, any bhakta who is

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<sup>13</sup> One should uplift oneself by oneself. One should not lower oneself.

inclined toward practicing this informal dvaita bhakti, and who needs this type of dvaita bhakti, can practice it. But this kind of dvaita bhakti is not compulsory for all. It is useful, it is recommended, it can be followed, but in Vedanta we never say this has to be followed by all spiritual seekers. So this is the first topic: informal dvaita bhakti, or avaidha dvaita bhakti—bhakti that neither conforms to, nor is restricted by any śāstra vidhi, or law.

The second topic is formal dvaita bhakti, śāstriya dvaita bhakti, or classical dvaita bhakti. This dvaita bhakti exists in the form of karma yoga and upāsana yoga. I don't want to elaborate on these two topics here, because several Vedanta granthas, particularly in the Bhagavad Gītā, discuss them in detail. This formal dvaita bhakti is specially designed to develop spiritual qualification and thus, unlike informal dvaita bhakti, is compulsory for all spiritual seekers. Whereas informal dvaita bhakti may or may not be practiced, formal dvaita bhakti in the form of karma yoga and upāsana yoga is compulsory for all; that alone makes a person sādhanā-chatuṣṭaya sampatti adhikārī, an eligible student with the fourfold qualification. This second topic should be carefully noted.

The third topic is Vedanta vicāra. All dvaita bhaktas, by following formal dvaita bhakti, with or without the addition of informal dvaita bhakti, should acquire the fourfold qualification (sādhanā chatuṣṭaya sampatti) reasonably well, and all dvaita bhaktas should come to Vedanta vicāra. Vedanta vicāra is choiceless. Lord Kṛṣṇa's advice to every dvaita bhakti is that you cannot skip or avoid Vedanta vicāra under the guidance of a guru (Gītā, 4.34):

**tad vidhhi praṇipātena, paripraśnena sevayā  
upadekṣyanti te jñānam, jñāninastattvadarśinaḥ<sup>14</sup>**

The fourth topic is that this Vedanta vicāra alone converts dvaita bhakti into advaita bhakti. Thus, the fourth topic is advaita bhakti, which is also called abheda bhakti, parābhakti, mukhya bhakti (in the Nārada Bhakti Sutra), and jñanī bhakti (in the Bhagavad Gītā). This advaita bhakti is identical with advaita jñānam. We should remember that dvaita bhakti is never complete without coming to advaita bhakti, and advaita bhakti is never possible without going through dvaita bhakti. Both are important. Therefore every spiritual seeker requires dvaita bhakti initially and advaita bhakti eventually; it is not a question of choosing one or the other. This process is also not simultaneous, but sequential. Dvaita bhakti can never get converted or naturally ripen into advaita bhakti automatically; rather, dvaita bhakti will have to be deliberately converted into advaita bhakti through the corridor of Vedanta vicāra. So this advaita bhakti, which is another name for advaita jñānam, is the fourth topic. Therefore, to recap, the first four topics are informal dvaita bhakti, formal dvaita bhakti, Vedanta vicāra, and advaita bhakti.

Then comes the fifth and final topic: mokṣa. Mokṣa is the culmination and destination of the journey of dvaita bhakti, Vedanta vicāra, and advaita bhakti. These are the five topics we should recall in chronological order whenever we read any bhakti grantha. Without this awareness, if we read any bhakti grantha we may get trapped in misconception and our spiritual growth may get permanently stopped, stultified, stunted, or aborted. Indeed, the Nārada Bhakti Sutra is a beautiful grantha because it deals with four of these five topics clearly—namely, informal dvaita bhakti, formal dvaita bhakti, advaita bhakti, and mokṣa. These four topics are explicitly and clearly elucidated in the Nārada Bhakti Sutras. Even Vedanta vicāra is not totally absent from the text; it is discussed in the context of highlighting the importance of guru and satsaṅga. Guru refers to a responsible guru, a traditional guru, a śrotiyya-brahmaniṣṭa guru.<sup>15</sup> Such a guru will invariably introduce Vedanta vicāra at the appropriate

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<sup>14</sup> May you gain the knowledge by prostration, by service, and by proper inquiry. The wise sages will impart that knowledge to you.

<sup>15</sup> A śrotiyya is one who has learnt the wisdom of the Vedas from another guru who, in turn, belongs to the guru- śiṣya paramparā, or lineage. A Brahmaniṣṭa is one who, having gained this knowledge, has fully assimilated it, and thus abides in and as the Self.

time, or at the very least tell the seeker how to come to Vedanta vicāra. Thus, by highlighting guru and satsaṅga, Vedanta vicāra is also hinted at in the Nārada Bhakti Sutra. So with this context firmly in hand, we will enter the text proper.

I had said in the last class that the Nārada Bhakti Sutra includes 84 sutras divided into five chapters. Now we will enter into the 1<sup>st</sup> Chapter, which in this RamaKṛṣṇa Mission version of the text is titled: Parābhakti Svarūpam. As the title suggests, the text begins with advaita bhakti. Recall that in the Bhūma Vidya of the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, Nārada is Sanatkumara's disciple, so he is a śrotriya-brahmaniṣṭha ācārya. Indeed, the very word Nārada means 'knowledge-giver': **naram jñānam dadati iti Nāradaḥ**. Naram means jñānam, especially ātmā-jñānam; daḥ means giver, so Nāradaḥ means 'the ātmā-giver Nārada.' Nārada begins with advaita bhakti in the first two chapters and thereafter introduces dvaita bhakti as a means to advaita bhakti. Just as Kṛṣṇa introduced jñāna yoga in the beginning of the Bhagavad Gītā and later introduced bhakti karma as a means (2.12, 2.16, 2.20):

**na tvevāhaṃ jātu nāsam, na tvam neme janādhipāḥ...**<sup>16</sup>

**nāsato vidyate bhāvaḥ, nābhāvo vidyate sataḥ...**<sup>17</sup>

**na jāyate mriyate vā kadācid...**<sup>18</sup>

Thus, he begins with clean Vedanta vicāra jñāna yoga, and then introduces bhakti karma yoga as a means. Similarly here, advaita bhakti is going to be the first topic and then dvaita bhakti will be introduced as a stepping-stone to that. That is why the chapter is titled Parābhakti Svarūpam, which is also known as abheda (non-difference) bhakti svarūpam, advaita bhakti svarūpam, jñāna bhakti svarūpam, mukhya (chief or primary) bhakti svarūpam, mokṣa bhakti svarūpam. That is topic of the 1<sup>st</sup> Chapter.

## **Chapter 1: Parābhakti Svarūpam (The Nature of Advaita Bhakti; Sutras 1-24)**

**Sutra 1. athāto bhaktiṃ vyākhyāsyāmaḥ**

***Now, therefore, we shall commence to expound upon devotion.***

So the first sutra begins with the word **atha**. And **atha** is supposed to be a maṅgala śābda, or auspicious word. According to tradition, any scriptural teaching should begin with śantipath, a mantra for peace, or a maṅgala śloka, an auspicious verse. All the Upaniṣads start with a śantipath, but this being a sutra grantha, there is no provision for śantipath, so how to manage the maṅgala-ācaraṇam (invocation of auspiciousness)? By using the word 'atha,' all the Sutrakaras manage to present śantipath, or maṅgala-ācaraṇam because, as the rule says, the words 'Om' and 'atha' are maṅgala śābda (auspicious speech sounds), therefore if you start with 'atha', you have offered śantipath, a prayer to the Lord. Thus, Nārada follows this tradition, just as the Brahma Sutra begins with **athato brahma jijnasa** (now therefore, an inquiry into Brahman) and the Pūrva Mimāṃsa Dharmasutra written

<sup>16</sup> "I did not exist at any time in the past. You did not exist. These kings did not exist—such an idea is not at all true..."

<sup>17</sup> There is no existence for the unreal. There is no non-existence for the real...

<sup>18</sup> This ātma is neither born at any time, nor does it die...

by Jaimini R̥ṣi, which analyzes the karmakanda portion of the Vedas (i.e., what is dharma/adharma), begins with **athato dharma jijnasa**.

The word ‘atha’ serves in a twofold way—as a sound it is auspicious and as a word it has a meaning as well. Unlike in the Brahma Sutra in which ‘atha’ means ānantarya ārtha (immediate fruit), here ‘atha’ is arambhate atha śábdá, or ‘now begins.’ And what am I beginning? We are going to begin dealing elaborately with the topic of bhakti, both dvaita and advaita bhakti. And for what purpose? Atha. Atha means ‘therefore,’ or for this reason. And what is the reason? This reason is implied rather than explicitly mentioned and thus we have to supply the reason. And it is this: Because dvaita bhakti and advaita bhakti will lead to liberation. And how are dvaita bhakti and advaita bhakti a means to mokṣa? Dvaita bhakti is the indirect means and advaita bhakti is the direct means. And how do we know that? This has been said in Bhagavad Gītā itself. In the 7<sup>th</sup> Chapter, Kṛṣṇa says (7.16):

**caturvidhā bhajante mām, janāḥ sukṛtino’rjuna  
ārto jijñāsuarthārthi, jñānī ca bharatarśabha**<sup>19</sup>

Thus, Kṛṣṇa enumerates four types of bhakta: ārta bhakta, arthārthī bhakta, jijñāsu bhakta, and jñānī bhakta. Of these four, the first three fall under dvaita bhakta with varying motives. For an ārta bhakta, the motive of devotion is to solve problems. For an arthārthī bhakta, the motive is to gain something: ‘Oh, Lord, give me profit in business at least this year.’ A jijñāsu bhakta is also a dvaita bhakta, but the jijñāsu bhakta says: ‘Oh, Lord give me sādhanā chatusṭaya sampatti, a guru, and the opportunity for Vedanta vicāra.’ The jijñāsu bhakti intelligently asks for jñāna yoga prāpti and jñāna prāpti (self-inquiry and self-knowledge). Whereas these three bhaktas come under dvaita bhakta, the fourth type, the jñānī bhakta, is an advaita bhakta.

So Kṛṣṇa never asks a bhakta to avoid jñānam. Unfortunately, nowadays many people and most of the programs are misleading Hindu society by saying jñāna-mārga<sup>20</sup> is one among many mārgas for mokṣa, and that it is a tough mārga and therefore an avoidable mārga. Furthermore, they say that bhakti-mārga is another mārga for mokṣa and it is easy. They argue that any intelligent person would opt to go through the easy mārga, and therefore let the unintelligent people attend all these classes—studying Śrūtisāra Samuddharaṇam, Vivekacūdamani, and so on—let them, but we will take the simple route and do the vanamas and kirtanam and effortlessly attain mokṣa. This, unfortunately, is the bhakti that is spread all over, but this has never been taught by Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa says we have to go through ārta, arthārthī, jijñāsu, and jñānī bhakta, and further, he says (7.17):

**teṣām jñānī nitya-yuktaḥ eka-bhaktir vaśiṣyate  
priyo hi jñānino’tyārtam aham sa ca mama priyaḥ**<sup>21</sup>

All these Gītā verses are suppressed, and now the unfortunate Hinduism that is spreading is that among the mārgas, bhakti-mārga is the easiest and best for kali yuga and all you have to do is chant ‘Hari Rama, Hari Rama’ and Bhagavān will lift you to mokṣa. This is our pūrvapakṣa. This bhakti darśanam. We should never fall into that trap. You can start with ārta bhakti, nothing wrong with that; you can become an arthārthī bhakta, nothing wrong with that either. But we should all become jijñāsu bhaktas and, ultimately, jñānī bhakta. And Nārada says, following that Vedantic tradition I am going to talk about both dvaita bhakti and advaita bhakti, and I am going to start with advaita bhakti, jñānī bhakti.

<sup>19</sup> Four types of virtuous people surrender to Me—the distressed, the seeker of wealth, the seeker of knowledge, and the wise.

<sup>20</sup> A mārga is a path toward salvation. The Gītā describes jñāna-mārga, the way of knowledge (through the study and contemplation of scripture), karma-mārga the way of action (acting in accordance with dharma), and bhakti-mārga, the way of devotion and self-surrender to God.

<sup>21</sup> Among them the man of wisdom who is always engaged exclusively in devotional service is superior. To that cultivator of wisdom, I am extremely dear and he is dear to me.

I am going to start with ‘atha.’ So here ‘atha’ means because dvaita bhakti and advaita bhakti are a means of liberation, I shall teach both. This is the introduction and now he enters the subject matter.

**Sutra 2. sā tvasmin para(ma)prema svarūpā**

***That [devotion, i.e., advaita bhakti] is of the nature of supreme love toward this one [God].***

That **ma** is put in parentheses to indicate that there are two readings: **paraprema svarūpa** and **paramaprema svarūpa**—both of which are correct. Both para and parama have the same meaning: the highest, greatest, or supreme. So first Nārada gives the primary definition of bhakti. **Sā** means ‘that,’ which refers to **sā bhaktiḥ** (that bhakti). So **sā bhaktiḥ** is **paramaprema svarūpā**—of the nature of the highest love. **Prema** means ‘love.’ And as I said, **para** is a superlative, meaning the highest, greatest, or supreme. **Svarūpa** means ‘of the nature of.’ So the nature of bhakti is that of supreme love.

Because love is a transitive verb, love is always directed toward something. The moment you say ‘love,’ it raises the question: love towards or for whom? And to this Nārada mysteriously replies *asmin*, meaning ‘toward this one.’ So he uses a pronoun to indicate the object of love. So now the question arises: What is the meaning of this pronoun? We use a pronoun only after a noun has already been introduced. The key word ‘pronoun’ means proxy-noun. And here, Nārada is using a pronoun without introducing the noun itself, so how does one arrive at its meaning? The rule is this: whenever we use a pronoun generally (i.e., without referring to any particular noun), it refers to God. This is our convention. Suppose I say: ‘Without Him, nothing in the creation will move.’ You naturally understand the meaning of the word ‘Him’ to refer to God alone. Not to former Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, not to Obama, even though they are fine people. That is why the śāntipath, a joint prayer between the giver and recipient of knowledge, says:

**sahanāvavatu, sahanau bhunaktu sahvīryaṅkaravāvahai  
tejasvināvadhītamastu mā vidviṣāvahai  
Om śāntiḥ, śāntiḥ, śāntiḥ<sup>22</sup>**

In the entire śāntipatha, the word **saha**—the ‘He’ pronoun—is used without indicating whom it is referring to, and we translate it as *saha Bhagavān Īśvara nau avatu*. Therefore, in keeping with that convention and tradition, **asmin** refers to Īśvara-Bhagavān. Thus, the definition of bhakti according to Sutra 2 is that bhakti is of the nature of supreme love toward God.

Then comes the question, which God? The question arises because the śāstra describes God in two different ways. God is described in one way in the Veda pūrvabhāga (the earlier part of the Vedas focusing on religious action, i.e., the karma-kānda) and the very same God is described in another way in the Veda antabhāga (the latter portion of the Vedas focusing on self-knowledge, i.e., the jñāna-kānda). Both are Vedas, both are śāstras, therefore which one is the referent here? And Nārada must not stray from the scriptures, as I said before, the one rule in our tradition is that the teaching must follow three norms, or yardsticks: śrūti, yukti, and anubhava. Any scripture that violates any one of these three should be tidied up and put away. Given that Nārada has to follow Veda, the question is which God? In the Veda pūrvabhāga, God is an extraordinary divine being who is an object of worship (pujya devatā) and meditation (upāsya devatā). And is this God who is an object of worship and

<sup>22</sup> May He protect us both. May He nourish us. May we acquire the capacity to study and understand the scripture. May our study fructify. May we not cavil at each other.

meditation anātma or ātma? Uncomfortable questions are being raised which we would prefer to forget. So the worshipped Lord, the meditated-upon Lord is anātma-Īśvara, an object that is different from me. Thus, the Veda pūrvabhāga deals with anātmarūpa-Īśvara. Pūjā-upasya-anātmarūpa-Īśvara is the God of the Veda pūrvabhāga, whereas in the Veda antabhāga, Īśvara is talked about as ātmā, the very observer (Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, 3<sup>rd</sup> Chapter, 7<sup>th</sup> Section: Antaryami Brahmana)

**adr̥ṣṭo driṣṭā, aśruta śrotā, amato manta, avijnato vijnata  
nanyti'to'sti dr̥ṣṭa, nanyo'to'sti śrotā, nanyo'to'sti mantā**<sup>23</sup>

Here, God is referred to as Antaryami Brahmanam. Antaryami means the one who remains inside as (Kena Upaniṣad, 1.1-2):

**śrotrasya śrotram manaso manaḥ yadvāco ha vācam sa u prāṇasya prāṇaḥ  
cakṣuṣācakṣuratimucya dhīrāḥ pretyāsmālokādāmṛtā bhavanti**<sup>24</sup>

The One who enlivens all the faculties. Kṛṣṇa himself says this when he talks about the various vibhūti, or forms, of the Lord in the creation. The first description (10.20) is: Arjuna, do you know who am I? **Aham ātmā guḍākeśa, sarvabhūtāśayasthitaḥ**—I am the Self residing in the heart of all beings. And where am I? (18.61): **Īśvaraḥ sarvabhūtānām, hṛddeśe'rjuna tiṣṭhati**—the Lord resides in the heart of all beings.

Thus, our scriptures talk about both anātmarūpa-Īśvara and atmārūpa-Īśvara—God in the form of “not-Self” and God as Self. And bhakti has been defined as supreme love toward God. So our question is: supreme love toward *which* version of God? To answer this, we have to look to the Upaniṣads; the śrūti must be there. Bhakti gr̥antha must be studied with a tanpura-śrūti.<sup>25</sup> We should never study the bhakti gr̥antha without Vedic background, or we will get trapped. And in the Upaniṣads, especially the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad (1.4.8), it says there is only one thing that is the object of supreme love. For every human being—instinctively, universally and unconditionally—there is only one thing that is of the highest love: ātmā. Oneself alone is the dearest.

**tadetatpreyaḥ putrātpreyo vittātpreyo'nyasmātsarvasmādantaratarāṃ yadayamātmā  
sa yo'nyamātmanaḥ priyaṃ bruvāṇaṃ brūyātpriyaṃ rotsyatītīśvaro ha tathaiva  
syādātmānameva priyamupāsīta sa ya ātmānameva priyamupāste na hāsya priyaṃ  
pramāyukaṃ bhavati**<sup>26</sup>

Ātmā alone can be dearest. We can love all others; they can come under dear, or at maximum, dearer. Every anātma can only fall under the undear—for example, a cockroach; unless, of course, you are a researcher studying cockroaches—the dear, or at most, the dearer category. Who says? The

<sup>23</sup> This Self cannot be seen, but it sees. It cannot be heard, but hears. It cannot be thought of, but it thinks. It cannot be understood, but it understands. There is no seer other than that. There is no hearer other than that. There is no thinker other than that.

<sup>24</sup> Because He is the Ear of the ear, the Mind of the mind, the Speech of speech, the Life of life, and the Eye of the eye, the intelligent men after giving up identification with the senses and renouncing this world, become immortal.

<sup>25</sup> This is a double-entendre referring to śrūti both in the sense of śravaṇa and in the sense of the electronic version of a tanpura, which provides a background drone in Indian classical music. Here, Swamiji is implying that the jñāna-kanda should always serve as the backdrop when we study the bhakti gr̥antha.

<sup>26</sup> This Self is dearer than a son, dearer than wealth, dearer than everything else, and is innermost. Should a person holding the Self as dear say to one calling anything else dearer than the Self, 'What you hold dear will die,' he or she is certainly competent to say so, as it will indeed come true. One should meditation upon the Self alone as dear, the dear ones are not mortal.

Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad. Then naturally a question will arise: What about my spouse? Because at least in the beginning stages of marriage, spouses will call each other “honey” all the time and all other sorts of superlative love words are used. Yājñavalkya addresses this doubt very clearly in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, Verse 2.4.5:

**sa hovāca: na vā are patyuh kāmāya patiḥ priyo bhavatyātmanastu kāmāya patiḥ priyo bhavati, na vā are jāyāyai kāmāya jāyā priyā bhavatyātmanastu kāmāya jāyā priyā bhavati, na vā are putrāṇaṃ kāmāya putrāḥ priyā bhavantyātmanastu kāmāya putrāḥ priyā bhavanti, na vā are vittasya kāmāya vittam priyaṃ bhavatyātmanastu kāmāya vittam priyaṃ bhavati, na vā are brahmaṇaḥ kāmāya brahma priyaṃ bhavatyātmanastu kāmāya brahma priyaṃ bhavati na vā are kṣatrasya kāmāya kṣatram priyaṃ bhavatyātmanastu kāmāya kṣatram priyaṃ bhavati, na vā are lokānāṃ kāmāya lokāḥ priyā bhavantyātmanastu kāmāya lokāḥ priyā bhavanti, na vā are devānāṃ kāmāya devāḥ priyā bhavantyātmanastu kāmāya devāḥ priyā bhavanti, na vā are bhūtānāṃ kāmāya bhūtāni priyāni bhavantyātmanastu kāmāya bhūtāni priyāni bhavanti, na vā are sarvasya kāmāya sarvaṃ priyaṃ bhavatyātmanastu kāmāya sarvaṃ priyaṃ bhavati, ātmā vā are draṣṭavaḥ śrotavyo mantavyo nididhyāsitavyo maitreyyātmano vā are darśanena śravaṇena matyā vijñānenedagm sarvaṃ viditam<sup>27</sup>**

Everything other than ātmā is loved only conditionally; the condition being my comfort. Once that object becomes a source of discomfort or headache, I may continue to care for a person or object out of duty or conscience, but it is not possible to love that person or object because everybody wants to be comfortable. Thus, the highest love is reserved for Oneself. The Upaniṣad says there is no exception at all. Therefore, ‘satu asmin’ refers to what? Ātmā svarūpa Īśvara para(ma)prema alone is called bhaktiḥ. So divine love, which is synonymous with Self-love, is the highest love.

### \*\*\*End of Teaching 3\*\*\*

In the 1<sup>st</sup> Sutra, Nārada introduces the subject matter of this text—namely, bhakti or divine love. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sutra, he gives the definition of bhakti or divine love: **sā tvasmin para(ma)prema svarūpā**. The divine love mentioned in the 1<sup>st</sup> Sutra is nothing but the supreme love, or the highest love, directed toward Him. And the pronoun used here is **asmin**. I said in the last class that whenever the śāstra uses a general pronoun without introducing any particular noun, the general pronoun refers to God alone. Therefore, **asmin** means **Īśvara paramaprema rūpa**—supreme love directed toward God, which is also called divine love. Then I asked the question: What do you mean by God? Because God has been explained in two different ways in the Veda pūrvabhāga and Veda antabhāga. God is initially understood in the Veda pūrvabhāga to be an extraordinary being that is worshipped or meditated upon. As a karma yogī, I worship the Lord and as an upāsana yogī, I meditate upon God; in both cases, God is an extraordinary being that is an object of worship and meditation. Anātma-rūpa-Īśvara is introduced in the Veda pūrvabhāga, whereas a refinement is made in the Veda antabhāga (i.e., Vedanta), wherein the same God is revealed not as an object, anātma, but the very subject, ātmā itself. As we saw in the Bhagavad Gītā (18.61): **Īśvaraḥ sarvabhūtānāṃ hr̥ddeṣe**—God is in the heart of everyone. And in what form does God reside in the heart? To this, Kṛṣṇa says (10.20): **aham ātmā guḍākeśa**

<sup>27</sup> It is not for the sake of the husband, my dear, that the husband is loved, but for the sake of the Self. It is not for the sake of the wife, my dear, that the wife is loved, but for the sake of the self. It is not for the sake of the sons, my dear, that the sons are loved, but for the sake of the self. It is not for the sake of wealth, my dear, that wealth is loved, but for the sake of the self. It is not for the sake of the brahmins, my dear, that the brahmins is loved, but for the sake of the Self. It is not for the sake of the kṣatriya, my dear, that kṣatriya is loved, but for the sake of the Self. It is not for the sake of the worlds, my dear, that the worlds are loved, but for the sake of the Self. It is not for the sake of the gods, my dear, that thee gods are loved, but for the sake of the Self. It is not for the sake of the beings, my dear, that they are loved, but for the sake of the Self. It is not for the sake of the All, my dear, that All is loved, but for the sake of the Self. My dear Maitreyi, it is the Self that should be realized—should be heard, reflected on, and meditated upon. By realizing the Self through hearing, reflection, and meditation, all this is known.

**sarvabhūtāśayasthitah**—in the form of the very ātmā, or the self. Therefore, in Vedanta divine love is Self-love; supreme love directed toward God who is in the form of the very ātmā.

Then the next question is: Why do you accept the Vedantic definition of God? Why do we take God to be the ātmā within? Why can't we take God as a being outside, other than me? To this very important question, we looked to the answer supplied by the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad (1.4.8):

**tadetatpreyaḥ putrātpreyo vittātpreyo'nyasmātsarvasmādanatarataraṃ yadayamātmā  
sa yo'nyamātmanaḥ priyaṃ bruvāṇaṃ brūyātpriyaṃ rotsyatītīśvaro ha tathaiva  
syādātmānameva priyamupāsīta sa ya ātmānameva priyamupāste na hāsya priyaṃ  
pramāyukaṃ bhavati**<sup>28</sup>

Instinctively and naturally, supreme love is possible only in one place. It is a choiceless thing. All beings instinctively and naturally love the Self only, and therefore ātmā alone is the object of highest love. Anātma can never become the dearest thing; anātma can become either dear, or at best, dearer. The dearest one for everyone is Oneself, the ātmā. Therefore Nārada's thesis is that divine love can become supreme love only when the Divine is discovered to be the very ātmā, a thesis that is substantiated by the Veda.

According to the Veda, love is nothing but the natural liking of the mind directed toward the source of joy. Whatever object is a source of joy for me, whatever gives happiness to me, my mind naturally likes. I hear a talk and that talks give me joy, naturally I like that talk. It may be a material object, it may be an event, it may be a person, or it may be a pet—anything at all. Whatever is a source of happiness for me, the mind will naturally gravitate toward liking that particular object. This natural liking that the mind develops in the direction of a source of happiness is called love. I love gulab jamun, it gives me happiness. Generally in the case of material objects, we use the word 'like,' whereas in the case of beings, we use the word 'love.' Liking is love and love is liking; whether you use the word 'like' or 'love,' it is nothing but the mind's natural tendency toward a source of happiness. Therefore the attitude of the mind toward the source of joy is called 'prema.' This is why, as Swami Dayānandaji says, people love each other for some time, then get married and live together for some time, discovering each other more deeply. Then they say: "Until now I loved you, but now I would love you to go away." So love becomes "alove" (a play on Sanskrit negation by adding 'a').

Why does love become alove? Because until now I took this person to be a source of happiness because of our compatibility, but having lived together, some incompatibility was discovered. When the incompatibility outweighs the compatibility, the so-called source of happiness becomes a source of unhappiness; naturally the mind begins to distance itself, even as the other person has remained the same. Therefore, the definition of love is: mental liking toward an object that is a source of joy. The Veda says that if you go by this definition, you can love only ātmā because in the entire creation there is only one original source of ānanda: ātmā alone is this source. As it says in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad (7.23.1): **yo vai bhūmā tatsukham, nālpe sukhamasti**—the Infinite alone is bliss, which is absent in finite objects. Therefore, the finite anātma cannot have ānanda, and if at all the finite anātma seems to give ānanda, it is only your own happiness reflected in that object. So our Vedic conclusion is that ātmā alone is the infinite source of ānanda and thus we can have supreme love towards ātmā alone. That is why Self-love is natural and unconditional: **ānanda ātma brahma pucchaṃ pratiṣṭhād**—the Self is the source of ānanda (Taittirīya Upaniṣad, 2.9). Therefore, Nārada's thesis is that bhakti is Divine love in the form of Self-love, which is supreme love directed toward that God who is discovered to be non-different from the Self.

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<sup>28</sup> This Self is dearer than a son, dearer than wealth, dearer than everything else, and is innermost. A person holding the self as dear is certainly competent to say to someone calling anything else dearer than the self: 'What you hold dear will die,' as it will indeed come true. One should meditate upon the self alone as dear for the dear ones are not mortal.

Then comes the next question: If you define Divine love as Self-love, aren't you degrading it? This question arises because when people say 'self-love' they typically have in mind is selfish love. So they will ask: "If you say Divine love is self-love, which is selfish love, are you ultimately defining Divine love as selfish love?" This question arises, whether it comes to you or not; śāstra analyzes everything. According to śāstra, Self-love contaminated with ignorance is selfish love, and therefore it is not Divine love. But when the very same Self-love is decontaminated, when it is purified of its contamination by ignorance, Self-love is not selfish love; Self-love without the contamination of ignorance is universal love. So Divine love is equal to uncontaminated, or purified, Self-love, and purified Self-love is universal love. The logic here is as follows: When Self-love is contaminated with ignorance, I have a misconception about myself; I take myself to be the ahaṅkāra, the body-mind complex. Contaminated self-love is a love directed toward a mistaken "self"—the body-mind complex, or ahaṅkāra. Ahaṅkāra love is selfish love; it cannot be Divine love. But when ignorance is removed, the Self is no longer taken to be ahaṅkāra; the Self is rightly understood to be ātmā, the sat-cit-ānanda svarūpa kṣetraijñāḥ—pure Consciousness; the knower of the field whose nature is existence-consciousness-bliss. So Self-love becomes love for the real Self, who is the kṣetraijñāḥ (the knower of the field), not the ahaṅkāra. Self-love is not ego-love; Self-love is ātmā love, and this ātmā love will become universal love because when ignorance goes and I understand I am not the ahaṅkāra, but the ātmā, I recognize that the ātmā in this body-mind complex is the ātmā everywhere. When I mistake the self to be ahaṅkāra, it is a localized self. But when I understand that I am the ātmā, not only in this body, but in *every* body—even the mosquito—Self-love becomes the love of all because the ātmā in everyone is me. Therefore the 'S' in Self-love should be capitalized. In contaminated self-love, the 's' is small and this self-love is dangerous. In a wise person's Self-love, Self is not with a small 's,' but with a big 'S.' As it says in the Kaivalya Upaniṣad (Verse 10): **sarvabhūtastham ātmānaṃ, sarvabhūtāni chātmani sampaśyan brahma paramaṃ yāti nānyena hetunā**—experiencing one's own Self in all beings and all beings in the Self, one attains the supreme Brahman and not by any other means.

Similarly, in the Bhagavad Gītā (6.29-30):

**sarvabhūtastham ātmānaṃ, sarvabhūtāni chātmani  
īkṣate yogayuktātmā, sarvatra samadarśanaḥ  
yo mām paśyati sarvatra, sarvaṃ ca mayi paśyati  
tasyāhaṃ na praṇaśyāmi, sa ca me na praṇaśyati**<sup>29</sup>

Therefore, I see the ātmā not only in this body but everywhere, and ātmā prema becomes sarva prema (all love, whole love, or complete love). Thus, bhakti is Divine love, which is non-different from Self-love, which is non-different from universal love. And Nārada says it is this love that we have to discover. This love is called advaita bhakti because God, ātmā, and every living being are known to be one. Bhagavān is equal to ātmā and ātmā is equal to all beings; all three merge into one. In saying that Divine love is equal to Self-love is equal to universal love, remove the word 'love' and examine the equation: Divine = Self = the Universe. Therefore, advaita bhakti alone is real bhakti and may you discover that. So, **sā tvasmin para(ma)prema rūpā** (Sutra 2).

Then the question will arise: How do you know that Nārada has all these ideas in mind? You may be putting these interpretations into Nārada's mouth. Maybe you are twisting everything because you love Vedanta. We respond by offering the logic to that as well. Nārada does not say love of *that* God is divine love. He doesn't use the pronoun 'that' God. He uses the Sanskrit pronoun **asmin**, which means *this* God. The very fact that he uses the pronoun 'this' rather than 'that' indicates that he is not talking about anātma-Īśvara, but rather, ayam ātmā Brahma—this Self is Brahma only. Nārada's use of the pronoun 'this' indicates that Nārada is referring to Bhagavān as the closest ātmā, I. Thus, he begins the

<sup>29</sup> One whose mind is disciplined through meditation perceives the ātmā in all beings and all beings in the ātmā. He has the same vision everywhere. I am not lost to him who sees Me everywhere and sees everything in Me. He also is not lost to Me.

bhakti with a bang—big bang bhakti; advaita bhakti. This is our goal. And how to acquire advaita bhakti? That alone is going to be the topic of the entire bhakti śāstra.

**Sutra 3. amṛtasvarūpā ca**

***And its essence is the nectar of immortality.***

Here Nārada is saying: this Divine love—which is Self-love, which is universal love—alone will be permanent. Any form of love other than this Divine love—this love of the same Self that is in every living being—will be conditional and impermanent love, as we experience. That is why the love of any other thing is not long-lasting, as Śaṅkarācārya says in Bhaja Govindaṃ (Verse 5):

**yāvadvittopārjana saktah, tāvannija parivāro raktah  
paścājjīvati jarjara dehe, vārtāṃ ko'pi na pṛcchati gehe  
bhajagovindaṃ<sup>30</sup>**

You will be loved by all people, including family members, as long as you are a productive and useful member, or they are sure that you are going to write them into your will. But if you become a liability in any way, as in old age, at maximum to satisfy societal expectations, they will send you to the nearby citizen's home and write a letter saying: "If this person dies, please take care of everything and send us the bill." Therefore, Śaṅkarācārya is telling us: don't expect too much from the world. Don't expect too much from the people around and then wind up getting shattered. Instead, be prepared. If you want real love, **bhajagovindaṃ bhajagovindaṃ** (worship/seek the Lord). Any other love will be conditional. What is the condition? You must be a source of joy or utility. This is why Nārada says that divine love alone is **amṛtasvarūpā**—amṛta means immortality, or permanence. It is unconditional and therefore permanent. Everything else is conditional love and when the condition passes, so too does the love; it is thus impermanent. How do we treat all of our gadgets? Suppose the car we buy is in need of frequent repair, we don't say: "I love you. You have served me so much. I want to remain grateful to you." We get rid of it. Previously, we disposed of material possessions only, but nowadays we have begun disposing of people, too. This is the human mind. And therefore, ātmā prema—Īśvara prema—alone is nitya prema (eternal love); everything else is impermanent.

Having defined bhakti as advaita bhakti, Nārada is going to talk about the benefits of this advaita bhakti, advaita bhakti prayojanam. And what is the prayojanam, or necessity? I discussed the role of bhakti according to Vedānta śāstra. This is a crucial topic. I gave a summary, which I would suggest revisiting regularly because we are going to develop the entire Nārada Bhakti Sutra on this basis alone. In that summary, I talked about five topics. First, I said that informal dvaita bhakti is very useful but not compulsory; second, that formal dvaita bhakti in the form of karma yoga and upāsana yoga is compulsory for all; third, that thereafter, one must come to Vedānta vicāra; fourth, that through Vedānta vicāra one comes to advaita bhakti, or advaita jñānam (in Vedānta these terms are synonymous); and fifth, that advaita bhakti or advaita jñānam alone gives mokṣa. Therefore, advaita bhakti phalam (the result of advaita bhakti) is in the form of jīvanmukti and videhamukti.<sup>31</sup> Both these phalams are

<sup>30</sup> So long as a man is fit and able to support his family, see the affection all those around him show. But no one at home even cares to have a word with him when his body totters due to old age. Worship/seek Govinda.

<sup>31</sup> Jīvanmuktas who have doubtless knowledge of the ātmā, who revel in themselves, who are pure-minded, and who love all beings (seeing the very same ātmā in all) attain oneness with brahman upon the fall of the body, which is known as videhamukti.

elaborately discussed in several places in the Gītā—for example, sthitaprajña lakṣaṇam in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Chapter;<sup>32</sup> parabhakta lakṣaṇam in the 12<sup>th</sup> Chapter;<sup>33</sup> and guṇātīta lakṣaṇam in the 14<sup>th</sup> Chapter.<sup>34</sup> These are all benefits of advaita bhakti, which is called jīvanmukti. And that jīvanmukti of the Bhagavad Gītā alone is what we are getting in all of the following sutras.

**Sutra 4. yallabdhvā pumān siddho bhavati, amṛto bhavati, tṛpto bhavati**

***One who obtains it becomes perfect, immortal, and fully satisfied.***

Suppose a spiritual seeker wants to discover this advaita bhakti (the word **pumān** here refers to a spiritual seeker, or mumukṣutvu). How does this spiritual seeker do so? Dvaita bhakti is incomplete without advaita bhakti, and advaita bhakti is impossible without dvaita bhakti; thus, we should start with dvaita bhakti and convert it into advaita bhakti. This conversion doesn't happen automatically, however; the corridor between dvaita bhakti and advaita bhakti is Vedanta vicāra—Vedanta śravaṇa, manana, nididhyāsana is the only route connecting dvaita bhakti to advaita bhakti. It doesn't happen on its own and it cannot be done for us by anyone else. We can't let Bhagavān do Vedanta vicāra for us. Instead, śāstra tells us (Gītā, 4.34):

**tad viddhi praṇipātena, paripraśnena sevayā  
upadekṣayanti te jñānam, jñāninastattvadarśinah<sup>35</sup>**

and Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad, 1.2.12:

**tad-vijñānārthaṃ sa gurum evābhigacchet  
samit-pāṇiḥ śrotriyaṃ brahma-niṣṭham<sup>36</sup>**

In short, guru-śāstra upadeśa śravaṇam dvāra dvaita bhakti advaita bhaktiḥ bhavati—scriptural study under the guidance of a qualified teacher is necessary for the progression from dvaita bhakti to advaita bhakti. All this is clarified in Vedanta darśanam alone; none of this is mentioned at all in the bhakt-grantha. Therefore, what will happen if a person goes through all these stages successfully? **Siddho bhavati**. Such a person is no longer a sādḥaka, or seeker. A seeker is in a process of struggle—the seeking struggle. The very process of seeking is a struggle with an inherent anxiety: When will I reach

<sup>32</sup> In this section, Arjuna becomes curious about the characteristics of one who is firmly established in Self-knowledge (i.e., sthitaprajña) and Kṛṣṇa answers his question, saying the wise person is always satisfied in himself, independent of the world, and free from attachment, hatred, desire, anger, fear, elation, depression, etc.

<sup>33</sup> In this section, Kṛṣṇa talks about the virtues that a wise person (parabhakta) enjoys: maitrī (friendliness), karuṇā (compassion), samatvam (equanimity), kṣamā (forbearance), santuṣṭi (contentment), yatatmatvam (self-control), dṛḍhaniścaya (firm Self-knowledge), bhakti (devotion), gentleness, śucitvam (purity), dakṣatvam (resourcefulness), and upāsīnatvam (impartiality). He also talks about the negative traits from which the parabhakta is free: dveṣa (hatred), mamākara (“mine” notion), ahaṅkara (“I” notion), udvega (anxiety), harṣa (elation), amaṛṣa (envy), bhayaṃ (fear), apekṣā (dependence), ārambha (selfish action), śoka (grief), kāṅkṣā (desire), and the pairs of opposites (pleasure/pain, praise/censure, etc).

<sup>34</sup> In this section, Kṛṣṇa explains how a wise person is guṇātīta (i.e., beyond the guṇās—birth, death, etc.) and thus not attached to prakṛti (matter). A guṇātīta does not have an “I” notion in the body or a “my” notion in the world, and thus observes variations in the guṇās objectively without reacting to them. Such a person is unaffected by the pairs of opposites, as they are seen as the play of prakṛti. Being full, such a person seeks nothing and is thus free from selfish activities.

<sup>35</sup> May you gain knowledge by prostration, by service, and by proper inquiry. The wise sages will impart that knowledge to you.

<sup>36</sup> [To understand Reality], one must humbly approach a proper teacher, who is learned in the Vedas and having made that knowledge his own reveals in it.

my destination? The seeking struggle ends with the discovery of advaita bhakti. I am no longer a sādḥaka. I become a siddha (perfected one). Therefore Nārada says: **siddho bhavati**—the struggle of seeking, of running about, is over. The destination is reached. Mission accomplished. Thumbs up. This person is fulfilled. It is like puri (an unleavened deep-fried Indian bread). When the puri is dropped in the oil, it gradually expands. And as it is still expanding, it runs about in the oil because it is not yet full. But once it has become full, it remains in place. Similarly, we run about in the oil—in that cauldron called saṃsāra—until we become full like puri and tasty as well. Then **amṛto bhavati**—this bhakta becomes immortal. There is no sense of insecurity caused by the fear of mortality. As the śāntipath prayer in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad says:

**asato mā sadgamāyā, tamaso mā jyotirgamāyā, mṛtyormā amṛtam gamāyā**<sup>37</sup>

Until I discover immortality, there is a sense of insecurity. For the siddha, that sense of insecurity is gone; he becomes immortal. And a bhakta can become immortal only in one way. Not by making my body immortal because the body is essentially mortal. Some ayurvedic practitioners used to talk about kayakalpa, various methods by which one can make the body immortal. The interesting news is that all the proponents of kayakalpa have died, so it is quite clear that the body cannot be immortalized. The mind cannot be immortalized either. So how can a bhakta become immortal? Immortalization is possible by one method alone, and that is by the firm knowledge that I am not the mortal body and I am not the mortal mind; I am the immortal ātmā. Therefore, ātmā jñānam alone leads to advaita bhakti and immortality. So **amṛto bhavati**. And **tr̥pto bhavati**—fully satisfied. Any other thing we obtain in the world will never bring lasting satisfaction. Thus, tr̥pti will not come by any other method. We may do tarpaṇam (offer food to satiate a divine entity), but no human being becomes fully satisfied by getting anything in the world. Only advaita bhakti gives purna tr̥pti (absolute satisfaction). As is said in the Bhagavad Gītā (3.17 and 2.55, respectively):

**yastvātmaratireva syād, ātmatr̥ptaśca mānavaḥ  
ātmanyeva ca satuṣṭaḥ, tasya kāryaṃ na vidyate**<sup>38</sup>

**prajāhati yadā kāmān, sarvān pārtha manogatān  
ātmanyevātmanā tuṣṭaḥ, sthitaprajñastadocyate**<sup>39</sup>

Therefore, **amṛto bhavati**—one who becomes immortal—is called a jīvanmukti, and this is the advaita bhakti phalam.

**Sutra 5. yat prāpya na kiñcid vañchati, na śocati, na dveṣṭi, na ramate, na utsāhī bhavati**

*One who attains it becomes completely desireless, grieving not, hating not, not rejoicing in fleeting happiness, and without passion for personal concerns.*

<sup>37</sup> Lead me from the unreal to the real, from the darkness of ignorance to the light of knowledge, from death (the sense of limitation) to immortality (limitlessness, liberation).

<sup>38</sup> Suppose there is a person who loves the Self alone, who is happy with the Self alone and who is contented with the Self alone. There is nothing to be accomplished for this person.

<sup>39</sup> Oh Arjuna! Satisfied in oneself by oneself, when one gives up all the desires obtaining in the mind, then this person is said to be of firm knowledge.

So, **yat prāpya na kiñcid vañchati**—all the desires born out of a sense of incompleteness are eliminated. According to Vedānta, every desire is born out of a sense of apūrṇatvam (lack of fullness); I feel my life is incomplete without that object or person. Thus all of our desires are a struggle to complete ourselves. According to Vedānta, when a person wants to get married, it is born out of the feeling that that bachelor-I is incomplete, therefore he wants to become a husband-I. Marriage is the conversion of the bachelor-I into the husband-I in the hope that the incomplete one will become complete. Then after a few months this same husband-I begins to feel incomplete, and he thinks: I should become the father-I. He repeats this three times and all three sons are educated, have jobs, and are settled. Soon the father-I begins to think: I want to become a father-in-law-I. And after being a father-in-law for a few years... It is an endless journey. Even on his death bed, he does not feel full. Desire is born out of a sense of apūrṇatvam, and this goes away only through advaita bhakti, which is advaita jñānam. Advaita jñānam is aham purnaḥ asmi: I am fullness. As the Bhagavad Gītā (2.70) says:

**āpūryamāṇam acalapratiṣṭham,  
samudram āpaḥ praviśanti yadvat  
tadvat kāmā yaṁ praviśanti sarve,  
sa śāntim āpnoti na kāmakāmi<sup>40</sup>**

The advaita bhakta is like an ocean and all the other people are like miserable tanks. In the summer, they dry up; in the rainy season they get filled. And again dried up and filled, over and over again. And what is the beauty of this? Even though the ocean doesn't ask for anything, all the rivers, pour their waters into it. So it keeps getting more and more full. When you ask, you don't get. But when you discover pūrṇatvam, even if you don't want, it will come from all directions. Therefore, Narada says: **na vañchati**—he doesn't desire for anything. And if any desires are there at all, they are selfless desires for the wellbeing of the world. As Kṛṣṇa declares in the Gītā (3.22): **nānāvāptam avāptavyam, varta eva cha karmaṇi**—I have nothing to accomplish, but still I am busy. Not for my pūrṇatvam, but to serve the world. Thus, a jñānī may serve the family, society, or religion, but not for his own pūrṇatvam.

#### \*\*\*End of Teaching 4\*\*\*

Nārada immediately begins his teaching with the highest level of bhakti, advaita bhakti, which is the ultimate destination of all bhaktas. A spiritual seeker reaches this advaita bhakti by going through the preceding two stages; the first being formal dvaita bhakti, consisting of karma yoga and upāsana yoga, which is known as formal dvaita bhakti. This formal dvaita bhakti can be enhanced with informal dvaita bhakti, but it need not be; only formal dvaita bhakti is compulsory. And through formal dvaita bhakti one gains sādhanā chatusthaya sampatti (the fourfold qualification), which is also compulsory. After gaining these qualifications reasonably well, a dvaita bhakta will have to go through Vedānta śravaṇa, manana, nididhyāsanaṁ, which means Mahāvākya śravaṇa, manana, nididhyāsana (listening, meditating on, and assimilating the great sayings of the Vedas). Through this Vedānta vicāra, the dvaita bhakta gains advaita jñānam, which is synonymous with advaita bhakti: an advaita jñānī is an advaita bhakta and an advaita bhakta is an advaita jñānī—it is impossible to be one without being the other. This advaita jñānam, or advaita bhakti, alone leads to liberation, which is jīvanmukti followed by final vidhamukti.

Nārada talks about advaita bhakti in Sutras 2 and 3: **sā tvasmin paramaprema rūpā** and **amṛtasvarūpā ca** both talk about advaita bhakti. From the 4<sup>th</sup> Sutra, Nārada talks about the phalam (result) of advaita bhakti, or advaita jñānam, which is jīvanmukti. This jīvanmukti enjoyed by the advaita bhakti is described in three places in the Bhagavad Gītā—namely, the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, and 14<sup>th</sup>

<sup>40</sup> All sense-objects enter him just as waters enter the full, calm ocean. He attains peace and is not the seeker of sense-objects.

Chapters—and it is described again in these important Sutras, of which we have come to the 5<sup>th</sup>: **yat prāpya na kiñcid vañchati, na śocati, na dveṣṭi, na ramate, na utsāhī bhavati.**

Similarly, the Katha Upaniṣad (6.14) says:

**yada sarve paramucyante kama ye'sya hrđi sritah atha martyo'mrto bhavati atra Brahma samasnute**<sup>41</sup>

Sarva kama nivṛtti (disappearance of all desire) is the jīvanmukti being described: **na kiñcid vañchati**—**vancha** means kama. And **na śocati, na dveṣṭi**—this advaita bhakti doesn't grieve or hate.

This is why a jñānī will not approve of videhamukti in the form of escaping the world; the desire to escape the world suggests a dislike toward the world. After jñānam, a jñānī doesn't hate anything. Even punarjanma (rebirth/reincarnation) is OK for him, but as Brahman he simply doesn't have it. Therefore, remembering the Gītā (12.13), a jñānī is: **adveṣṭā sarvabhūtānām**—a non-hater of all beings. And Nārada says, **na ramate**—he does not get carried away by worldly pleasures, which will continue coming to a jñānī while he is exhausting puṇya prārabdha. Remember that a jñānī has also got prārabdha from the ahaṅkāra angle, so puṇyam will bring pleasant situations and pāpam will bring unpleasant situations. When the puṇya fructifies, that day's bhikṣā (alms) will be very good. So does a jñānī enjoy it when the puṇya prarabdhā brings in worldly pleasures? Śāstra says he does and he will enjoy, but this enjoyment is controlled enjoyment; he doesn't get lost in the worldly pleasure. He doesn't get carried away, or allow those pleasures to form an attachment or addiction. Every pleasure has the potential power to cause attachment to the source of pleasure and addiction to the enjoyment of pleasure. These are the two evils associated with any sense pleasure. This is why Kṛṣṇa gives a warning in the Gītā (5.22):

**ye hi saṃsparśajā bhogāḥ, duḥkhaḥyonaya eva te ādyantavantaḥ kaunteya, na teṣu ramate budhaḥ**<sup>42</sup>

A jñānī doesn't reject pleasure—we need not reject pleasure—but a jñānī doesn't get carried away. The same pleasure may be repeated or not; he is happy with its arrival and he accepts its departure. This is called controlled sensory enjoyment and it like the difference between rash driving and fast driving. Speed is there in both. In fast driving, one uses speed but it is controlled speed. If a child runs across the road, this person, despite driving quickly, will be able to brake. In rash driving, there is no control. Speed is common to both, but one is controlled speed; the other is uncontrolled. The jñānī's enjoyment of sense pleasures is like fast driving, the ajñānī's enjoyment of sense pleasures is like rash driving; there is risk involved. Therefore, **na ramate**—the jñānī doesn't revel in sense pleasures. Then **na utsāhī bhavati**—he is no longer enthusiastic in kama karmas—the activities driven by selfishness. Of course, he doesn't drop karma altogether, loka sangraha karmas remain (Bhagavad Gītā, 4.23):

**gatasaṅgasya muktasya, jñānāvasthitacetasaḥ yajñyācarataḥ karma, samagraṃ pravilīyate**<sup>43</sup>

The jñānī is involved in action but there is no tinge of selfishness to it. All these are definitions of jīvanmukti, which is the result of advaita bhaktiḥ.

<sup>41</sup> When all the desires situated in the heart are cleared away the mortal becomes immortal and enjoys Brahman.

<sup>42</sup> Oh Arjuna! Those pleasures born of contact are indeed only sources of sorrow, because they have a beginning and an end. The wise person does not revel in them.

<sup>43</sup> The entire action of one whose mind is established in knowledge, who is free from attachment, who is independent, and who acts for the sake of yajña dissolves.

**Sutra 6. yat jñātvā matto bhavati, stabdho bhavati, ātmārāmo bhavati**

***One who attains it becomes wonderstruck and intoxicated, still and drunk in the Self.***

Discovering this advaita bhakti—jīva-Īśvara-abheda bhakti—this jīvanmukta is matto bhavati, thrilled or excited about the fulfillment of life’s mission. The very purpose of human life is meant for attaining liberation. If we discover this, life has become meaningful; and otherwise, life has become a waste because if we miss it in this life, we don’t know when the next opportunity will be. Therefore, the more he looks upon his own success, the more thrilled he is because mokṣa is the rarest of rare gains in life (Vivekacūdamani, Verse 3):

**durlabhaṃ trayamevaitat devānugraha hetukam  
manuṣyatvaṃ mumukṣutvaṃ mahāpuruṣasaṃsrayaḥ<sup>44</sup>**

There are innumerable species in the universe, so being born a human being is a very rare thing. And even after this human birth, there are countless tempting human goals that can be pursued—people talk about so many different accomplishments—so choosing mokṣa as the primary goal of one’s life is exceptionally rare. And even after coming to the mokṣa field, there are dozens of philosophical systems, each defining mokṣa in its own way. Some say that mokṣa is going to Vaikuṅṭha (the abode of Brahman); others say it’s going to Kailasa (a mountain peak in the Himalayas said to be the abode of Śiva); some say it is going to Brahmaloaka (the highest of celestial words); still others say it is going to paradise. Hare Kṛṣṇa people say mokṣa is going to Golokah (the eternal Supreme abode of Kṛṣṇa), where there are lots of cows and cow dung and they will have rasa krida kolattam (passionate dancing) with the Gopis. So by this definition mokṣa is kolattam. I don’t say it is wrong, but taking that as the ultimate goal of life? My point is that there are such varieties of philosophical systems and definitions of mokṣa and therefore coming to the right definition of mokṣa is rare indeed. And even after coming to that, dozens of systems prescribe dozens of methods for attaining mokṣa: meditations are prescribed, kundalini rising is prescribed, some people say going up, others say going down—so many different mokṣas and so many mokṣa mārgas to choose from! Suffice to say that when a jñānī reflects upon having come to the original Veda, the original Vedānta, the original Mahāvākya, and understood it—considering also the possibilities of straying—the more there is a thrill to have arrived. Therefore, **mattaḥ bhavati**. As Vidyāranya says in the 7<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the Pañcadasi:

**aho śāstram aho śāstram aho guruḥ aho guruḥ  
aho puṇyam aho puṇyam aho sukham aho aukham<sup>45</sup>**

God is great, he has given me a guru. The guru is great, he has given me knowledge. Knowledge is great, it has given me bliss. Bliss is great because it is mine. Therefore, he says, everything here is great. Therefore, **mattaḥ bhavati**, which literally translated means intoxicated, but I don’t want to use that word because it has a negative connotation; it means thrilled about his mokṣa accomplishment.

<sup>44</sup> These three blessings are rare, difficult to achieve, and attained only by the grace of God: A human birth, the desire for liberation, and association with a great sage.

<sup>45</sup> O how grand and true are the scriptures, the scriptures, O how grand and great is my teacher, my teacher! O how grand is this merit, this merit, O how grand is this bliss, this bliss!

Then **stabdhaḥ bhavati**—**stabdhaḥ** means wonderstruck by this teaching because all the fundamentals of Vedanta are unbelievable. Vedanta has three components and each one is an unbelievable wonder. We are experiencing a solid world capable of delivering so many problems. This tangible world, Vedanta says, is mithya or unreal. Who will believe this? In fact, many students, even after 25 years of Vedanta, are not able to assimilate jagat-mithyatvam (the unreality of the world). It is a wonder that a mithya jagat is presenting itself as so real. The glory of mithya prapañca is an unbelievable wonder. And a Brahman—which can never be seen in the past, which is never seen in the present, and which will never be seen in the future—we say that Brahman is the only reality. Vedanta says that the Brahman nobody sees at any time is the only reality, whereas the world that we confront all the time is unreal. What a wonder! Then Vedanta challenges: can anybody dismiss this teaching? The 2<sup>nd</sup> Chapter of the Brahma Sutras is dedicated to defending this teaching with the five Āstika darśanas, the six Nāstika darśanas, all of which challenge this teaching. Vedanta says: Brahma satyam, jagat mithya. Each one is difficult to swallow. Finally comes the thing that is perhaps most difficult to swallow: I am ānanda svarūpa. On the path, nobody will believe this because there are so many physical problems, so many emotional problems, so many financial problems, I find it difficult to even smile and yet Vedanta boldly says: ‘You are ānanda svarūpa,’ and further, ‘You are the only source of ānanda.’ What a wonder! The Bhagavad Gītā (2.29), it says:

**āścaryavat paśyati kaścīd enam,  
āścaryavad vadati tathaiva cānyaḥ,  
āścaryavaccainam anyaḥ śrṇoti,  
śrutvāpyenaṃ veda na caiva kaścit**<sup>46</sup>

And the Katha Upaniṣad (1.2.7):

**śravaṇyāpi bahubhir yon a labhyaḥ  
śrṇvanto’pi bahavo yaṃ na vidyaḥ  
āścaryo vaktā kuśalo’sya labdhā  
āścaryo jñātā kuśalānuśiṣṭaḥ**<sup>47</sup>

And in the Taittirīya Upaniṣad, a song presented by Sage Bhr̥gu:

**hā vu hā vu hā vu,  
āhamannamāhamannamāhamannam  
āhamannādo’hamannādo’ ahamannādaḥ...**<sup>48</sup>

The jñanī says: “What a great wonder! I am the non-dual reality and I myself am also appearing as the experiencing jīva; I myself am also appearing as the experienced universe; I myself appear as the connecting Īśvara-ślokaḥ (the God who authored the śloka) as well. I am jīva-rupina, jagat-rupina, Īśvara-rupina with one single māyā Śakti I play all the roles—how great I am! Wonderful! Wonderful! Wonderful! So this advaita bhakta is wonderstruck. All the wonders of the world put together pale in their insignificance in front of this jñānam.

Then Nārada makes a fantastic statement: **ātmārāmo bhavati**. This advaita bhakta revels in himself. Now look at the statement. When Nārada started, he defined bhakti as supreme love to God. So if

<sup>46</sup> One sees (ātmā) as a wonder. In the same way, another speaks about (it) as a wonder. Another hears of it as a wonder. Still another never understands it in spite of hearing.

<sup>47</sup> Even to hear of it is not available to many; many having heard of it, cannot comprehend. It is rare to find a good teacher for it and equally rare to find a good student. Wonderful indeed is he who comprehends it when taught by an able preceptor.

<sup>48</sup> Bliss! Bliss! Bliss! I am food, I am food, I am food; I am the eater of food, I am the eater of food, I am the eater of food.

bhakti is supreme love to God, the bhakta must be reveling in God alone. But now look at the statement: Nārada is saying bhakta revels in himself. How do we resolve this apparent contradiction? It can be reconciled in one way only: this bhakta has discovered that God is non-different from himself, the ātmā. Bhagavad Gītā, 10.20:

**aham ātmā guḍākeśa, sarvabhūtāśayasthitah<sup>49</sup>**

Therefore, Īśvara-rama and ātmā-rama are one and the same. There a beautiful definition of ‘rama’ given in a śloka from the Sata Nama Stotram of Lord Ramachandra (Verse 8) in the Padma Purāṇa:

**ramante yogīno’nante satyānande cid-ātmani  
iti rāma-padenāsau paraṃ brahmābhidhīyate<sup>50</sup>**

And what type of rama is this, according to the śloka? That rama who is Brahmanda and who is none other than the chid-ātmā. Therefore, Nārada says: **ātmārāmaḥ bhavati**. Again, when we read the bhakti granthas, we have to closely follow three pramāṇas—śrūti, yukti, and anubhava; otherwise we will unwittingly get sidetracked. We will miss Vedanta darśanam and get trapped in the pūrvapakshi darśanam known as bhakti darśanam. There are so many bhakti schools of philosophy and they all have Veda-virudha darśanani. We should never get caught in that; we should go along with the Upaniṣads.

**Sutra 7. sā na kāmāyāmānā nirodharūpatvāt**

***It is not desire-generating, as it is, by its nature, a form of renunciation.***

So this advaita bhakti is different from the dvaita bhakti practiced by most people, which is classified into three types in the Bhagavad Gītā: arta, arthārthī, and jijñāsu. All three of these types of devotees go to Bhagavān, but throughout their practice they want to encash their bhakti. They want to exchange every namaskāra for one thing or another. This is called business bhakti. The attitude is: I don’t want to waste my namaskāra; for every namaskāra I want to get something for myself, for my family, or for my business. Bhagavān is tired of hearing their continuous pleas for one thing or another. The ārta bhakta creates a contract wherein Bhagavān has to solve his problems in exchange for his hair (the cheapest offering). You do this for me and only after doing so will I do that for you. The ārta bhakti wants a solution to problems. The arthārthī bhakta seeks one benefit or another, prosperity of various types. Even the jijñāsu bhakta, who is called a niṣkāma bhakti (desireless), has got a kama. So it is really a misnomer because the niṣkāma jijñāsu bhakta is not totally niṣkāma. He is only partially niṣkāma bhakta because he, too, has got a set of demands: Bhagavān, you should give me sādhanā chatuṣṭaya sampatti. You should give me guru prakti (attainment). You should give me śravaṇa, manana, nididhyāsana prapti. You should give me note-taking prapti, audio recording-saving prakti...so many praptis are desired! So even the jijñāsu bhakta who has a noble desire is a demanding bhakta. The Lord is left waiting for someone who will do namaskāram and simply say ‘thank you’: Bhagavān, I have come here just to express my gratitude for what you have given, rather than complaining and asking for something more. This jñānī bhakta alone goes to God without any application forms. This advaita bhakti is purna niṣkāma bhakti. Therefore Nārada says: **sā**—it, advaita bhakti is **na kāmāyāmānā**—a non-demanding bhakti, because the advaita bhakta has discovered pūrṇatvam. Therefore, **na**

<sup>49</sup> I am the self residing in the heart of all beings.

<sup>50</sup> The supreme absolute truth is called Rama because the transcendentalists take pleasure in the unlimited pleasure of spiritual existence.

**vañchati**, as we have seen in the 5<sup>th</sup> Sutra 5 (in fact this is merely an explanation of that sutra)—there are no more demands because **ātmanyevātmanā tuṣṭaḥ**—he is satisfied in himself by himself (Gītā, 2.55). Therefore, **nirodharūpatvāt**—advaita is in the form of nirodha, extinction or disengagement (nivr̥tti rūpa). In fact, Nārada will go on to explain the term ‘nirodharūpatvāt’ in the next Sutra, but for the time being, simply note that it is nivr̥tti rūpa. Whereas demanding bhakti is called pravṛtti rūpa bhakti, non-demanding bhakti is called nivr̥tti rūpa bhakti or sannyāsa rūpa bhakti.

**Sutra 8. nirodhastu lokavedavyāpāranyāsaḥ**

***This renunciation consecrates the performance of worldly and religious social duties.***

So the nirodha of the previous sutra, Nārada defines as **nyāsaḥ**, which means sannyāsa, or renunciation. Advaita bhakti is in the form of renunciation. This is internal renunciation, we are not talking about external sannyāsa āśrama, but rather, internal renunciation because there is no demand. So then the next question is: renunciation of what? And the answer is renunciation of all worldly goals, of all desire for worldly goals, and all those activities leading to worldly goals. Worldly goals are in the form of karma phalams (the results or fruits of actions) and activities leading to worldly goals are in the form of karma—thus, renunciation of all the karmas and karma phalams. Karma meaning kamyā karmani (optional actions intended to secure particular ends). As Lord Kṛṣṇa says (Gītā, 18.2):

**kāmyānāṃ karmanāṃ nyāsaṃ, sannyāsaṃ kavayo viduḥ  
sarvakarmaphalatyāgaṃ, prāhustyāgaṃ vicakṣaṇāḥ<sup>51</sup>**

Sannyāsa is internal because all worldly accomplishments are finite. Through advaita bhakti, the jñānī has accomplished the infinite. After becoming infinite, how can a person seek for anything less? There is a jocular story about a milkman who prayed to the Lord: “Oh Lord, I should have an akṣayapatra (inexhaustible vessel) of milk from which I can draw any amount, sell it, and become very rich. Please give me such a perennial source of milk.” And Bhagavān replied: “Given.” Naturally, this milkman was overjoyed and sent the Lord off. By the time the Lord had gone just 10 steps away, the milkman called the Lord back, saying: “Oh Lord, I forgot another thing. In selling the milk, I am in the habit of mixing it with water. Therefore, in addition to the perennial source of milk source, I need a perennial source of water as well.” But Bhagavān had given him an infinite source of milk. So why can’t this milkman drop the technique of diluting it with water? The habit doesn’t go that easily. Like that miserable milkman, here we are offered the infinite milk of mokṣa and we are saying: I want infinite XXX. So it is sannyāsa, renunciation of all kamyā karmas—all binding desires are gone. A jñānī can have any number of non-binding desires: desiring power is the vibhūti (sacred ash) of the human mind. The human mind has got a special glory. What is that glory? Desiring power. And this glory is bestowed by Bhagavān in the form of icchā śakti (power of will), jñāna śakti (power of knowledge), and kriya śakti (power of thought). These three śaktis are unique to us; animal minds cannot desire, only the human mind has got this unique power. If someone asks you about your future, you can come up with various goals and plans. But if you interview a dog about his future plans, he will bark a few times and run off. Animals cannot have any extraordinary objectives in life. So icchā śakti is a wonderful vibhūti, there is nothing wrong with employing it. Therefore, a jñānī employs that power to bring out glory. Crucially, however, he doesn’t seek pūrṇatvam or fulfillment through that because he knows that pūrṇatvam cannot be achieved by getting a few things in life. Therefore, the jñānī uses icchā śakti to serve the world or to

<sup>51</sup> Sages regard the renunciation of desire-born actions as sannyāsa. The learned people declare that the renunciation of the results of all actions is tyāga (renunciation).

declare the glory of Bhagavān, but he doesn't have a binding desire through which he seeks pūrṇatvam. So if at all the jñānī desires, he desires *from* pūrṇatvam rather than *for* pūrṇatvam. Even Bhagavān has icchā. I have told you this before. I don't know whether you remember. And now I have a desire that you remember...

In the Taittirīya Upaniṣad (2.6.1), Bhagavān himself enjoys desiring.

**so'kāmāyāta bāhu syāṃ prajāyeyeti sa tapo'tapyata tapas taptvā idaṃ sarvam asṛjat yad idaṃ kiñcana tat sṛṣṭvā tad evānuprāviśat, tad anupraviśya sac ca tyac cābhavat**<sup>52</sup>

Therefore desire in itself is harmless, but it should be appropriate desire. I don't want to go into the details. One New Year, I gave an hour-long talk titled *Is Desire Evil?* in which I discussed the A, B, Cs of desire, and I said that non-binding desires are wonderful. Therefore, a jñānī renounces all the binding desires as well as the karmas leading to their fulfillment. Therefore, Nārada says: **lokavedavyāpāra—vypārāḥ** means kama karmani (ignorance-driven actions, apūrṇatvam-driven actions). The kama karmas themselves are divided into two types: lokika kama karmas (desire-driven worldly activities) and vidhika kama karmas (desire-driven religious activities), and **lokavedavyāpāra nyāsaḥ**—the jñānī renounces both. Thus, advaita bhakti is sannyāsa bhakti.

### \*\*\*End of Teaching 5\*\*\*

In this first chapter, Nārada is talking about the highest bhakti, which is the destination of a bhakta, known as parābhakti or advaita bhakti. And we should remember how a person comes to this advaita bhakti. One can never come to this bhakti immediately; one has to start from dvaita bhakti in the form of karma yoga and upāsana yoga, and thereafter the dvaita bhakta should necessarily go through Vedānta vicāra. Only Vedānta vicāra under a qualified guru will convert dvaita bhakti into advaita bhakti, which is synonymous with advaita jñānam and which is the only means of liberation. Therefore, we should remember the following two facts: First, dvaita bhakti is impossible without dvaita bhakti. Second, dvaita bhakti is incomplete without advaita bhakti. And it is this advaita bhakti that is being described in all these sutras.

In the 8<sup>th</sup> Sutra, Nārada explains the word **nirodha**, which he used in the 7<sup>th</sup> Sutra. In the 7<sup>th</sup> Sutra, Nārada said: This parābhakti is without any motivated desire. This parābhakti does not involve any demands on the Lord because it is in the form of nirodha. So naturally, the question arises: what is meant by nirodha? Nārada defines nirodha as sannyāsa. The message that Nārada wants to deliver is this: In the 7<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the Gītā, Kṛṣṇa defines four types of bhaktas: artha, arthārthī, jijñāsu, and jñānī. Among these four, the first three have a bhakti that involves placing demands upon the Lord. It is not an innocent, straightforward bhakti; it is a bhakti expressed with an application form. In the case of the artha bhakta, the application form amounts to this: "O Lord, save me from such and such problem," accompanied by an endless list. Bhagavān is bored by this list, but he is helpless. Similarly, the arthārthī bhakta practices bhakti with an application form. As the very term indicates, this bhakta has many demands for things and beings—son-in-law demands, daughter-in-law demands, grandchildren demands. Even the jijñāsu bhakti, who is considered superior to the previous two—who is considered sādhanā chatuṣṭaya sampana adhikāri—has an application form that says: "O Lord, I want jñānam and mokṣa." The demand is there. This leaves only one bhakta who doesn't place any demands whatsoever on the Lord. Even if Bhagavān offers to give something, the jñānī bhakta says that he does not need anything; he has discovered purantvam in himself. This bhakti knows that nothing existing outside of himself, so what could he possibly demand from the Lord? So he demands

<sup>52</sup> He desired: I will become many. I will father many children. He performed austerities and created everything. Then he entered within the world he had created. After he entered, he became all that is manifest and all that is unmanifest.

nothing and all activities meant for acquiring things are dropped. Therefore, **nirodhastu nyāsaḥ**. Here, **nyāsaḥ** means sannyāsa—sannyāsa of **sarva-lokavedavyāpāra**. In the last class, I explained: lokika vedica kama karmani. He will have loka-sangraha karma (actions that benefit all beings) and loka kṣema karma (actions that protect the world), but he will not have any karma for improving his position because he is unimprovable. How can the infinite be improved? Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, 2.4.23:

**eṣa nityo mahimā brāhmaṇasya na vardhate karmaṇā no kaṇīyān**<sup>53</sup>

A Brahma jñānī is one who cannot be improved because he is infinite, and thus renounces all karmas. This is called vidvat sannyasa, dedicating his life to nididhyāsana. So he becomes a nididhyāsana pradhāna by renouncing lokika vedica karmani. This is discussed in the 4th Brahmana of the Upaniṣad, wherein Sage Yājñavalkya says to his consort Maitreyī: “I want to leave everything.” Even though Yājñavalkya is a jñānī, he wants to leave everything for nididhyāsana. Similarly, the parabhakta, renounces everything, which is called vidvat sannyasaha. And if he does remain in grihasthāśrama (householder life), he may not renounce all karma because of family duties, but sannyāsa for him means reducing karma to support the practice of nididhyāsana. Therefore, advaita bhakti leads to nididhyāsana through the reduction of karma.

**Sutra 9. tasmin ananyatā tad virodhiṣūdāsīnatā ca**

***Furthermore, renunciation requires an exclusive intention and complete indifference to anything that is contrary to that.***

This advaita bhakta, or parabhakta or jñānī bhakti, practices **ananyatā**, which means exclusivity with regard to Īśvara. So **tasmin ananyatā** means this bhakta practices ananya bhakti, a very significant term used in both Vedānta darśanam and bhakti darśanam. But even though the same term is common to both, the meanings ascribed to it in each case are very different, and we totally reject the bhakti darśanam interpretation. What is wrong in their interpretation? They say ananya bhakti means exclusive love of God. Bhakti means love; **ananya** means exclusive, so exclusive love of God. They will then add that it is exclusive love of the *supreme* God and not other inferior gods. But then when you ask: “Who is this supreme God?” each bhakti darśanam school will give a different name. If it is a Śiva bhakti darśanam school, they will say Śiva matra bhakti (devotion to Śiva only). If it is a Viṣṇu school of philosophy, they will say Viṣṇu matra bhakti, not the love of any other god. Thus, for them **ananya** bhakti is an exclusive bhakti of one God and not other gods. This amounts to a fundamentalist approach.

They begin by expressing this in mild language, saying: “It is enough that you worship our God alone because our God can give you everything you want. When our God can give everything, what is the need to go anywhere else?” If you don’t listen to them, they will say: “You can only get mokṣa if you practice ananya bhakti, so if you want mokṣa, you should worship our God alone.” And if you still don’t listen to them, they will go one step further and give a very strong interpretation, which is very unpleasant. I should not be talking about this interpretation in classes like this, but I will ask you to forgive me for briefly mentioning it so that we know how the scriptures can be misconstrued if they are improperly approached. They say: “Look at the Bhagavad Gītā. As Kṛṣṇa has said (Gītā, 13.11):

**mayi cānanyayogena, bhatiravyabhicāriṇī**<sup>54</sup>

<sup>53</sup> The greatness of the knower of brahman does not increase or decrease by action done or action not done.

<sup>54</sup> Unswerving devotion to me with undivided attention.

So ananya bhakti is bhatiravyabhicāriṇī (unswerving devotion) as mentioned in the Gītā. And then if you ask them: “What do you mean by ‘avyabhicāriṇī bhaktiḥ?’” They will say: “It is a pure bhakti not polluted by vyabhicāra pāpam”—a sin associated with the Red Light district. So if you want to be a pure bhakti, you should avoid this doṣa (defect of the mind). The implied meaning of this interpretation is that going to any other temple is like visiting the red light district, so be sure not to set foot in any other temple. What a frightening message! They will say that even going near that temple is like going to the red light district. As a result, the bhakta will develop a hatred and disgust toward any other deities, despite the fact that they are also in the Vedas. Thus ananya bhakti is misinterpreted as this exclusive bhakti toward *our* God, along with a strong rejection of all other forms of pūjā parayanam. It is a very unfortunate interpretation. I never knew about this until I visited one house and a man spoke this way, and it actually became very unpleasant for me to be there. So we strongly reject this interpretation of ananya bhakti.

Vedanta darśanam interprets ananya bhakti completely differently. There is no question of exclusive love of God if you understand what God is. You can never talk about exclusive love of God, if you understand the God explained in the Veda—in the Gītā, the Upaniṣads, etc. When the bhakti darśanam schools talk about an exclusive God, and say that you should worship this God exclusively, they are saying that their God excludes all other gods, all other human beings, all animals, all plants, etc. When God excludes everything else, God is effectively reduced to one of the finite beings in the creation. They may think that they are glorifying God, but Vedanta says they are degrading God by talking about *our* God as exclusive.

Then what is the definition of God according to Vedanta? From the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 12<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the Bhagavad Gītā, Kṛṣṇa says: “I am the jagat-kāraṇam and the entire universe is karyam,” which means I alone manifest in the form of every blessed thing: **anekavaktranayanam, anekādbhutadarśanam**—with many mouths and eyes, with many wonderful sights (Gītā, 11.10), **ahaṃ kraturahaṃ yajñah, svadhāham aham auśadhams**—I alone am the ritual prescribed by the śrūti, the ritual prescribed by the smṛti, the food of all living beings (Gītā, 9.16), **paśyādityān vasūn rudrān, aśvinau marutastathā bahūnyadṛṣṭapūrvāṇi, paśyāścāryaṇi bhārata**—see ādityas, vasus, rudras, aśvins, and maruts. See many wonders that were not seen before (Gītā, 11.6)

When Bhagavān includes everything how can you talk about an exclusive God? Talking about an exclusive God degrades God. Every bhakta should understand that God includes everything, cetanām (conscious, sentient) and acetanām (insentient). All the cetanā-vastu belong to the para prakṛti of God and all acetanā-vastu belong to the apara prakṛti of God. Where do these two words—para prakṛti and apara prakṛti—come from? The 7<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the Bhagavad Gītā.<sup>55</sup> We should never study any bhakti

<sup>55</sup> In Chapter 7, Verses 4 to 5, Kṛṣṇa explains that God (i.e., the Self) is of two principles: a higher principle (para prakṛti) and a lower principle (apara prakṛti). Both are beginningless and eternal, but there are fundamental differences between them. The higher principle is the Conscious principle (cetanā), whereas the lower principle is inert (acetanā); the higher one is without attributes (nirguṇa), whereas the lower one is with attributes (saguṇa); the higher is not subject to change, as it is beyond time (nirvikāra), whereas the lower one is subject to change and time is an integral part of it (vikāra); and finally, the higher principle is independent (satyam), whereas the lower principle is dependent upon the higher one (mithya). This mixture existed before the emergence or evolution of the universe, which is gradual, occurring in two stages. Para prakṛti remains unchanged in the evolution from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the intermediary stage because it is beyond time and space. By contrast, apara prakṛti (also known as the matter or energy principle) divides into an eightfold principle, known as aṣṭadhā apara prakṛti. So in the intermediate stage we have one para prakṛti and eight apara prakṛti. In the final stage, the eightfold apara prakṛti magnifies and expands to become the multifarious creation consisting of everything: the galaxies, solar systems, planets, continents, and the body (modified matter) and mind (subtle matter). Thus, body and mind are both final products of apara prakṛti. Krishna then enumerates the eightfold apara prakṛti in the intermediate stage. These consist of earth, water, fire, air, space (the pañcamahābhūtani, or five elements), as well as manaḥ, buddhiḥ, and ahaṅkarāḥ. It is important to note that the scriptures talk about two types of pañca mahābhūtani: sthūla pañca mahābhūtani (the gross, tangible, or concrete elements that are final products) and sūkṣma pañca mahābhūtani (subtle elements, which are the intermediary objects). In Verse 4, Krishna is talking about the subtle elements or intermediary objects: that is, the invisible earth, water, fire, air, and space principles, as well as the subtle manaḥ, buddhiḥ, and ahaṅkarāḥ. These latter three are technical words based on Sankhyan cosmology and should not be mistaken for the individual (i.e., human) mind, intellect, and ego. Rather, they should be understood as the intermediary stages of these three matter principles. Then in Verse 5, Krishna introduces para prakṛti. According to scripture, both matter

grantha without studying the Gītā. Once we have studied the Gītā, any bhakti book will be meaningful; but without studying the Gītā, all bhakti books will be misunderstood. When God includes everything, love of God means love of everything, no person or thing can be excluded. In the Śiva Sahasranāma, the word Viṣṇu appears, and in the Viṣṇu Sahasranāma, the word Śiva appears, indicating that all deities, all human beings, all forms are included in that Lord. Therefore, ananya bhakti should never be taken to mean exclusive to a particular god.

Then what *is* ananya bhakti? According to Vedanta, ananya bhakti is used either to indicate a jijñāsu bhakta or a jñānī bhakta, as distinct from the ārta bhakta and arthārthī bhakta. Ananya bhakti is a technical word used for the particular form of bhakti practiced by the jijñāsu bhakta or the jñānī bhakta. When we talk about the ananya bhakti of a jijñāsu, a spiritual seeker, we give one definition and when we talk about the ananya bhakti of a jñānī, we make a slight modification to this definition. All these are very important points to be noted carefully. The ananya bhakti of bhakti darśanam is an immoral interpretation that we should reject outright. In Vedanta, ananya refers to jijñāsu or jñānī bhakti. A jijñāsu's ananya bhakti is one in which there is no puruṣārtha, or goal, other than Bhagavān, or mokṣa. In fact, in the case of the jijñāsu bhakti, 'ananya bhakti' means tīvra mumukṣutvam (burning desire for liberation). Such a bhakta is not interested in any other finite goal. Thus, **na vidyate anyaḥ puruṣārthaḥ yasyam bhakta**—there is no other goal (than mokṣa) pursued by this bhakta. When we talk about the ananya bhakti of a jñānī, the definition is: **na vidyate anyaḥ Īśvaraḥ yasyam bhakta**—there is no God to be worshipped other than the bhakta. Whereas for the jijñāsu there is no other puruṣārtha, for the jñānī there is no Īśvara other than the bhakta. This means that a jñānī bhakta has devotion to Īśvara, who is non-different from himself. In fact, Kṛṣṇa calls the jñānī **ekabhaktirviśiṣyate**—superior for having undivided devotion (Gītā, 7.17). Thus, there are two interpretations of ananya bhakti in Vedanta: The first interpretation is a bhakti in which there is no goal other than mokṣa and the second interpretation is a bhakti in which there is no God other than the bhakta himself. Thus when Nārada talks about ananya bhakti he is referring to jñānī bhakti or jijñāsu

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and energy (apara prakṛti) are inferior because both come under acetanā tattvam, the inert principle, and are subject to change, whereas Consciousness is superior. Many people mistake consciousness as a form of energy. Śāstra does not look upon Consciousness as subject to modification; it is neither matter nor energy. Then what is Consciousness? It is Consciousness. Therefore, Krishna says: "May you know my higher nature, which is other than matter and energy; which is beyond observation; which is beyond scientific study; which is beyond physical and chemical laws." And where is this para prakṛti located? It is very much within this creation. Whatever is changing should be put on the apara prakṛti list, and you must search further to find para prakṛti. But a clue is given: look at the whole creation. Whatever you come across is subject to modification, including space, which scientists tell us is expanding. Therefore, you can rule all this out as apara prakṛti. Having ruled out the whole world, you come to your own body and find that it, too, is changing; it is getting out of shape despite all your efforts to keep it slim and trim. And what about mind? It is violently changing. Therefore, body, mind and world are all apara prakṛti; in fact, whatever is observable is apara prakṛti. Krishna says: "There is para prakṛti here and now; discover it." And Arjuna says: "But where to find it? I've searched all over." Then Krishna reveals the answer: "If whatever you experience is apara prakṛti, then what is para prakṛti? It is YOU, the conscious experiencer. Tat tvam asi. The whole creation is a mixture of para prakṛti, the experiencer, and apara prakṛti, the experienced; para prakṛti, the observer, and apara prakṛti, the observed. This is the creation. Oh, Arjuna, it is not enough to have powerful arms; it is far better to have a powerful intellect. May you know the para prakṛti as the Consciousness, the experiencer behind the body-mind complex. Just as invisible electricity, enlivens a fan, a light, or a gadget, this inert body-mind complex is enlivened and activated by the touch of Consciousness. That Consciousness is my higher nature." Because of Spirit alone, idaṃ jagat dhāryate—this entire universe is sustained. At the physical body level, Consciousness is experienced as the very life principle. If you have any doubt, touch your body and you will experience its sentiency, revealing that it is blessed by the Conscious principle. As long as the body has life, it is functioning; the moment the life principle is not there, the body disintegrates and this dearest body has to be disposed of as soon as possible. Now the body is bathed, dressed, and perfumed; all kinds of elaborate rituals are performed. But without life, it rapidly disintegrates. Now extend this to the cosmic level. The whole cosmos is in harmony only because of the Intelligence principle, the caitanya-tattvam. The world is functioning as though a cosmic human being. The visible part of the creation is called apara prakṛti and the invisible, sustaining principle is called para prakṛti. This is Bhagavān.

bhakti, and given that the context in these sutras is advaita bhakti, we should take him to mean the jñānī's ananya bhakti. Nārada himself will explicate the word 'ananyata' further in the next sutra.

So Narada says: **tasmin ananyatā**—(the advaita bhakta) looks at God as non-different from himself. And **tad virodhiṣṭādāsīnatā ca**—he is indifferent to things contrary to that, meaning contrary to Īśvara or śāstra. We don't differentiate between Īśvara and śāstra, which is delivered by Īśvara alone. In other words, the advaita bhakta is indifferent to those who are nāstikas and look upon God as their enemy. Īśvara virodhishu does not mean Īśvara's enemies because Īśvara does not look upon any one as an enemy. As Kṛṣṇa says (Gītā, 9.29): **samo'ham sarvabhutesu, na me dvesyo'sti priyah**—I am the same toward all beings.

Those who look upon God as their enemy, like Shishupala, Kamsa, and Hiranyakashipu,<sup>56</sup> who said: "You should not chant 'Om Namo Nārāyaṇa,' you should only chant 'Hiranayaya Namaha.'" The advaita bhakta's attitude toward such nāstikas is not one of hatred; instead, he ignores them. He is indifferent to them. And **tad virodhi** means śāstra virodhi as well. Who are the śāstra virodhis? They are described in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Chapters of the Gītā. For example, in Chapter 16, Verse 8:

**asatyam apratiṣṭhaṃ te, jagad āhuranīśvaram  
aparaspasambhūtaṃ, kim anyat kāmahaitukam**<sup>57</sup>

They are all the people of āsurī-sampat. They reject God, they reject the śāstra, they reject daivi-sampat, they reject dharma—all these people are considered Īśvara śāstra virodhi. And with regard to them, **ūdāsīnatā ca**—the term is very important: we should not hate them, even terrorists should never be hated. We have to strongly condemn their actions and take remedial measures—this is our duty—but we should never ever hate them. We can even keep our physical distance from them, but we should never curse them or hate them. As Kṛṣṇa says (Gītā, 12.13):

**adveṣṭā sarvabhūtānāṃ, maitraḥ karuṇa eva ca  
nirmamo nirahaṅkāraḥ, samaduḥkhasukhaḥ kṣamī**<sup>58</sup>

And if at all we have a prayer, what will it be? May this person's mind become purified. Because once purified, even a terrorist is a noble soul. Śaṅkarācārya gives a lovely example of this in Vivekacūdamani. He says: A piece of sandalwood has an attractive fragrant smell, but now suppose it is kept in a wet environment for a long time. Because of the wetness, a layer of moss forms. And because of the moss, it emanates a foul smell. Experiencing the foul smell, nobody would ever believe it is a piece of sandalwood. But there is any doubt about this, rub that piece of sandalwood. Not only will the foul smell go away, it will be replaced by a pleasant fragrance. According to śāstra, a terrorist is also a piece of sandalwood, but because of the wetness he emanates a foul smell. What is the wetness? Ignorance (ajñānam), resulting in ahaṅkāra (egoism), mamākara (ownership), and because of these two, moha (delusion). Therefore never hate anyone. Instead, simply ignore them. There is a wonderful prayer that says:

**durjanah sajjano bhūyāt sajjano śāntim āpnuyāt  
śānto mucyeta bandhebhya muktaścānyān vimocayet**

<sup>56</sup> All three are powerful demons from the Mahabharata, enemies of Viṣṇu's incarnations on earth.

<sup>57</sup> They say 'the world is without truth, without dharma, without God, and born out of the union of the male and the female. The world is caused by desire alone; what else?'

<sup>58</sup> My devotee is a non-hater of all beings; is friendly, compassionate, free from the 'I'-notion, free from the 'mine'-notion, the same in comfort as well as discomfort, and forbearing.

**sarve bhavantu sukhinaḥ sarve santu nirāmayāḥ  
sarve bhadrāni paśyantu mā kaśchid duḥkha bhāḥ bhavet**

**kāle varṣatu parjanyaḥ pthivī sasya śālinī  
deśo'yam kṣoba rahito brāhmaṇāḥ santu nirbhayāḥ**

**sarve taratu durgāni sarvo bhadrāni paśyantu  
sarva kāmān avāpnotu sarva sarvatra nandatu**<sup>59</sup>

We don't hate anyone; we pray for all. Therefore, **tad virodhiṣūdāsīnatā ca.**

**Sutra 10. anyāśrayāṇām tyāgo'nanyatā**

***When one's devotion is unswerving, one relinquishes seeking security in anything other than himself.***

In the previous sutra, Nārada talked about ananya bhakti, and he is explicating that ananya bhakti in this sutra. As I said, ananya bhakti per Vedanta darśanam is not avoiding other temples. Shankarāyācārya introduced Ṣaṇmata sthapanam, a system of worship centered on six main deities—namely, Śiva, Viṣṇu, Śakti, Gaṇeśa, Sūrya, and Skanda—and Pañcāyatana pūjā<sup>60</sup> so that we could worship any form of deity, according to our convenience. We can have an Iṣṭa-devatā upāsanam and become comfortable with one form, but this does not mean converting anya-devatās (demigods) into an Iṣṭa-devatā, nor does it mean dveṣa devatā (developing an aversion to other deities or temples). Once we get into such beliefs, fundamentalism is not far behind. When religion becomes associated with a fundamentalist interpretation, it divides humanity instead of uniting humanity and religious quarrels ensue: between Hinduism and Christianity, Hinduism and Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism, Hinduism and Jainism. Even within Hinduism, between Vaiṣṇavas and Śaivas, and so on. All of these quarrels stem from a fundamentalist interpretation of religion. The Vedas never condone this. When religion leads to conflict, our younger generation loses interest in it. This is why they are slowly becoming nāstikas. You will find that our youth value service and all, but they are against religion because the popular religion is exclusivist and fundamentalist. If you understand God, then pūrnamaḥ pūrnamaḥ—loving God means loving everyone, so how can there be infighting? Therefore, ananya bhakti should not be interpreted fundamentalistically; rather, ananya bhakti is jijñasu bhakti and jñanī bhakti.

What is the uniqueness of the jijñasu bhakta and jñanī bhakta? A jijñasu bhakta doesn't want to depend on anyone or anything else for his peace, security, and happiness; he wants to depend on only one: Īśvara. Nothing else in the creation can give security. As it says in Bhaja Govindaḥ (Verse 1):

<sup>59</sup> May the wicked become good, may the good attain peace, may the peaceful attain liberation, and may the liberated help to set others free. May all beings be happy, may all be free from disease, may all beings find what they seek, and may none experience sorrow. May the rains fall on time, may the earth yield its produce in abundance, may this land be free from disturbance, and may we all be free from fear. May all beings cross over their tribulations, and may all attain their respective goals, may all realize their aims. May all beings, in all times and places, be happy.

<sup>60</sup> Pañca means five, ayatana means dwelling, and pūjā means worship. Pañcāyatana means One God resplended in five forms, or dwellings. Pañcāyatana pūjā is a ritual form of worship honoring Bhagavān in the form of five deities: Viṣṇu, Śiva, Devi, Gaṇeśa, and Sūrya.

**bhajagovindaṃ bhajagovindaṃ  
govindaṃ bhajamūḍhamate, samprāpte sannihite kale, nahi nahi rakṣati ḍukṛñkaraṇe**<sup>61</sup>

All worldly relationships are ephemeral. We cannot expect any person we rely upon to be with us all the time because we don't know who is going to die first. After 40 or 50 years together, a common topic of discussion among couples is: "Who will go first?" And they may also add: "I should go first" or "You should go first" and then begin planning what they will do when this happens. As discussed in the Gītā, this world has beauty, variety, and novelty, but it does not have stability. Therefore, it doesn't have reliability. Therefore, it cannot give security. Sometimes God himself shoots the Prime Minister dead. Therefore, the jijñāsu bhakti has nitya-anitya vastu viveka (the ability to discriminate correctly between the eternal and the ephemeral), and has iha-amutra-phala-bhoga-vairāgya (non-attachment to the fruits of actions) and wants to rely upon nitya vastu, Īśvara alone. This bhakta loves and cares for everyone around, which means helping them. You can give others emotional support, but when you want care and support yourself, don't lean on anyone around. As Krishna says (Gītā, 9.22):

**ananyāścintayanto mām, ye janāḥ paryupāsate  
teṣāṃ nityābhilyuktānām, yogakṣemaṃ vahāmyaham**<sup>62</sup>

If anyone asks you who your support is, never name anyone in the family; never ever name. Who is your support? The answer should be Īśvara and Īśvara alone. The jijñāsu bhakta wants to hold onto the branch of a tamarind tree, not the branch of a mango tree. The branch of a mango tree is stout, but it breaks easily. The branch of a tamarind tree is thin, but it is safe. Therefore, what is ananya bhakti? For peace, security, and happiness rely upon God alone.

Now what is the difference between the jijñāsu's ananya bhakti and the jñānī's ananya bhakti? Both rely upon God only and not the world, but the difference is that when the jijñāsu bhakta says: "God is my support," he is referring to *that* God, who is somewhere else and different from me. So the jijñāsu has progressed from world-dependence to God-dependence, but that God is still elsewhere. The jñānī, by contrast, depends upon God alone, and for that jñānī, God is **aham ātmā guḍākeśa sarvabhūtāśayasthitah**—the Self residing in the heart of all beings (Gītā, 10.20). Put another way, Īśvara-āśrayatvam is ātmā-āśrayatvam; God-dependence is equivalent to self-dependence (Gītā, 3.17):

**yastvātmaratireva syād, ātmatṛptasca mānavaḥ  
ātmanyeva ca santuṣṭaḥ, tasya kāryaṃ na vidyate**<sup>63</sup>

Is it frightening? I hope not; it should not be. For both the jijñāsu bhakta and the jñānī bhakta, ananya bhakti is God dependence, but for the latter alone this is equivalent to Self-dependence. Therefore, Narada says: **anyāśrayāṇām tyāgah**—renunciation of dependence on anything other than God. This ananya bhakta will say: Other than ātmā, I don't depend on anything else.

\*\*\*End of Teaching 6\*\*\*

<sup>61</sup> Worship Govinda, worship Govinda, worship Govinda. Oh fool! The rules of grammar will not save you at the time of death.

<sup>62</sup> Those who see Me as non-different from them offer worship by dwelling on me. I take care of the yoga and kṣema of those ever-steadfast ones.

<sup>63</sup> However, suppose there is a man who loves the self alone, is happy with the self alone, and who is contented with the self alone. There is nothing to be accomplished for him.

The sutras of the 1<sup>st</sup> Chapter, titled Parābhakti Svarūpam, can be compared with the 12<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the Bhagavad Gītā, titled Bhakti Yoga, in which Lord Kṛṣṇa outlines the five levels of bhakti yoga that ultimately lead to mokṣa. The five levels are described from Verse 1 through Verse 12. Those five levels, in reverse order, are: (1) **sakāma-karma pradhāna karma yoga**—actions based primarily on our desires for āṛta and kāma; (2) **nishkāma karma pradhāna karma yoga**—actions performed without any attachment to their results or ‘fruits’; (3) **līṣṭa-devatā dhyāna rūpa upāsana yoga**—dwelling upon the Lord in a preferred embodied form; (4) **viṣvarūpa dhyāna rūpa upāsana yoga**—dwelling upon the Lord in all forms; and finally, (5) **nirguṇa brahma vicāra rūpa**: jñāna yoga—the firm understanding that Īśvara is in the form of my nature as sākṣī caitanyam, the conscious experiencer of everything, which is never experienced as an object. There are two levels of karma yoga, two levels of upāsana yoga, and one level of jñāna yoga. Taken together, these five levels comprise bhakti yoga. There is no separate bhakti yoga; bhakti yoga refers to karma yoga plus upāsana yoga plus jñāna yoga. Anyone who wants to attain mokṣa through bhakti will necessarily have to go through all five of these levels. If a bhakti yogī stops at the first or second level, bhakti yoga will be incomplete. Indeed, this is what Lord Kṛṣṇa teaches in the 1<sup>st</sup> Chapter of the Gītā. A bhakti yogī who has gone through all five levels culminating in nirguṇa brahma vicāra rūpa will wind up as a jñānī because the highest level of bhakti yoga is about inquiring into the nirguṇa svarūpam (formless nature) of Īśvara. Īśvara has a lower saṅguṇa svarūpam (i.e., with qualities or gunas) known as apara prakṛti and a higher nirguṇa (formless) svarūpam known as para prakṛti. A bhakta must eventually come to the para prakṛti, the higher nirguṇa svarūpam of God, which Kṛṣṇa describes in two very brilliant and important śloka in the 12<sup>th</sup> Chapter (Gītā,12.3-4):

**ye tavakṣaram anirdeśyam, avyaktaṃ paryupāsate  
sarvatrāgam acintyaṃ ca, kūṭastham acalaṃ dhruvam  
sanniyamyendriyagrāmaṃ, sarvatra samabuddhayaḥ  
te prāpnuvanti mām eva, sarvabhūtahite ratāḥ**<sup>64</sup>

And then he says (Gītā,12.5):

**kleśo’dhikatarasteṣāṃ, avyaktāsaktacetasāṃ  
avyaktā hi gatirduḥkhaṃ, dehavadbhiravāpyate**<sup>65</sup>

In sum, the highest level of bhakti yoga requires nirguṇa Īśvara vicāra (inquiry and analysis into formless Brahman). And Kṛṣṇa acknowledges that this is very difficult because of our attachment to name and form. Kṛṣṇa’s advice should be carefully noted, but this does not mean that we can avoid nirguṇa Īśvara vicāra because of its difficulty; knowledge of Īśvara is not complete until a person knows both saṅguṇa and nirguṇa. Given that nirguṇa Īśvara vicāra cannot be bypassed, one must prepare oneself to make it easier. In other words, if nirguṇa vicāra is difficult, the advice is postpone it, prepare yourself, and thereafter inquire. At one time or another we have to consummate; we have to complete bhakti and this can only be done by going through nirguṇa Īśvara vicāra and jñānam. Once we reach para prakṛti and gain jñānam, the knowledge will transform from dvaita bhakti into advaita bhakti. At the apara prakṛti level, jñānam will still be bheda jñānam; bhakti will still be bheda bhakti. But once we come to the para prakṛti nature of Īśvara, it will be understood as the very jīvātmā.

As Kṛṣṇa says (Gītā, 7.5):

<sup>64</sup> Having restrained the sense organs, being even-minded towards all, and being interested in the welfare of all beings, some devotees meditate upon the imperishable brahman, which is indefinable, unmanifest, all-pervading, incomprehensible, immutable, immovable, and eternal. They alone attain me.

<sup>65</sup> Difficulties are greater for those whose minds are committed to the pursuit of the unmanifest brahman, for the goal of unmanifest is difficult to attain by those with bodily attachment.

**apareyam itastvanyāṃ, prakṛtiṃ viddhi ma parām  
jīvabhūtāṃ mahābāho, yayedam dhāryate jagat<sup>66</sup>**

Thus, apara prakṛti jñānam leads to dvaita bhakti, and para prakṛti jñānam leads to advaita bhakti. Accordingly, Kṛṣṇa says in the 1<sup>st</sup> Chapter of the Gītā: “Go through all five levels of bhakti yoga, beginning with dvaita bhakti, and you will inevitably discover yourself to be an advaita bhakta.” Advaita bhakti is equal to jñānam, which is equal to mokṣa. Naturally, Arjuna is curious to know whether anyone has successfully completed this process: “Do you have a case study?” he asks Kṛṣṇa. Before we are ready to put our time and effort into something, we want some evidence that it actually works, just as we want to know that new medicines have been tested on someone else first. To this, Lord Kṛṣṇa replies: “Many have practiced and attained jīvanmukti,” and then he goes into a brilliant description of them, calling the advaita bhakta “parābhakti”—the supreme bhakta. This description of the advaita jñānī—also known as the advaita bhakta, para bhakta, or mukta—appears in the 12<sup>th</sup> Chapter, from Verse 13 to the end:

**adveṣṭā sarvabhūtānāṃ, maitraḥ karuṇa eva ca  
nirmamo nirahaṅkāraḥ, samaduḥkhasukhaḥ kṣamī<sup>67</sup>**

The advaita bhakta doesn’t look upon God as a person in a temple or a loka; he looks upon God as the ātmā in everyone. For this jñānī, Īśvara bhakti is the love of all people; friendliness and compassion toward *all* beings. This advaita bhakta described in the 12<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the Gītā is the very same one that Nārada is presenting in these sutras, therefore don’t imagine that we are dealing with an entirely new subject matter. And Kṛṣṇa says: “Not only does that bhakta love me intensely,” but he secretly whispers: “I also have a soft spot for that advaita bhakta.” He says: “I love all people, but if forced to add the superlative ‘dearest one,’ I would reserve it for those few exceptional cases who have listened to me and followed all five steps. I am proud of those advaita bhaktas. And this love is necessarily mutual because these advaita bhaktas have discovered their oneness with Me.”

The advaita bhakta has become ananya bhakta, which was discussed in Sutras 8 through 10. Ananya bhakti can be explained in several ways, but in Sutra 10 Nārada describes ananya bhakti as **anyāśraya tyāgaḥ**—renouncing all other dependencies and learning to depend on God alone. For my peace, for my security, and for my happiness, I don’t depend upon anyone other than God. Thus, the jijñāsu bhakta and the jñānī bhakta depend solely on God. Both are Īśvara-matra āśraya, meaning they take support from Īśvara only. There is a song from an old Tamil film in which a man desperately expected support from family members, but everyone he leaned on ditched him. Finally, he sings: “All of you get lost. I have not been able to depend on any one of you.” And what empowers him to say: “Get lost?” He has found something far more powerful to lean on, just as Sugriva was able to challenge Vali, even after getting many lashings from him because he had back-up.<sup>68</sup> To what back-up are we referring? (Sri Rama Stotram, Verse 3):

**agrataḥ pṛṣṭataścaiva pārśvaitaśca mahābalau  
ākaraṇapūrṇadhanvānau rakṣetām rāmalakṣmaṇau<sup>69</sup>**

<sup>66</sup> This eight-fold nature is my lower nature. Know that nature that is distinct from this lower nature and which is in the form of jīva to be my higher nature by which this universe is sustained.

<sup>67</sup> My devotee is a non-hater of all beings; is friendly, compassionate, free from the ‘I’-notion, free from the ‘mine’-notion, the same in comfort as well as discomfort, and forbearing.

<sup>68</sup> This is a reference to the Ramāyāna. Sugriva was the younger brother of Vali, who ostracized Sugriva from the monkey kingdom, Kishkandha, and forcibly took Sugriva’s wife. Sugriva later formed an alliance with Rama, who helped him to reclaim Kishkandha.

<sup>69</sup> May the great warriors Rama and Lakṣmana protect me, in front, behind, and on all sides with their bows drawn up to their

When Rama is there to protect me, why should I depend on anyone? Thus, both the jijñāsu bhakta and the jñānī bhakta are Īśvara-matra āśraya. However, when the jijñāsu bhakta says: “I depend on Īśvara only,” he is looking upon Īśvara as someone different from himself, whereas once the jñānī becomes Īśvara-matra-āśraya, Īśvara becomes identical with ātmā. Thus, a jñānī doesn’t depend on anātma, he only depends on ātmā. As Kṛṣṇa says (Gītā, 3.17):

**yastvātmaratireva syād, ātmatṛptasca mānavaḥ  
ātmanyeva ca santuṣṭaḥ, tasya kāryaṃ na vidyate**<sup>70</sup>

When anātmās are around, he enjoys them, he loves them, he takes care of them, but he will never lean on them. Imagine that during Navaratri you have made a beautiful cardboard chair. You spent a lot of time decorating it elaborately with all kinds of silver and gold paper. You can showcase it and do everything with it, except sit on it. You must remember your own weight. But that does not mean that the chair has to be thrown away; the chair is attractive. Similarly, with anātma prapañca: beauty, variety, and novelty are all attractive. Love them and take care of them, but don’t lean on them. This is called advaita bhakti.

**Sutra 11. lokavedeṣu tadanukūlācaraṇaṃ tadvirodhiṣu udāsīnatā ca**

***Exclusiveness means conducting worldly and religious duties in a manner supportive of that.***

One of the optional lifestyles for a spiritual seeker is that of a sannyāsī.<sup>71</sup> It is available and can be entered into, if one is interested. And this sannyāsa is of two types. A person may decide to settle in a

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ears and mounted arrows ready to be discharged at the attacker.

<sup>70</sup> However, suppose there is a man who loves the self alone, is happy with the Self alone, and is contented with the Self alone. There is nothing to be accomplished for him.

<sup>71</sup> There are four type of sannyāsa based on the nature of renunciation, ranging from partial to total. The highest form of sannyāsa is paramahansa sannyāsa, which is the renunciation of everything, and there are 'lower-grade' sannyāsīs who still have an interest in something. Paramahansa sannyāsa is further subdivided into two types: vividiśa sannyāsa and vidvat sannyāsa. Vividiśa sanyasa is taken for studying scripture. 'Vividiśa' means a desire for learning. Vividiśa sannyāsa is a step toward vidvat sannyāsa, in which a sannyāsī is no longer interested in anything. He has attained the knowledge. He does not hold onto anything—not even to the idea 'I am a jñani.' He does not even have pride in the knowledge. Thus, the aim of vividiśa sanyasa is committed scriptural study and the aim of vidvat sanyasa is total renunciation. According to the Vedas, vividiśa sannyāsa is the ideal means and vidvat sanyasa is the ideal end in life. Why is this the case? If someone wants an empirical model for Brahman, a sannyāsī serves as such a model. How? Brahman is free from all actions and duties, and a sannyāsī is also free from duty. He does not have family duties, social duties, religious duties, a duty to earn etc. Second, the Vedas define brahman as one that is free from all relations. Similarly, in taking sannyas, the sannyāsī breaks all relationships. Third, Brahman is behind everything, supporting everything. Like brahman, the sannyāsī supports the whole creation. He does not belong to anyone; he belongs to everyone. Nothing belongs to him; everything belongs to everyone. Fourth, brahman does not depend upon anything for security and neither does a sannyāsī. He does not have a bank balance, a house, etc. He finds security in himself. The beauty is that he gives security to others and the irony is that the other person to whom he gives security could be a very rich person while the sannyāsī himself is a pauper. This vividiśa sanyasa is the ideal means. Sannyāsa is also the ideal end. In renunciation alone does one achieve mastery. A sannyāsī gives up everything that will be snatched away by time or death later. The only un snatchable entity is the atma. The Vedantin’s approach is this: when something is snatched away from us, the sense of loss is intensified; when it is given up or given away by us, the pleasure is intensified. There was a lady who, while visiting the temple, lost a gold ornament. She thought somebody has stolen it. She became very upset and took an oath that if the ornament were to be found, she would offer it to the Lord. As it turned out, she found the ornament and offered it to the Lord, which made her very happy. When she lost the ornament, she lost the benefit of wearing it and was very sad. When she gave the ornament to the Lord, she also lost the benefit of wearing it, but this time she was very happy. From this we get a very important idea. In loss, we are without an object. In giving also we are without an

gurukulam, and to practice śravaṇa and manana under the consistent guidance of a guru because grihasthāśrama (householder life) does not seem as conducive to this practice. This person is choosing vividiśa sannyāsī. Vividiśa (discriminating) sannyāsa is for the systematic study of Vedānta. This is also called śravaṇartam. Then there is another type of sannyāsa wherein a person has thoroughly studied Vedānta, even while remaining in grihasthāśrama or in brahmācāryāśrama (fortunately, the grihasthāśrama was Vedānta-friendly and thus conducive—to attend the 11am class and be able to sit and listen for an hour, one must have tremendous puṇya. Then to actually understand the teaching is a whole other level of puṇya...). So imagine this person, who has already done śravaṇa and manana and, despite being a jñānī, wants to take sannyāsa for nididhyāsanam. Such a person neither needs to stay with a guru nor in an ashram, because the knowledge is already firm. This sannyāsa is called vidvat (knowing or wise) sannaysa. So we have śravaṇārta sannyāsa vividiśa and nididhyāsanārta sannyāsa vidvat. Nārada mentions the vidvat sannyāsī in Sutra 8: **nirodhastu lokavedavyāpāranyāsaḥ**—the word **nyāsaḥ** refers to vidvat sannyāsa. Given that both types of sannyāsa are optional, a gr̥hastha (householder) can become an advaita jñānī—or advaita bhakta—and as such continue in grihasthāśrama, which Lord Kṛṣṇa himself advises throughout the Gītā. Specifically, Kṛṣṇa establishes that a gr̥hastha can also become an advaita bhakta and a mukta. He can practice śravaṇam and mananam, and he can manage to practice nididhyāsanam, but he has to make appropriate adjustments.

Suppose an advaita bhakta chooses to continue as a gr̥hastha and manages nididhyāsanam in grihasthāśrama, becoming a jñāna niṣṭhā sthitaprajña (one who continually abides in and as awareness). What should the lifestyle of this advaita bhakta who lives in society with various duties look like? The advaita bhakta is not bound by any duty as his sādhanā; he or she has already attained jñānam and is no longer a sādhanā; he or she has become a siddha. So what of those religious disciplines and duties: Navaratri pūjā, Śivaratri pūjā, Deepavali, Kṛṣṇa jayanti, etc. So many karmas are there! Pitṛ-karmas (ancestral duties), nitya-karmas (daily duties), naimittika karmas (occasional duties); so many vyāpāras and ācāras (transactions and customs) are there! Should he follow them or not? The advice is that the advaita bhakta should follow all of them. If he wants to renounce them, the option is there, but it should be done properly and formally because renunciation should be formalized. Consider, for example, if I had spent much of my life working in a company and had earned enough money to retire. My children are settled and a salary is no longer required; I want to spend more time on Vedānta. I would like to drop going to the office. How should I go about doing this? I can't just suddenly stop showing up to the office one day; there is a procedure in place with specific details. I have to give a certain amount of notice, I have to train someone else to fill my position, and so forth. That is the responsible way to retire. Similarly, if a person wants to drop all the rituals and pūjās, this is fine, but it needs to be done properly. The person needs to take vidvat sannyāsa and quit the family—thereafter no sandhyām (sunset rituals), no Kṛṣṇa Jayanti, no upāsanam (worship), no Śivaratri, no upavāsa (fasting)—instead, upavāsa becomes the time between two dikshas (meals offered to a sadhu). Absolutely no vidhis (injunctions), no niṣedhas (prohibitions). The vidvat sannyāsī is beyond vidhi-niṣedha, but these should be dropped properly. As long as one has not taken formal sannyāsa, and is neither a vividiśa sannyāsī nor a vidvat sannyāsī; that is to say, one lives in society in either brahmācāryāśrama or grihasthāśrama, one has to follow all of them—not as a sādhanā, because such

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object. But in loss there is pain. In giving there is pleasure. So even before time takes away from us, we hand over to time. This way, when things go away—whether money, or relations, or our teeth in old age—we do not feel any pain. A tyāgi (renunciate) is not worried about losing anything, including his body. He knows that time is going to take away everything. He holds onto only one thing that time cannot take away: atma. He can even challenge death, because he knows that death cannot touch him. So what is the ultimate tyāga? Giving up everything that can be lost or taken away and finding security in what cannot be snatched. This is called Paramahansa sannyāsa or vidvat sanyasa. What is the life of such a sannyāsī? Because he does not belong to any one family or community, he keeps moving from place to place. If he remains in one place, there is a danger that he may get attached to people and that people may get attached to him. His life is to teach. He does not have anything; he does not know what his security will be tomorrow. Yet he seems to be the happiest person. When we see such a sannyāsī, we will realise we don't need things for joy.

a sādhanā is no longer required, but for an altogether different purpose. Not for citta śuddhi (mental purification), not for jñāna-prapti (knowledge qualification), not for mokṣa-prapti (qualification for freedom)—none of these things are required any longer. Nārada presents three important reasons, which are not found in the Gītā, why a jñānī should follow rules and regulations—these include both worldly rules and śāstric rules; secular and sacred rules.

The first reason a jñānī should follow rules and regulations is loka-rakṣaṇam (protecting society), which is also known as lokakṣema or lokasaṃgraha (the welfare of the world). As Lord Kṛṣṇa says (Gītā, 3.20): **lokasaṅgraham evāpi, sampaśyan kartum arhasi**—At least considering the upliftment of society, you should act. The second is śāstra-rakṣaṇa (protecting the scripture). Until now, śāstra has protected you. After mokṣa, you have to protect the śāstra. This is like the parent and the child. Up to a certain age, parents protect their children and after a certain age, children are expected to protect their parents. The third and final reason is ātmā-rakṣaṇam (protecting oneself).

Nārada discusses loka-rakṣaṇam first. He says: **lokavedeṣu**—**loka** means with regard to worldly or secular activities and **vedeṣu** means with regard to the sacred scriptural activities. With regard to both things like traffic rules and the niyamas (10 Vedic observances). May you live in accordance with the respective vidhis and niṣedhas. Then **tadanukūlacaraṇam**—**tadanukūlā** means follow the Dos and avoid the Don'ts, even though a jñānī will not be affected by violating the rules. One who becomes a jñānī no longer has ahaṅkāra and mamākāra, and can be compared to a child. If a child violates the rules, the child is not arrested. Similarly, when a cow is on the road and violates the traffic signal, does the traffic police go to the cow and ask for his license and registration? So rules are relevant only where ahaṅkāra (ego) is involved. A jñānī has transcended rules, therefore even if he violates them, he will not accrue agami pāpam or agami puṇyam. As it says in Tattva Bodha (Verse 38.1):

**āgāmi karma api jñānena naśyati kiñca āgāmi karmaṇaṃ  
nalinīdalagatajalavat jñānināṃ sambandho nāsti**<sup>72</sup>

So even though a jñānī need not be afraid of pāpam, because he is akartā and abogha (neither a doer nor an enjoyer), he follows the rules—not out of desire for mokṣa, nor out of fear of narakam (hell), but out of compassion for the worldly order, so as not to confuse society. As Kṛṣṇa says (Gītā, 3.25-26):

**saktāḥ karmanyavidvāmsah, yathā kurvanti bhārata  
kuryād vidvāṃstathāsaktaḥ, cikīrṣurlokasaṅgraham  
na buddhibhedam janayed, ajñānāṃ karmasaṅginām  
joṣayet sarvakarmāṇi, vidvān yuktaḥ samācaran**<sup>73</sup>

Not only should you perform these actions, you should perform them with utmost commitment. Just because you yourself don't require the benefit, don't do a sloppy job. Anything worth doing is worth doing well. Therefore, may you maintain the order and may you help society. Not only that, Kṛṣṇa also says that we can learn the proper way of life from three important sources. The first source is śrūti pramāṇam, the Vedic literature, which tells us about the proper way of life. The second source is smṛti,<sup>74</sup> all the Veda-based writings, such as the Itihāsas, Purāṇas, and Dharma śāstras, or the writings of mahātmās in regional languages. Now suppose there is a segment of society that is illiterate and cannot study the śrūti or smṛti; our scriptures also take those people into account. Accordingly, scripture

<sup>72</sup> Knowledge destroys agāmi karma and the jñānī is not affected by it, just as a lotus leaf is not affected by the water on it.

<sup>73</sup> Oh Arjuna! Just as the ignorant people act with attachment to action, a wise person should also act without attachment, with a desire to bring about the upliftment of society. The wise should not create confusion in the intellect of the ignorant, who are attached to their action. Efficiently performing all duties with discipline, the wise person should inspire them.

<sup>74</sup> A smṛti is literally translated as a to-be-remembered history, the most important of these being the Bhagavad Gītā, Ramāyāna, and the Mahabharata.

advises such people to follow those who know the scriptures well and lead a conforming lifestyle. Such a person, known as a sadācāra or satpuruṣa ācāra (one who leads a virtuous life and serves as a guru for the spiritual aspirant), has not only read the scriptures, but lives them. Thus, the sadācāra is the third source of knowledge. Every jñānī should know that his or her lifestyle is being observed by others. For every child, the parents are models because the child learns the way of living, eating, and talking—everything from the parents. Because a parent’s ācāra (conduct) serves as a model for the child, every parent should be responsible and aware of the fact that his or her life is a teaching for that child. Similarly, every jñānī in society must be aware that he or she is going to be a model, a standard. If he is a sannyāsī in the forest, no problem. But when living amid society, society is going to watch and learn. As Kṛṣṇa says (Gītā, 3.21):

**yad yad ācarati śreṣṭhaḥ, tat tad evetaro janaḥ  
sa yat pramāṇaṃ kurute, lokastad anuvartate**<sup>75</sup>

Therefore, a jñānī in society needs to live in conformity with the rules of society. As Sutra 11 says **lokavedeṣu**—in regard to secular rules and scriptural rules, **tadanukūlācāraṇaṃ**—live in conformity. This is the duty of a jñānī. Furthermore, **tadvirodhiṣu**—with regard to those people who violate such rules, a jñānī should not develop hatred. Even a terrorist should not be hated. Terrorist activity can be very strongly disapproved of, but we cannot even hate this. Never hate. So what is the attitude? **Ūdāsīnatā**—treat them with indifference. Why can’t a jñānī educate a terrorist? Remember, a jñānī is ready to share his jñānam and help anyone, provided the other is willing to follow. You cannot talk to someone who doesn’t want to listen. Often when we talk, it is vana rodanam—weeping in the wilderness: As it says in the Mahābhārata (Book 12, Chapter 276, Verse 34):

**nāpṛṣṭaḥ kasya cid brūyān na cānyāyena pṛcchataḥ  
jñānavān api medhāvī jadaval lokam ācaret**<sup>76</sup>

And in Pañcatantra, by Viṣṇu Śarma (1.424):

**vācyam śraddhāsametasya pṛcchateś ca viśeṣataḥ  
proktaṃ śraddhāvihīnasya araṇyaruditopamam**<sup>77</sup>

Therefore, because such people are are not receptive, ignore them. Or at most, pray for them. Thus, the number one duty of a jñānī is loka-rakṣaṇam.

**\*\*\*End of Teaching 7\*\*\***

Nārada continues to talk about advaita bhakti, which is the same as advaita jñānam, which is also called parābhakti, as described in the 12<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the Gītā. Nobody begins with advaita bhakti; rather, it is the end result of a lot of sādhanā involving dvaita bhakti, with Vedānta vicāra alone leading to advaita jñānam, the only means of liberation. The advaita bhakta is a liberated person. He is no longer a sādhanaka, and has no sādhanas to deliberately follow and thus no binding rules. Therefore, none of the śāstric vidhis and niṣedhas (injunctions and prohibitions) apply to him; even lokika vidhi niṣedhas are not relevant to him. Still, the tradition and the ācāryas suggest that an advaita bhakta

<sup>75</sup> Every other person performs only such actions that a superior one performs. The world follows that which is seen as the standard.

<sup>76</sup> Insert translation (Mahabharata, Book 12, Chapter 276, Verse 34)

<sup>77</sup> **Insert translation**

should follow all the lokika and śāstria niyamas. And if an advaita bhakta or liberated jñānī follows these rules and regulations, what is the intention or motive? Certainly the motive cannot be liberation because this person is already liberated; thus, the motive must be otherwise. In the last class, I mentioned three motives: loka-rakṣaṇam, śāstra-rakṣaṇam, and ātmā or jñāna-rakṣaṇam.

Loka-rakṣaṇam—otherwise known as lokakṣema, and referred to in the Bhagavad Gītā as lokasaṃgraha and in Sutra 11 of the Nārada Bhakti Sutra as **lokavedeṣu**—refers to worldly activities and to religious or śāstric activities. With regard to both, the jñānī lives in such a way that is conducive to the protection of the loka, or society. The rationale is that a jñānī automatically becomes a role model for society because of the following rule (Gītā, 3.21):

**yad yad ācarati śreṣṭhaḥ, tat tad evetaro janaḥ  
sa yat pramāṇam kurute, lokastad anuvartate**<sup>78</sup>

Society always imitates a successful person, be it a cricketer or a film star. In any field in which someone becomes successful, that person becomes a role model. That is why cricketers and film stars are used in public service advertisements. Once these people say something, everyone follows. This is the apish tendency of humanity—we are their descendents and therefore we imitate them. Thus, jñānīs are given a warning: you are being watched by society, and whatever you do, society will follow. You will not be affected one way or another, but society will be affected by the right way of life or the wrong way of life. And therefore, may you follow the right way. This is the first motive. Now we examine the second motive—namely, śāstra rakṣaṇam.

**Sutra 12. bhavatu niścaya dārdhyādūrdhvaṃ śāstrarakṣaṇam**

***Let there be a firm commitment to maintaining an ethical code, even after the development of spiritual devotion.***

The law of the world is always this: Initially we are protected by something, and having benefited from it, we have a responsibility to protect it in return. If a healthy environment is useful for our growth, then it is our duty to take care of the environment. And if we were taken care of and protected by our parents when we were helpless and incapable, then when we become capable and they become incapable, we should reciprocate by protecting and taking care of them. This is the law of nature. Thus, the roles of protector and protected always get reversed. The śāstram protects a person. In fact, the very definition of the word 'śāstram' is: **śāsanāt trāyate iti śāstram**—that which protects by teaching. In other words, the śāstram protects a human being from downfall by teaching the proper way of life. And if I am protected by the śāstram, then after gaining benefit from it in the form of mokṣa, it is my duty to do everything to protect and perpetuate that śāstram.

Protection of the śāstram by a jñānī is done in a twofold manner: the first protection is by not bringing down the reputation of the śāstra. Suppose, for example, that after gaining ātmā jñānam, I were to abuse the freedom given by the śāstram. Śāstra says that a jñānī is free and unaffected by either agami puṇyam or agami pāpam, and is beyond the guṇas, and śāstric prescriptions and prohibitions. (Gītā, 5.15):

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<sup>78</sup> Every other person performs only such actions whichever a superior one performs. The world follows that which he sees as a standard.

**nādatte kasyacit pāpaṃ, na caiva sukr̥tam vibhuḥ  
ajñānenāvṛtaṃ jñānaṃ, tena muhyanti jantavaḥ<sup>79</sup>**

Śāstra gives this freedom, but if a jñanī were to abuse this freedom and live a licentious life without any discipline, he will again become a prakṛti-puruṣa, an uncultured person. Initially, the Vedas took a lot of trouble to culture and educate this person. Because we are born undisciplined and uncultured, the Vedas prescribed 41 saṃskāras. Through the Veda pūrvabhagha, we became refined and polished. The Veda prescribed many ‘Do’s’ and ‘Don’ts’ and took great pains to convert prakṛti-puruṣa into saṃskṛta-puruṣa. Now imagine that after gaining Vedanta jñāna, this jñanī reverts to become a licentious, undisciplined, uncultivated, uncultured, uncouth prakṛta puruṣa. Vedanta will get a bad reputation for converting a saṃskṛta-puruṣa back into a prakṛti-puruṣa and society will look at this person and say: “This is a Gītā student. This is an Upaniṣad student. Before attending these classes he was following something and now after becoming Swamiji’s student, this is the result.” Instead of criticizing the person, society will wind up looking down upon the śāstram and ācārya. Therefore, Nārada says, at the very least to save the reputation of the guru and the śāstram, every jñanī should continue to follow all the rules and regulations, even if he doesn’t require any benefit from this.

Therefore, Nārada says: **niścaya dārdhyādūrdhvaṃ**. After getting jñāna-niṣṭha, there is **niścaya dārdhyā**—firmness of conviction. What conviction? I am Brahman. I am liberated, I was liberated, and I will ever be liberated; there is never question of my downfall as Brahman. Even if there is a downfall for ahaṅkāra, I am not affected by it. It is the firm conviction that I, Brahman, can never fall at all. After getting this jñāna niṣṭha, **śāstrarakṣaṇam bhavatu**—may you continue to follow the varna-āśrama dharma<sup>80</sup> and also the constitutional rules of the country, known as lokika-dharma, to avoid disrepute to śāstram and the guru. This was also Kṛṣṇa’s argument: “Arjuna,” he said, “If you run away from the battlefield, society will talk about you and follow your example.” Further, Kṛṣṇa said: “Observe me. I don’t have anything to accomplish in life, but as a human being I have come to the world and I am following my duty.” When Kṛṣṇa’s friend Kuchela<sup>81</sup> came for a visit, Kṛṣṇa wanted to observe the gr̥hastha dharma of honoring a guest. Kuchela was a nobody and he didn’t have great riches, but Kṛṣṇa, who is the emperor of the cosmos, rushed toward a sweaty Kuchela, embraced him and performed the padma puja—not for his own citta śuddhi, but to serve as a model for all the gr̥hasthas of the world. Therefore, a jñanī should not bring disrepute to the śāstra. This is the first aspect of śāstra-rakṣaṇam.

The second aspect of śāstra-rakṣaṇam is that a jñanī should propagate the Vedantic teaching by sharing this knowledge with humanity because only a jñanī is capable of sharing this knowledge. Imagine all jñanīs refused to share the knowledge and ajñanīs enthusiastically came forward to share, they would only be sharing their ignorance and confusion, and we would wind up with several anta paramparā (end points to the lineage). Therefore, the śāstra says to every jñanī: if there is a sincere seeker, may you not neglect him. Every jñanī is instructed to educate a sincere seeker. As it says in Vivekacūdamani, Verse 41: **nirīkṣya kāruṇyasarādradriṣṭyā dadyādabhītiṃ sahasā mahatma**—the great sage looked at the seeker with a gaze full of compassion, urging him to abandon fear, now that he had taken refuge in him.

<sup>79</sup> The ātmā takes neither the pāpaṃ nor the punyam of anyone. Discrimination is veiled by ignorance. Hence, the beings are deluded.

<sup>80</sup> In the ideal varna-āśrama dharma system of life, society is divided into four social groups (varnas) according to natural talents and proclivities: the brahmana (intelligentsia), kṣatriya (administrators), vaiśya (entrepreneurs), and śūdra (the laboring class). Then the life span of each individual is divided into four stages; student (bramācārya), householder (gr̥hastha), vānaprastha (retiree), and sannyāsī (renunciate).

<sup>81</sup> Kuchala as he is known in South India, or Sudama, was a brahmin childhood friend of Krishna from Mathura. The story of his visit to Dwaraka to meet Krishna is mentioned in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa.

Śaṅkarācārya says that a jñanī should share his knowledge. Sharing can be in the form of oral teaching, or written works, as Adi Śaṅkarācārya has exemplified. We are able to study the Upaniṣads today because of his pioneering commentary. Thus, the second meaning of śāstra-rakṣaṇam is sharing the teaching with others. This is the second motive of a jñanī.

Then third motive is ātmā jñāna-rakṣaṇam—maintenance of the jñānam by regular polishing. If we do not regularly polish the brass and silver valuables in our homes, they become tarnished. Similarly, a jñanī is advised to remain in touch with the śāstra for ātmā rakṣaṇam.

**Sutra 13. anyathā pātityaśaṅkayā**

***Otherwise, there is the risk of a fall.***

Even after gaining jñānam, a jñanī must exercise caution. He should not become complacent or overconfident because māyā is constantly pulling on him. The temptations are too many and śāstra prescribes several rules for saving a jñanī from temptation. If these rules are violated and caution is thrown to the wind, chances are that a jñanī may have a downfall. A downfall does not mean losing the jñānam, because once it is gained clearly and thoroughly jñānam cannot be lost, but jñānam can be overpowered by ahaṅkāra-mamākara-deha abhimāna (egoism, ownership, and false pride), by deha vāsanā (attachment to the sense pleasures), by loka vāsanā (worldly tendencies)—all varieties of vāsanās have the capacity to overpower. Let a jñanī not lead a licentious life because of overconfidence, Nārada says, **anyathā pātityaśaṅkayā**—otherwise, there is a risk of a spiritual fall. Ahaṅkāra-mamākara can overpower the jñānam, as well as the behavior of the jñanī. Hence, jñāna-rakṣaṇam. In the last portion of the Kena Upaniṣad, various values are mentioned and the Upaniṣad is compared to a sacred cow and the mind to a shed. Protection is said to be satyam āyatanam (the abode of Brahman). Values are very important, not only for acquiring the knowledge, but also for preserving it. Therefore, the advice to a jñāni bhakta is: may you follow a disciplined way of life.

**Pātitya** means downfall. There is a technical term used in the śāstra for the spiritual fall of a Vedantic student who has been in the field for some time, and it is especially pertinent to a sannyāsī who falls from sannyāsa āśrama dharma. The term is: **ārūḍha pātītatvam**, which means having ascended and then falling from that height, really the worst kind of fall. If you fall from the first rung of a ladder, you will only have a small bruise or sprain, but if as a result of complacency you fall after having climbed many steps, you are at risk of a serious fracture. **Śaṅkayā** means risk. The more we climb, the more caution we need to exercise, never less. Thus, because of the risk of spiritual fall, a jñanī should follow a disciplined lifestyle. Thus, loka-rakṣaṇam, śāstra-rakṣaṇam, and ātmā-rakṣhārtam; Nārada’s advice is to continue a disciplined life. In fact, there is a Purāṇic story describing how Nārada himself wanted to experiment with māyā. He was overconfident and challenged Bhagavān saying: “What can māyā do to me?” And the Lord replied: “At the appropriate time, I will tell you.” Then Bhagavān created a temporary hallucination in which Nārada was going for bhikṣā and a beautiful young woman gave bhikṣā to him. Nārada enjoyed it and thought: Why can’t we get settled in the grihasthāshram? So he entered into grihasthāshram with the women and they had several children. Then a flood came and Nārada wanted to save the children. Carrying the first child in one arm, the second child in the other, and struggling to stay afloat, he shouted “Nārāyaṇa!” And at that very moment, the hallucination disappeared—it had only been an artificial dreamlike experience created by Bhagavān. When it was over, neither of them said very much. Bhagavān looked at Nārada and Nārada looked down, sending the message that he understood the power of māyā. So the moral of the story is, don’t be overconfident.

**Sutra 14. loko’pi tāvadeva bhojanādivyāpārastu āsarīradhāraṇāvadhi**

***For as long as the body lasts, one should engage minimally in worldly activities and in such behaviors, which are required to sustain the body.***

Next, Nārada says that even if a jñānī bhakta is involved in lokika vyavahāra, there must be a balance. Previously, Nārada had talked about lokika vyavahāra (worldly behavior and activities) being qualitatively proper, in keeping with lokika niyama and śāstriya niyama; here he is talking about the quantity. And what he says is: “Don’t get completely immersed in the service of the world. That is all wonderful, but have enough time for your own āśrama dharma, especially the continuation of nididhyāsanam.” As I have often said, nididhyāsanam is the compulsory duty. Don’t ask for how long. There is a śloka that says: **asupta amṛta kālam nayet Vedanta chintaya**—till he goes to bed, till he leaves the mortal coil, he always thinks of Vedanta. Until death, you have to allot time for Vedanta. Even if you are a maha jñānī, allot time for Vedanta. Because kama, krodha, lobha, moda—those vāsanās are waiting at the doorstep for the right occasion to gatecrash. If you recall the 2<sup>nd</sup> Chapter of the Gītā (2.62-63):

**dhyāyato viṣayān puṃsaḥ saṅgasteṣūpajāyate  
saṅgāt sañjāyate kāmaḥ kāmāt krodho’ bijayāte  
krodhād bhavati saṃmohāḥ, saṃmohāt smṛtīvibhramaḥ  
smṛtībhraṃśād buddhināśaḥ, buddhināśāt praṇāśyati<sup>82</sup>**

Kṛṣṇa warned that this can even happen to a jñānī, therefore be sure to allot time for Vedanta. Don’t make excuses; allot some time. Just as we allot time for food—wherever we go, we carry huge bags with our special coffee concoctions, this and that and sugar-free sugar, we carry all these things because we need the right coffee at the right time. If we are that particular about our coffee items, may we be just as particular about the spiritual food called Vedanta in any form—whether reading or writing or sharing or hearing; in one form or another, one should continue this until death. Therefore, do not let worldly transactions obstruct Vedantic pursuits: **tāvadeva** means let it be in limited measure (Gītā, 6.17):

**yuktāhāravihārasya, yuktaceṣṭasya karmasu  
yuktasvapnāvabodhasya, yogo bhavati duḥkhahā<sup>83</sup>**

And **bhojanādivyāpārastu āsarīradhāraṇāvadhi**. The worldly vyavahāras will gradually decrease because of our physical limits, but bhojana divyavahāra (the activities essential for supporting life) will continue until death. Therefore, Nārada says: **bhojanādivyāpāraḥ**—the minimum activities required for the maintenance of the body (Gītā, 3.8):

**śarīrayātrāpi ca te, na prasidhyed akarmaṇaḥ<sup>84</sup>**

<sup>82</sup> For a person who dwells on the sense objects, a fancy toward them arises. From fancy, desire is born. From desire, anger arises. From anger arises delusion. From delusion, the loss of memory. From the loss of memory, the loss of discrimination. Because of the loss of discrimination, he perishes.

<sup>83</sup> Dhyāna yoga (meditation) becomes the destroyer of sorrow for one who is moderate in eating and recreation, who is moderate in sleeping and waking, and who is moderately engaged in actions.

<sup>84</sup> Even the maintenance of the body would not be possible for you from inaction.

Thus, avoid the other extreme. Don't get too involved in vyavahāra, but you cannot completely avoid vyavahāra either, because a minimum amount of transaction is required to maintain the body. Therefore, **āśarīradhāraṇāvadhī**—as long as one still has this body (i.e., until death), minimum transaction is required. Don't eat too much, but don't fast too much either. In short, keep the quantity of all worldly transactions balanced. This is the overall message of Sutra 14.

**Sutra 15. tallakṣaṇāni vācyante nānāmatābhedaḥ**

***There are various definitions of the characteristics of bhakti due to differences in view.***

In Sutras 15 through 19, Nārada will be changing the topic slightly. Up to this point, he had been talking about advaita bhakti, parābhakti, or jñānī bhakti, including the benefit that such a bhakta gets and the way of life that such a bhakta should lead. In the ensuing five sutras, Nārada returns to the definition of bhakti, which he had given in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sutra as: **sā tvasmin para(ma)prema svarūpā**—supreme love directed toward God. But Nārada wants to provide some other characteristics, or **lakṣaṇās**, of bhakti given by other ācāryas. In the 16<sup>th</sup> Sutra, he gives Vyasācārya's definition; in the 17<sup>th</sup> Sutra, he gives Garga Maharṣi's definition; in the 18<sup>th</sup> Sutra, he gives Śaṅḍilya Rṣi's definition; and in the 19<sup>th</sup> Sutra, Nārada provides another definition himself. Thus, four alternative definitions are given and Nārada says: **vācyante nānāmatābhedaḥ**—different definitions due to different views, or approaches.

Naturally, a question may arise: How can there be several definitions of bhakti? Isn't the idea that there is only one definition of bhakti: supreme love toward God? Although love or devotion to God, is the only definition, this devotion itself can be expressed in different forms, just as a mother can show her child love in different ways. Different people express their love in different ways: some people pinch babies until their cheeks become red (that is the unfortunate expression of some, for while they are getting enjoyment, the poor child has to suffer). All this to say that there are different expressions, and on this basis, bhakti is defined variously (**nānā**) by different ṛṣis: expression-based bhakti.

Before going into the details of Sutras 15 through 19, however, I would like to make some general observations. I talked about dvaita bhakti in the beginning stages and how, through Vedānta vicāra, it gets converted into advaita bhakti. I also distinguished between two types of dvaita bhakti. The first type is informal dvaita bhakti, wherein one does not follow the strict rules given by the sāstra, but instead expresses love for God in his or her own way, at times even violating sāstric rules. We have the examples of Shavari biting food before giving it to God and Kannappa Nayanar giving māṁsam (meat) to God. The second type is formal dvaita bhakti, in the form of karma yoga and upāsana yoga, which involves pañca mahāyajñas and so forth—that is the traditional or formal dvaita bhakti. Both forms of dvaita bhakti will give joy to the dvaita bhakta, but there are key differences between them as well. In informal dvaita bhakti, as exemplified in the songs of the Alvars and Nyanmars,<sup>85</sup> the bhakta approaches God as a person—be it as a child, a parent, a beloved—and an emotional bond is formed with the Lord, which is expressed in varieties of transactions: putting the Lord to sleep, waking the Lord, clothing the Lord, feeding and talking to the Lord, etc. This informal dvaita bhakti focuses on bonding with Bhagavān as a person, and is more emotional and less intellectual. Accordingly, the joy is in the form of emotional contentment. This is why the informal dvaita bhakta always defines bhakti in terms of love and affection. This type of bhakta will use words that are connected with emotion: “Bhagavān is a

<sup>85</sup> The Alvars were a group of 12 poet-saints who espoused bhakti to Viṣṇu or his avatar, Kṛṣṇa. The Nyanmars were a group of 63 Shaivaita poet-saints devoted to Śiva. Both groups had a major influence on the bhakti movement in Tamil Nadu.

person with whom I have an emotional bond” ... “I regularly enjoy interacting with the Lord” ... “I love God and I am affectionate to God” ... This is the sort of language that is used when bhakti is predominantly emotional.

By contrast, when we get to formal dvaita bhakti—which is the pursuit of karma yoga and upāsana yoga, as well as bhakti expressed in the form of pañca mahāyajña, mūrti ārādhana (worship of Divine symbols), pañcayatana pūjā, and so forth—Bhagavān is not in the form of a person but a mūrti or vigrahaḥ (a symbol). And even when ārādhana (worship) is done, the focus is not on the particular or finite form of the Lord, but rather, the mūrti or vigrahaḥ symbolizes Bhagavān as everything; it is used as an indicator of viṣvarūpa Īśvara. This is why if you examine the mantra in formal pañcapūjā, they will say:

**laṃ pṛthivyātmana gandhaṃ samarpayāmi  
ham ākāśātmane puṣpaiḥ pūjāyāmi  
yaṃ vāyvātmane dhūpam āghrāpayāmi  
ram agnyātmane dīpaṃ darśayāmi  
vam amṛtātmane amṛtaṃ mahānaivedyaṃ nivedayāmi  
saṃ sarvātmane sarvopacārapūjāṃ samarpayāmi<sup>86</sup>**

When I apply gandha (sandalwood paste) on the mūrti of the Lord, what I am reminding myself is that Bhagavān is not this 2-inch mūrti, Bhagavān is in the form of the earth, pṛthvī. And ‘ham ākāśātmane puṣpam pūjāyāmi’ means Bhagavān is in the form of akasha, or ether. So where should I run to meet Bhagavān? If Bhagavān is akasha rūpa, I don’t have to run anywhere. In informal dvaita bhakta, Bhagavān is made a person and the bhakta has to run to meet Bhagavān, whereas in formal dvaita bhakti, pūjā is done to the mūrti, but this mūrti serves to expand the mind to see pṛthvī (earth) as Bhagavān, to see ākāśa (ether) as Bhagavān. And “ram agnyātmane dīpam pradarśayāmi:” when I show the dīpam to Bhagavān, I remember that Bhagavān is in the form of agni. And when I am feeling the humidity, that is Bhagavān in the form of agni (fire)—enjoy that, never complain about the humidity. And because of agni, water comes: “vam amṛtātmane amṛto paharam samarpayāmi.” In that āyatana pūjā, ‘amṛtam’ means jalām (liquid). Therefore, while offering a spoonful of water I am remembering that all the water on this earth is viṣvarūpa Īśvara. Informal dvaita bhakta focuses on ekarūpa Īśvara; formal dvaita bhakta focuses on viṣvarūpa Īśvara. Which is more important? Viṣvarūpa Īśvara, because that alone ultimately takes us to advaita jñānam. Therefore, ekarūpa Īśvara informal bhakti, is only a temporary stepping-stone for coming to viṣvarūpa Īśvara bhakti. And when the dhūpam (incense stick) is presented, the mantra chanted is: “yam vāyvātmane dhūpama āghrāpayāmi.” What a beautiful thing. When the incense stick is presented, we get a fragrance and this fragrance is carried by vāyu (air). Thus, when we are experiencing the fragrance, we are reminded of that fragrance-carrying vāyu tattvam, which is all-pervading—and that vāyu is also Bhagavān. Therefore, formal dvaita bhakta is cultivating appreciation of Bhagavān as viṣvarūpa Īśvara. It is an intellectual appreciation of the beauty of the universal God. It is the appreciation of the harmony of viṣvarūpa Īśvara. It is the appreciation of the principles that govern the microcosmos and macrocosmos, and all are the glory of God alone. If the sun is rising, that is the glory of God. If the water is evaporating in the summer, that is the glory of God. And if the water condenses during the rainy season and rain falls, that is the glory of God. Thus, it is the admiration and appreciation of nature and the universe itself as viṣvarūpa Īśvara. It requires a mature and expansive mind. It is not an emotional expression of bhakti in the form of kissing, cuddling, and pinching; informal dvaita bhakti is an emotional outpouring. In formal dvaita bhakti, we translate bhakti not through an emotional world, but as appreciation of viṣvarūpa Īśvara—admiration of this wonderful universe in front of us, and a reverential attitude toward everything.

<sup>86</sup> With [the bija, or seed mantra] ‘laṃ’ which is the root of earth, I offer sandal to the earth; with ‘ham,’ which is the root of ether, I offer flowers to the ether; with ‘yam,’ which is the root of air, I offer incense to the air; with ‘ram,’ which is the root of fire, I offer light to the fire; with “vam” which is the root of nectar, I offer the great offering to the nectar; with “saṃ” which is the root of all souls, I offer complete worship to all souls.

This is crucial because often, in the name of vairāgyam, we criticize the world. I talked about the three doṣas (defects of the mind): mala (impurities), including kama (desire), krodha (anger), lobha (greed), moha (delusion), mada (intoxication), and mātsarya (envy); vikṣepa (projection); and avarana (confusion). We say duḥkha miśri tattvam—the happiness we get when we achieve something is always mixed with sorrow—we are supposed to see the duḥkha in everything. Therefore in the name of vairāgyam, I find fault with the world. That has to be neutralized and balanced. I should learn to see the whole universe as the wonderful body of the Lord. I don't hate anything and I don't want to own anything. It requires maturity and an expanded intellect, and this brings intellectual joy. Thus, informal dvaita bhakti gives emotional joy, whereas formal dvaita bhakti gives intellectual joy, as well as a mature and expanded mind. To appreciate Bhagavān, a bhakta need not stand in a queue for seven hours. The mature bhakta says: "When I see the sunrise that is enough for me." As the Rudram (a Vedic hymn) says:

**asau yastāmro aruṇa uta babhruḥ sumaṅgalaḥ  
ye cemāgṃ rudrā abhito dikṣu śrītāḥ sahasraśo'vaiṣāgṃ heḍa īmahe<sup>87</sup>**

Everything is sarvam Śivamāyām, sarvam Viṣṇumāyām. Thus, we should understand both forms of bhakti and remember that both forms will give joy.

**\*\*\*End of Teaching 8\*\*\***

Up to the 14<sup>th</sup> Sutra, Nārada talked about the highest advaita bhakti, which is enjoyed by an advaita jñānī. This advaita bhakta, or jñānī, initially gains all of the qualifications in the form of sādhanā chatuṣṭaya sampatti by practicing dvaita bhakti. Thereafter he follows Vedānta śravaṇa, manana, nididhyāsana under a guru's guidance and converts dvaita bhakti into advaita jñānam and advaita bhakti. Through this jñānam or bhakti, he attains liberation, after which he is not bound by any vidhis or niṣedhas of the śāstram, but still continues to follow the śāstric disciplines for three purposes: loka rakṣaṇam, śāstra rakṣaṇam, and ātmā rakṣaṇam. Such a person is called a jīvanmukti. With that, Nārada concluded the topic of advaita bhakti, or parābhakti—the supreme bhakti. Now, Nārada takes a small deviation in which he presents different definitions of bhakti given by different ācāryas, like Vyasācārya, Garga Ṛṣi, Śāṅḍilya Ṛṣi and himself. Even though the primary definition of bhakti is Īśvara prema, or love of God alone, alternative definitions are provided because although love is one, the expression of that love is many and varied.

Before entering that topic, I want to discuss a side issue. It pertains to a concern that often arises in the dvaita bhakta, who enjoys both the emotional and intellectual joy through ekarūpa Īśvara and viṣvarūpa Īśvara, respectively. Nonetheless, the dvaita bhakta may wonder: If I come to advaita bhakti what will happen to dvaita bhakti? Will it be destroyed? Several doubts may stem from this concern. The first is whether advaita bhakti can logically exist at all. There are several people who challenge the very possibility of advaita bhakti, arguing that it is a contradiction in terms, like hot ice cream, because the very word 'bhakti' suggests a minimum of two entities. If bhakti is translated as devotion, then it would seem to require a devotee and an object of devotion. Therefore, bhakti brings to mind the idea of duality in the form of devotee and deity. If deity-devotee duality is required for devotion, dvaitam is required for bhakti. Even if bhakti is translated as love, this automatically conjures up the need for a lover and a beloved. How can we speak of love without duality? Therefore, some people argue that advaita bhakti is illogical, irrational, a contradiction in terms. To this we respond that there is no contradiction: advaita bhakti is the bhakti of a jñānī toward the Lord, which has been discovered to be

<sup>87</sup> The same Lord is this sun, with a reddish hue during sunrise, light red after rising, and a golden hue thereafter is auspicious. Through our praise, we pacify the anger of thousands of Rudras who have resorted to the quarters on all sides of this earth.

the bhakta's own essential nature. This means advaita bhakti is Self-love in which the self is Bhagavān himself. Self-love is never illogical because everyone already loves him or herself, as repeatedly declared in the Upaniṣads. The Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad (2.4.5) says: **ātmānas tu kamāyā sarvam priyam bhavati**—for the desire of the Infinite, which is the Self, everything appears to be desireable. The Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad (3.1.4) says:

**prāṇo hyeṣa yaḥ sarvabhūtairvibhāti vijānan vidvān bhavate nātivādī  
ātmakṛḍaḥ ātmaratiḥ kriyāvān eṣa brahma vidām variṣṭhaḥ**<sup>88</sup>

And in the Bhagavad Gītā (3.17), Kṛṣṇa says:

**yastvātmaratireva syād, ātmatṛptasca mānavaḥ  
ātmanyeva ca santuṣṭaḥ, tasya kāryaṃ na vidyate**<sup>89</sup>

In all these śāstric verses, we are talking about Self-love. Where is the contradiction? We all love ourselves. It is the reason we go about procuring anything and everything: to please ourselves because we love ourselves. When someone wants to commit suicide, it is because he hates himself. Both self-hatred born of ignorance and Self-love born of knowledge are very much possible. Therefore, advaita bhakti is Self-love in which the Self is discovered to be Bhagavān or Brahman itself, *aham brahmasmi*. A technical question may then arise, one that won't be asked by a layperson, but by the technical experts: How can you talk about self-love in which both the lover and the beloved—subject and object—are oneself? In Vedānta class we repeatedly stress that subject is different from object and object is different from subject. If subject and object are one and the same, it is a logical fallacy called karta-karma-virodha-doṣa. To this we say, karta-karma-virodha exists when the object is partless or indivisible, but if something has different parts, from the standpoint of one part it can be the subject and from the standpoint of the other it can be the subject, just as I am able to touch one of my hands with the other. Who is the toucher? The hand, which is myself. And what is touched? The hand, which is also myself. I am touching myself by myself. It is possible when I have different parts. The same logic applies in advaita bhakti: the vyavahārika (dual) 'I' am loving my own higher nature, the paramārtika 'I.' And since I comprise both parts—the vachyārta (apparent) vyavahārika 'I' and the lakṣyārta (ultimate) paramārtika 'I'—I can love myself, not as ahaṅkāra but as ātmā itself. Therefore, there is no logical contradiction; the vyavahārika 'I' loves the paramārtika 'I'. Bhagavān himself talks about his own higher and lower self. He says (Gītā, 4.6):

**ajo'pi sannavyayātmā, bhūtānām īśvaro'pi san  
prakṛitiṃ svām adhiṣṭhāya, sambhāvamyātmamāyayā**<sup>90</sup>

Even though from the standpoint of my higher nature, I am never born, from the standpoint of māyā, my lower nature, I am born again and again as Rama, Kṛṣṇa and so forth. If Bhagavān can have both apara and para prakṛti, why can't I have these two natures? Therefore, I love myself means I love my own higher nature, sat-cit-ānanda brahma svarūpa. So our conclusion is that advaita bhakti is not only possible, but every jīvanmukta enjoys it.

<sup>88</sup> This one is verily the vital force that shines divergently through all beings. Knowing this, the illumined person has no further occasion to go beyond anything in his talk. He revels in the self, delights in the self, and is engrossed in spiritual effort. This one is chief among knowers of brahman.

<sup>89</sup> However, suppose there is a man who loves the self alone, is happy with the self alone, and who is contented with the self alone. There is nothing to be accomplished for him.

<sup>90</sup> Though I am birthless and deathless, though I am the Lord of beings, still, I take birth again and again through my own māyā by restoring to my original transcendental form.

Then comes the next objection: assuming advaita bhakti is possible, if I attain this difficult advaita bhakti, it will destroy my dvaita bhakti. Many dvaita bhaktas say: “I love and enjoy this dvaita bhakti so much that I don’t want to lose it by going after a difficult advaita bhakti.” They worry that if they drop dvaita bhakti and go after advaita bhakti, they may end up like Triśanku of the Purāṇas, who left the earth to go to heaven, but didn’t have the proper Visa, and so Indra wanted to send him back down. Viṣvāmītra Ṛṣi wanted to send Trishangu up and pushed up, Indra pushed down, and Triśanku wound up getting caught in the middle. Similarly, I worry that if I drop my dvaita bhakti in search of advaita bhakti, which I don’t attain, and I wind up losing both. And even if I succeed in advaita bhakti, I don’t know exactly what type of bhakti it will be. I don’t want to miss the joy of dvaita bhakti: **adharaṃ madhuraṃ vadaṇaṃ madhuraṃ**<sup>91</sup>—there are so many songs! So I don’t want advaita bhakti because I fear it will destroy dvaita bhakti because advaitam and dvaitam are opposed. This is the fear that most dvaita bhaktas harbor. Kṛṣṇa also says that advaita bhakti is kleśa, or difficult (Gītā, 12.5):

**kleśo’dhikatarasteṣāṃ, avyaktāsaktacetasāṃ  
avyaktā hi gatirduḥkaṃ, dehavadbhiravāpyate**<sup>92</sup>

Therefore, the protest of many dvaita bhaktas is: “I don’t want advaita bhakti.” In one religious magazine, a great bhakta writes a prayer to Bhagavān: “Never bring Vedanta, or advaita vicāra, anywhere near me. I want to enjoy the wonderful Kṛṣṇa.” The advaita ācārya’s response to this will be: Advaita is never opposed to dvaita; advaita is *in spite of* dvaita. Advaitam brahma alone has been supporting dvaita prapañca (the cosmic manifestation, which appears as a duality) all along. If advaitam brahma were opposed to dvaita prapañca, it would not have existed at any time. The very fact that dvaita prapañca was created and sustained indicates that advaitam brahma supports, rather than opposes it. Thus, advaitam never opposes dvaitam; it is in spite of dvaitam. It is the adhiṣṭhānam (basis) of dvaita. And therefore, advaita jñānam is also not opposed to dvaita darśanam or dvaita anubhava (experience, perception). That is why all jīvanmuktas have advaita jñānam and still experience the dvaita prapañca. Not only is advaita bhakti not opposed to dvaita bhakti, Vedanta gives such skeptics the guarantee that their venture into advaita bhakti will not destroy dvaita bhakti. So you can attend Vedanta class without fearing that you will lose dvaita bhakti. This is lesson number one.

Lesson number two is that not only will advaita bhakti not destroy dvaita bhakti, it will actually make dvaita bhakti tastier, more enjoyable. It is like when grains or nuts are roasted in the fire. Raw grains and nuts have some taste, but when they are roasted they become tastier. Similarly, the fire of advaita jñānam will roast and toast dvaita bhakti, making it even tastier. When the advaita bhakta invokes dvaita bhakti, he celebrates because his dvaita bhakti has fully ripened into a successful sādhanā. The purpose of dvaita bhakti is not permanently remaining in dvaitam, but rather, progressing to advaita jñānam and mokṣa. Dvaita bhakti fructifies only when advaita bhakti has been attained. Therefore, whenever I invoke dvaita bhakti, it is an opportunity to celebrate, enjoy, and mutually admire bhakta and Bhagavān. It is like a successful doubles team in tennis: through teamwork they got through the quarter-final, the semi-final, and finally to the final, and finally won the cup. After winning the cup, they don’t separate; instead, whenever they meet it is an opportunity to acknowledge and celebrate their successful partnership. Similarly, whenever the advaita bhakta and Bhagavān meet, they celebrate their successful relationship and mutual contribution. Each gives credit to the other.

The relationship between an advaita bhakta and Bhagavān is one of mutual admiration and appreciation. The bhakta appreciates the glory of Bhagavān because Bhagavān has provided the guru and śāstra, and Bhagavān appreciates the bhakta who has successfully gone through karma yoga, upāsana yoga, and jñāna yoga. It is a successful relationship in which both have discovered

<sup>91</sup> Lyrics from a bhakti song by Vallabhācārya titled Sri Madhurastakam, which is an ode to Kṛṣṇa. This line translates to: “His lips are sweet, his face is sweet.”

<sup>92</sup> Difficulties are more for those people whose minds are committed to the pursuit of the unmanifest brahman, for the goal of unmanifest brahman is attained with difficulty by the people of bodily attachment.

independence. The bhakta is free and Bhagavān, of course, is also free. Two free people enjoying each other is the best kind of relationship because it is a non-demanding relationship. When parents are helping their children to learn and grow, what is their aim? Initially, the children are dependent upon the parents and the parents want to give independence to their children. When the children are finally in a position to say: “I have now started earning my own money, I no longer require support from you. But if you ever need anything, I can give you support,” the parents are happy. A relationship that goes from dependence to independence is a successful one. Thus, when an advaita bhakta invokes dvaita bhakti, it is a non-demanding relationship. When the ārta bhakta approaches Bhagavān, Bhagavān is bored of hearing nothing but complaints. When the arthārthī bhakta approaches Bhagavān, Bhagavān is bored of hearing nothing but desires. These bhaktas come demanding, and any relationship involving mutual demand will become strained—even a relationship between a husband and wife. As the demands increase, the partner finds him or herself wanting to avoid. No relationship can meet all the demands of the other because the demands go on increasing. Therefore, demands will be displaced by dissatisfaction and complaints, and complaints replaced by trading charges. Thereafter, husband and wife are together in the family but they don’t want to be together because nobody wants a relationship in which there is continuous demand. This is true of Bhagavān also. The relationship between Bhagavān and the advaita bhakta is one in which each is independent of the other (Gītā, 3.17):

**yastvātmaratireva syād, ātmatṛptasca mānavaḥ  
ātmanyeva ca santuṣṭaḥ, tasya kāryaṃ na vidyate**<sup>93</sup>

Psychologists declare that a dependence-based relationship will cause strain, whereas an independence-based relationship will thrive. One psychologist writes: “When they say that the husband is half and the wife is half, and the two join thinking each half will complete the other, the relationship does not actually wind up functioning as half plus half. The mathematics is such that when the two halves join together for completeness, it winds up being half divided by half, or one quarter. Any such relationship in which two incomplete people join together expecting to be completed by the other is bound to fail miserably. Previously such couples stayed together because of tradition. These days such a relationship will last only a few months because no husband can fulfill all the expectations of the wife, and no wife can fulfill all the expectations of the husband. Women say that every husband wants the wife to be a Sita, but he doesn’t want to be Rama. Therefore, a relationship based on expectations is bound to fail. Expectations are the core of dvaita bhakti, whereas there is no expectation in advaita bhakti. Therefore, when the advaita bhakta invokes dvaita bhakti, it is a bhakti without any expectation; it is a simple and straightforward opportunity to celebrate. I admire Bhagavān for what he has given me and Bhagavān admires me for making use of his ladder. Thus, the second lesson is that advaita bhakti makes dvaita bhakti even tastier, an opportunity to celebrate.

Finally, the third lesson is that advaita bhakti makes dvaita bhakti safer. All the Upaniṣads uniformly declare that dvaitam—be it is secular or sacred—is the cause of saṃsāra if it is not properly understood. Duality is the cause saṃsāra, whether it is the division between jīva and jīva, jīva and jagat, or jīva and Īśvara, bheda darśanam is saṃsāra kāraṇam (separation is the cause of misery); the Upaniṣads repeatedly declare this. What are some of the Upaniṣadic mantras? The Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad (1.4.2) says: **dvitīyād vai bhayam bhavati**—certainly fear is born of duality. The Taittirīya Upaniṣad (2.7) says: **yada hyevaīṣa etasminnudaramantaram kurute atha tasya bhayaṃ bhavati**—even a little bit of difference will be a source of fear.

Superimposing even a fraction of duality such as: “The Lord is One, He is non-dual, but I am dependent upon him; I am an attribute of his, and he is not me,” makes all the difference and causes even Bhagavān to become a source of fear. This will happen in two ways. First, according to the laws of

<sup>93</sup> However, suppose there is a man who loves the self alone, is happy with the self alone, and who is contented with the self alone. There is nothing to be accomplished for him.

karma, Bhagavān alone has the power to snatch all these wonderful things and people away from me. Just as Arjuna became frightened of Bhagavān in the Gītā (11.32):

**kālo'smi lokakṣayakṛt pravṛddhaḥ,  
lokān samāhartum iha pravṛttaḥ  
ṛte'pi tvām na bhaviṣyanti sarve,  
ye'vasthitāḥ pratyanīkeṣu yodhaḥ**<sup>94</sup>

Wherever dvaitam is present, Bhagavān becomes the worst non-vegetarian, a source of fear (11.26):

**amī ca tvām dhṛtarāṣṭrasya putrāḥ,  
sarve sahaivāvanipālasaṅghaiḥ  
bhīṣmo droṇaḥ sūtaputrastathāsau  
sahāsmadīyairapi yodhamukhyaiḥ**<sup>95</sup>

We think Bhagavān is compassionate, but some people are caught with their head crushed between the teeth of the Lord. In duality, even Bhagavān can become a source of fear: kāla rūpeṇa, karma-phala dātā rūpeṇa, laya kṛta rūpeṇa, kālāgni rūpeṇa (in the form of time, the giver of the results of actions, the destroyer, the fire of time). Then there is the Katha Upaniṣad vākyam (2.1.11): **neha nānā'asti kiṃcana na, mṛtyoḥ sa mṛtyuṃ gacchati ya iha nāneva paśyati**—whoever sees division or duality will travel from maraṇam to maraṇam (death to death). And in the Māṇḍukya Karika, Gaudapādācārya says in the advaita prakaraṇa: **upāsanāśrito dharmo jāte Brahmaṇi vartate prāgutpatterajaṃ sarvaṃ tenāsau kṛpaṇaḥ smṛtaḥ**.<sup>96</sup> Thus, even an upāsaka who sees the division between upāsaka (subject) and upasya (object of worship) is unfortunate because his saṃsāra will be preserved and perpetuated. The dvaita bhakta is an unfortunate person, unless he uses dvaita bhakti as a steppingstone for advaita jñānam; otherwise, saṃsāra will be perpetuated. Thus, according to the Upaniṣads, permanent dvaita bhakti is not safe. Having said that, dvaita bhakti can become safe when it is boiled in the fire of advaita jñāna, much like we boil our water to cleanse it of impurities. Therefore all dvaita bhaktas can and should come to advaita bhakti, and thereafter safely enjoy it.

There is an advaita ācārya named Madhusūdana Sarasvatī, who is a very great Kṛṣṇa bhakta. He has written many wonderful bhakti stotrams (hymn of praise), as well as the most advanced advaita grantha, called Advaita Siddhi. He says: "I enjoy Kṛṣṇa bhakti. After advaita jñānam, I enjoy dvaita bhakti as well. But when I mix them—that is, dvaita bhakti backed by advaita bhakti—the mixture is more enjoyable." So enjoy nāma-sankīrtanam (repeating the name of the Lord), enjoy dvaita pūjā, enjoy pilgrimage—but enjoy it with this awareness, he says:

**dvaitam mohāya bodhāt prāk, prāpte bodhe manīśayā  
pūjārtham kalpitam dvaitam advaitādapi sundaram**<sup>97</sup>

<sup>94</sup> I am the mighty time, the destroyer of all beings in the world. I am proceeding to destroy the people here. All the warriors who are arrayed in both the armies will cease to exist even without you.

<sup>95</sup> All these sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra along with hosts of kings, Bhisma, Drona, and that son of the charioteer along with the prominent warriors of ours are entering you.

<sup>96</sup> The individual ego taking to the path of devotion imagines itself to be related to the manifest brahman, who is supposed by it as having manifested himself. Such an individual is said to be of narrow intellect because it thinks that before creation, all was of the nature of unborn reality.

<sup>97</sup> Dvaita deludes one before enlightenment. Upon enlightenment, however, the kalpita dvaitam (imaginary duality) intentionally created for the purpose of indulging in pūjā is even more joyful than advaitam.

Before advaita jñānam, all types of dvaitam—including dvaita bhakti—are the cause of delusion and consequent saṃsāra. However, upon realizing that there is only advaitam brahma, one intentionally ‘creates’ dvaitam again for the sake of indulging in pūjā (or any form of dvaita bhakti)—but this time with the knowledge that dvaita is vyavahārika satyam and advaita is paramārtika satyam; that dvaitam is veṣam (the outward appearance, i.e., apparent) and advaitam is the veśī (the piercing, i.e., real). The resultant experience is that this kalpita (fabricated) dvaitam is even more joyful than advaitam. That is why all of our advaitic ācāryas enjoyed writing stotrams after writing Vedanta granthas. Śaṅkarācāryas himself enjoyed writing stotrams on all the deities, which testifies to the fact that advaitam is not a threat to dvaita bhakti; not only does it retain dvaita bhakti, it will make it safer and more enjoyable. Therefore, **ātmā va are drashtavyaḥ śrotavyo mantavyo nididhyasitavyaḥ.**<sup>98</sup>

**Sutra 16. pūjādiṣvanurāga iti Pārāśaryaḥ**

*According to Sage Vyasadeva, the son of Pārāśarya, spiritual devotion is expressed through intense longing to perform ritual worship.*

It is with this background in place that we should understand the lakṣaṇam in Sutra 16: **pūjādiṣvanurāga iti pārāśaryaḥ**. So **pārāśaryaḥ**—the son of Parashara, otherwise known as Vyasācārya, says bhakti is **anurāga**—love of the Lord, **pūjādiṣu**—expressed in the form of pūjā and so on, where ‘so on’ refers to the navavidha (nine forms) of bhakti, namely (Bhagavata Purāṇa, 7.5.23):

**śravaṇam kīrtanam viṣṇoḥ smaraṇam pādasevanam arcanam vandanaṁ dāsyam sakhyam ātmanivedanam**

**Śravaṇam** means listening to the glories of the Lord, both saḡuṇa (with attributes) and nirguṇa (without attributes). **Kīrtanam** means singing or talking about the glory of the Lord, again both apara and para. **Viṣṇoḥ** refers to Viṣṇu and is common to all of the forms of worship (vishnoho śravaṇam, vishnoho kīrtanam, etc.). **Smaraṇam** means remembrance. **Pādasevanam** means serving the Lord, this could be the temples of the Lord or the world, which is considered an expression of viṣvarūpa-Īśvara. As Ramana Maharṣi says in Upadesa Saram (Verse 5): **jagata īshadhī yukta sevanam, aṣṭamūrti bhṛd devapūjanam.**<sup>99</sup> **Arcanam** means uttering the name of the Lord and offering flowers. **Vandanaṁ** means namaskāra. **Dāsyam** is serving the Lord, which means following the instructions of the Lord by living a life that is in keeping with śāstra vidhi-niṣedha: promoting daivi-sampat (virtue) and demoting or dropping āsurī-sampat (vice). There is no other dāsyam than leading an ethical life. If I do, I am obeying Bhagavān because every Vedic instruction is Bhagavān’s instruction. **Sakhyam** means friendship with the Lord; enjoying the company of the Lord and finding time to cultivate this friendship. Finally, **ātmanivedanam**, which means surrendering ahaṅkāra and mamākāra to the Lord, which is nothing but prasāda-bhāvana whenever Bhagavān gives a karma phalam. Never criticize God when situations are not favorable; accepting karma phalam is the attitude: “Thine will be done, oh Lord.” Cultivate a contributing will rather than a controlling will. Control belongs to Īśvara, who is karma phala data (the giver of the results of actions). Therefore, accept every result with outstretched hands and a willingness to go through whatever you must go through declaring: “Oh Lord, I know that you only give what is fair and just.” That is true śaraṇāgati: surrender.

<sup>98</sup>The supreme self is to be seen, heard, meditated on, and contemplated upon.

<sup>99</sup> Serving the world with the attitude of serving the Lord is the true worship of God, who is the wielder of the eightfold forms [space, air, fire, water, earth, sun, moon and living beings].

\*\*\*End of Teaching 9\*\*\*

**Sutra 15. tallakṣaṇāni vācyante nānāmatābhedaḥ**

*There are various definitions of the characteristics of bhakti due to differences in view.*

**Sutra 16. pūjādiṣvanurāga iti Pārāśaryaḥ**

*According to Sage Vyasadeva, the son of Parashara, says spiritual devotion is expressed through intense longing to perform ritual worship.*

**Sutra 17. kathādiṣviti Gargaḥ**

*According to Sage Garga, bhakti is expressed through discussions on spiritual themes.*

**Sutra 18. ātmaratyavirodheneti Śāṅḍilyaḥ**

*According to Sage Śāṅḍilya, bhakti is expressed by perpetual delight in the Self.*

**Sutra 19. Nāradaḥ tadarpitākḥilācaratā tadvismaraṇe paramavyākulateti**

*According to Sage Nārada, however, bhakti is expressed by sanctifying all activities, and by supreme anguish upon forgetting the Beloved.*

In the first chapter, Nārada talks about the highest bhakti, parābhakti, otherwise known as abheda bhakti or advaita bhakti. This advaita bhakti can only be obtained through advaita jñānam, which is obtained through śravaṇa manana nididhyāsana, and this is only possible through the corridor of dvaita bhakti. Therefore, we are never against dvaita bhakti; indeed, we insist upon dvaita bhakti, which alone can give sādḥāna chatuṣṭaya sampatti (six-fold qualification). Only dvaita bhakti will give one sufficient puṇyam for Vedānta vicāra. In Vivekacūdamani (Verse 3), Śaṅkarācārya says:

**durlabhaṃ trayamevaitaddevānugrahaḥ  
manuṣyatvaṃ mumukṣutvaṃ mahāpuruṣasamśrayaḥ<sup>100</sup>**

I am deliberately repeating all of this because confusion abounds in the bhakti field. Dvaita bhakti should be followed by Vedānta vicāra, which will lead to advaita jñānam. This advaita jñānam alone is called advaita bhakti; there is no distinction between the two. And this alone will lead to mokṣa; in fact, advaita bhakti *is* mokṣa, advaita jñānam *is* mokṣa. I have also firmly asserted three things. First, advaita bhakti does not destroy dvaita bhakti; this is very important because many people are afraid that the joy of dvaita bhakti will be lost with the attainment of advaita bhakti. Second, advaita bhakti makes dvaita bhakti tastier, like roasted nuts or grains compared to raw ones. Third, advaita bhakti makes dvaita bhakti safer, like boiled water. Thus, one need not be afraid of coming to advaita jñānam and advaita bhakti.

<sup>100</sup> These three blessings are rare, difficult to achieve, and attained only by the grace of God: A human birth, the desire for liberation, and association with a great sage.

Nārada had previously supplied a general definition of bhakti: reverential love directed toward the Lord. But although this reverential love is singular, it can take various forms based on different expressions; accordingly, bhakti itself is defined in different ways by different ācāryas. Therefore, in Sūtras 16 through 19, Nārada presents several definitions of bhakti supplied by different ācāryas, including himself. The first definition, given in Sūtra 16, is: **pūjādiṣvanurāga iti Pārāśaryaḥ**. In that context, I said that in the bhakti literature they talk about navavidha bhakti, bhakti expressed in nine forms through the well-known śloka: **śravaṇam kīrtanam viśnoḥ smaraṇam pādasevanam arcanam vandanaṁ dāsyam sakhyam ātmanivedanam**.

One should not get confused by this and think that only Viṣṇu should be worshipped—the Śiva bhakta can chant “śravaṇam kīrtanam Śambho” or “śravaṇam kīrtanam devya” during Navaratri season—any appropriate word is fine. **Śravaṇam** means listening to the glories of the Lord. Initially, ekarūpa Īśvara mahimā (God of a particular, or chosen form), then viśvarūpa Īśvara mahimā (God in all forms), and finally nirguṇa Īśvara mahimā (God beyond all forms or attributes); all three need to be included. We mustn’t confine ourselves to ekarūpa Īśvara only; we must graduate to anekarūpa, and finally post-graduate to arūpa Īśvara, nirguṇa Īśvara, para prakṛti-rūpa Īśvara. Then, **kīrtanam** means talking about Īśvara’s glory. **Smaraṇam** means remembering the Lord. **Pādasevanam** is service at the feet of the Lord in the form of service to the entire creation. In Viṣṇusahasranāma (the stotram, in which 1000 names of Viṣṇu are recited), the feet of the Lord are described as bhūmi (the earth), therefore service to the feet of the Lord is in the form of service to the entire viśvarūpa Īśvara, or jagat, including people, animals, and plants. **Arcaṇam** means offering flowers while uttering different names of the Lord, and this includes ekarūpa, viśvarūpa, and arūpa Īśvara. In any arcana, you will have all three levels. Consider, for example, Verse 6 of Viṣṇusahasranāma, which says: **aprameyō hr̥ṣīkeśaḥ padmanābhōmarabhuḥ**.<sup>101</sup> ‘Aprameyaḥ’ is a description of arūpa Īśvara, whereas ‘padmanābhaḥ’ is a description of ekarūpa Īśvara. Similarly, the first name of Viṣṇu in Viṣṇusahasranāma is ‘Viśvam,’ which means the one that manifests as the entire universe; that is, viśvarūpa Īśvara.

Then **dāsyam** (service) refers to obeying the laws given by the Lord in the scriptures; there is no service to the Lord aside from following daivi-sampat and avoiding āsurī-sampat. And finally **ātmanivedanam** means ahaṅkāra and mamākāra should be dedicated to the Lord. I own nothing. I possess nothing. Even śarīra trayam (the three bodies; gross, subtle, causal) do not belong to me. One may wonder: “If I offer everything to the Lord, will I become empty?” Remember, by offering ahaṅkāra and mamākāra to the Lord, one does not become empty; one becomes Brahman svarūpa ātmā. Therefore, ultimate śaranagati, or surrender, is remaining as adhiṣṭhānam Brahma after surrendering anātma, abhimāna, ahaṅkāra, and mamākāra. That is why Śaṅkarācārya has written a very famous and elaborate commentary on the very last teaching śloka of the Bhagavad Gītā (18.66), which is known as the śaranagati mantra. Different people give different definitions of śaranagati. Śaṅkarācārya establishes that śaranagati is ātmā jñānam alone: surrendering ignorance and ahaṅkāra by knowledge. Therefore, advaita ātmā jñānam eva śaranagati: advaita jñānam is surrender, there is no other. We also heard Vyasācārya say that interest in navavidha bhakti is the lakṣaṇam of bhakti; thus, **pūjādiṣvanurāgaḥ**—enjoyment of performing pūjā and other rituals—is bhakti. Initially this is in the form of dvaita bhakti, but this enjoyment of pūjā can continue after advaita jñānam. **Pūjādiṣvanurāgaḥ** occurs before jñānam and after jñānam, at which point it is a much safer and tastier bhakti. This is the definition given by the Ṛṣi Parashara, who is none other than Vyasācārya. In the Bhagavad Gītā dhyana śloka (Verse 7), we see the words: **pārāśarya a-vacaḥ-sarojam-amalaṁ**—born in the lake of the words of Vyasa; this is a reference to Vyasācārya.

Garga Maharṣi’s definition of bhakti is introduced in Sūtra 17 as navavidha bhakti, with an emphasis on śravaṇam. In the previous Sūtra, pūjā and rituals are given prominence, which is especially pertinent to

<sup>101</sup> *Aprameyaḥ* means one who is not measurable or understandable by any of the conventional means of knowledge (i.e., perception and inference). *Hr̥ṣīkeśaḥ* means master of the senses or that one under whose control the senses subsist. *Padmanābhaḥ* means he in whose navel (nabhi) the lotus (padma), the source of the universe, stands. *Amara-prabhuḥ* means master of amaras or the deathless ones (i.e. the devas).

rajasic people who have a lot of energy and need to be occupied to avoid going elsewhere. But there are many other people who don't have that much energy; for them just standing may be a challenge, let alone pradakshina (circumambulation of sacred places). To these people, Garga Maharṣi says: "Don't break your back, but rather, **kathādiṣviti**—express your devotion through spiritual discussions. In your case, the best form of bhakti is to sit comfortably with the appropriate backrest, make sure you don't fall asleep, and listen to Bhagavān mahimā. Anurāga (great affection) is the bhakti. Both this and the Sutra 16 definition fall under navavidha bhakti, albeit with different emphases: whereas in the previous sutra, ritual is given prominence, here śravaṇam is given prominence.

The next definition is the one given by Śaṅḍilya, which I will explain later. For now, we will skip to the 19<sup>th</sup> Sutra, in which Nārada provides his own definition. He says: "Merely listening to Bhagavān's glory and doing pūjā is not enough; one should transform his or her very lifestyle. A non-transforming bhakti becomes another mechanical chore or ritual: there is some deity at home that my tata has always worshipped, and so I have gotten into the habit of offering things to this deity each day. Narada says: Don't make it a blind, mechanical ritual. Instead, transform your lifestyle by becoming a karma yogi and dedicating all your actions to the Lord. Therefore, navavidha bhakti must make you a karma yogī, because in śravaṇa and pūjā, Bhagavān is described as viṣvarūpa. So if you are only going to love God as Kṛṣṇa and Rama while hating the people of the world and mistreating them, it becomes a meaningless bhakti. Bhagavān himself will be dissatisfied with a bhakti in which I worship a form or an idol in a temple, but I am rude to everyone around as soon as I leave the temple. That is not bhakti. That is why I said that even in pūjā, when we are offering various upacāra (paraphernalia), we say:

**lam pṛthivyātmana gandham darayāmi  
ham ākashātmane pushpam pūjāyāmi  
yam vāyvātmane dhūpama āghrāpayāmi  
ram agnyātmane dīpam pradarshayāmi  
vam amṛtātmane amṛto paharam samarpayāmi**<sup>102</sup>

Bhagavān is in the form of pañcabhuta and pañca bhautika-prapañca (the five elements and everything in the creation, which is a combination of them). Therefore, avoid rāga and dveṣa toward the world. An increase of bhakti should lead to a reduction of rāga-dveṣa. Rāga, or attachment, comes when I want to own something. A bhakta will never have rāga because he does not own anything to which to become attached. So when bhakti increases, rāga decreases—even towards our own family members. I don't get attached because they are not my children; they are Bhagavān's children. Dveṣa should also be reduced because when everyone and everything is Bhagavān, how can I hate anyone? If anyone is causing me a problem, I can save myself by taking some physical distance. But physical distancing should not lead to hatred: in my mind, I wish well for all. And that is why Kṛṣṇa said (Gītā, 5.3):

**jñeyaḥ sa nityasannyāsī, yo na dveṣṭi na kāṅkṣati**<sup>103</sup>

A true bhakta is a nitya- sannyāsī (eternal renunciate) because a bhakta doesn't have rāga or dveṣa toward anyone. Therefore, when you do any action, let it be done with Īśvara arpaṇa-bhāvana, and not only pūjā: **yad-yat karma karomi tat-tad akhilaṃ Śambho tavārādhnam**—Whatever action I perform, they are all a worship of you, O' benevolent One! People often say to me: "I have toiled so much for my family and I get no appreciation, Swamiji! Sometimes I even get criticism, from my own children!" Whatever comes as a result (Gītā, 2.38):

<sup>102</sup> With [the bīja, or seed mantra] 'lam' which is the root of earth, I offer sandal to the earth; with 'ham,' which is the root of ether, I offer flowers to the ether; with 'yam,' which is the root of air, I offer incense to the air; with 'ram,' which is the root of fire, I offer light to the fire; with "vam" which is the root of nectar, I offer the great offering to the nectar; with "sam" which is the root of all souls, I offer complete worship to all souls.

<sup>103</sup> One who does not desire and does not hate is to be known as a permanent sannyāsī.

**sukhaduḥkhe same kṛtvā lābhālābhau jayājayau  
tato yuddhāya yujyasva, naivaṃ pāpam avāpsyasi<sup>104</sup>**

Sarvam same kṛtvā—regarding everything alike. This Īśvara arpaṇa-bhāvana and prasāda-bhāvana (the attitude of offering all actions to, and welcoming all results from, the Lord), otherwise known as viṣvarūpa bhakti, alone is the real bhakti, according to Nārada. Don't confine your worship to an idol; instead, may you see the world as Bhagavān. Nārada is pulling us from ekarūpa Īśvara and idol-rūpa Īśvara and asking us to look at the world. Śrī Rudram<sup>105</sup> is a viṣvarūpa Īśvara dhyānam (meditation on the Lord in all forms), Puruṣasūktam<sup>106</sup> is viṣvarūpa Īśvara dhyānam, Bhagavad Gītā prescribes viṣvarūpa Īśvara, Vedānta gives more importance to viṣvarūpa Īśvara than to ekarūpa Īśvara because viṣvarūpa Īśvara alone will take one to Vedānta vicāra. Therefore, Nārada says: **tadarpitākhilācaratā. Ācaraḥ** means all activities, including daily chores like brushing your teeth, taking a bath, or eating food; all activities are offerings to the Lord, who is inside me. When I take a bath, I should look upon it as Īśvara abhiṣekam (bathing of the Lord during worship). **Ākhilācaratā** means all activities I perform are an offering to the Lord. This should include prasāda-bhāvana as well. The word 'prasāda' has two meanings: The popular meaning is various edibles that come from the Lord, but the real meaning of the word 'prasāda' means total trpti, or satisfaction. So if I have prasāda-bhāvana, no event in life should disturb my mind. And how does one know if he or she has prasāda-bhāvana? Even though I did not expect this result—my rāga-dveṣa expected differently—upon receiving it, I set aside my rāga-dveṣa and accept it. And when I say 'I accept,' it should not be mere lip service; it should come from the innermost heart. Nārada says that a true bhakta is disturbed whenever he reacts to events in life. A bhakta cannot afford to react in situations—especially impulsive reactions, which indicate that one has momentarily become an abhakta. Anytime we react to situations, we feel bad temporarily: "O Lord, I forgot you and became an abhakta." Nārada says: **tadvismaraṇe**—forgetting *that*, meaning forgetting Īśvara. And how do I know whether I've forgotten? Every reaction—a violent reaction, a hurtful reaction—indicates Bhagavat vismaraṇam (forgetting). There is another beautiful śloka that says: Bhagavat vismaraṇam is the adversity in life. Loss of money and people are not adversities; real adversity is forgetfulness of God. And what is real wealth? Not gold bonds and stocks and real estate. Bhagavat smaraṇam (remembering) is the real wealth. The śloka says:

**Vipado naiva vipadaḥ, sampado naiva sampadaḥ  
vipat vismaraṇam Viṣṇoḥ, sampat Nārāyaṇa smṛtiḥ**

**Vipado naiva vipadaḥ** means the miseries that arise in our lives are not real miseries; **sampado naiva sampadaḥ** means all the wealth we acquire is not real wealth; **vipat vismaraṇam Viṣṇoḥ** means the forgetting the Lord is the real misery; and **sapat Nārāyaṇa smṛtiḥ** means remembering the Lord is the real wealth. Therefore, Nārada says: **tadvismaraṇe**—when Bhagavān is forgotten impulsively, **paramavyākulateti**—the bhakta experiences supreme anguish, and gives himself an auto-suggestion: I should be more alert. So this is Nārada's definition of bhakti: Īśvara arpaṇa-bhāvana and prasāda-bhāvana, which is nothing more than the well-known practice of karma yoga from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Chapter of the Bhagavad Gītā. There is intense disturbance for a bhakta when he forgets God. He doesn't mind forgetting family members because they are all temporary relations, subject to arrival and departure. In the last janma (birth) they were not around; they may have even been in different zoos! So we might have been in different places; they are all incidental "āya Ram gaya Ram"<sup>107</sup> relationships, but

<sup>104</sup> Regarding happiness and sorrow, gain and loss, victory and defeat alike, prepare for war. In this manner, you will not incur sin.

<sup>105</sup> A stotra, or hymn, in the Yajur Veda dedicated to Rudra, an epithet of Śiva.

<sup>106</sup> A stotra in the Rig Veda dedicated to the cosmic being.

<sup>107</sup> A popular expression in Indian politics to describe frequent floor-crossing by legislators. Literally translated, it means: Ram came and Ram went.

Bhagavān is not like that. Bhagavān is inseparable from me. I cannot afford to forget the Lord. Even in the worst Alzheimer’s disease, I will not and I should not forget Bhagavān. This is Nārada’s definition.

Coming back to Śāṅḍilya’s definition of advaita bhakti, Sutra 18, which says: **ātmaratyavirodheneti**—enjoyment of the other three forms of bhakti (i.e., those mentioned in Sutras 16, 17, and 19—namely, pūjā, śravaṇa, and smaraṇam), without ever losing sight of ātmā svarūpam; so that I can draw upon it whenever I want. Engaging in dvaita bhakti is much like watching a movie: I may get involved in the movie, I may even shed tears, but even as I enjoy it and feel touched by it, I do not forget that it is only a movie. I enjoy it knowingly. Śāṅḍilya says: **ātmaratyavirodhenet**—without losing sight of ātmā ānanda, ātmā pūrṇatvam, ātmā tṛptih (complete delight in the self). All great advaita jñānīs swear that they have never lost even an iota of enjoyment of dvaita bhakti in whatever field they enjoyed before jñānam. Now suppose a person is not at home in a particular field, then he is unlikely to suddenly begin enjoying it after jñānam. Be it informal dvaita bhakti or formal dvaita bhakti, whatever activities and practices were enjoyed before jñānam will continue to be enjoyed after jñānam. Imagine there is a buffet serving both North Indian and South Indian dishes. The North Indian jñānī will attack the parotta, whereas South Indian jñānī will head straight for the idli because this is in accordance with their respective vāsanās. Similarly, the dvaita bhakti enjoyed after jñānam will be the same as that enjoyed before jñānam. Therefore, **ātmaratyavirodheneti**. This is a really beautiful definition. It means to become a bhakta, one need not cry. Many people think bhakti means crying. We have to tell our stories and cry—not only cry ourselves, but make Bhagavān cry as well. It need not be. A joyous bhakti is possible, wherein we go to God expressing thanks for giving us advaita through the śāstra and guru; we go to God and say ‘Hi’ instead of cry. We think āṛta alone is bhakti because most of the bhakti songs are crying songs. I am discovering this more and more. All of the bhakti songs say: “Why can't you come? Which name do I need to utter for you to come? I have called you and called you, but you never come!” So most of the bhakti songs are crying songs. I have been looking for joyous bhakti songs, which seem to be very rare; I guess we will have to compose some... So **ātmaratyavirodheneti**—enjoying bhakti without losing delight in the self is the definition according to Śāṅḍilya Rṣi, another great bhakta who wrote the Śāṅḍilya Bhakti Sutras.

**Sutra 20. astyevamevam**

***Bhakti is correctly described in each of these ways.***

**Sutra 21. yathā Vrajaḡopikānām**

***The gopis of Vraja are such an example.***

As we saw, there are different definitions of bhakti, which are all correct and applicable to both dvaita and advaita bhakti. Nārada then says that there are so many examples of such bhaktas, the most well known being the Vraja Gopikas from the famous Bhāgavata Purāṇa. Nārada uses the Vraja Gopika as an example because they are ideal models of bhaktas at all three levels. Initially, they had ekaṛūpa Kṛṣṇa Bhakti, wherein they saw Kṛṣṇa as a personal God and enjoyed his company; then they advanced to viṣvarūpa Kṛṣṇa Bhakti, learning to see Kṛṣṇa in everything with which they interacted; and finally, by Kṛṣṇa’s own grace, they attained advaita jñānam, understanding Kṛṣṇa to be the very ātmā in everyone. I frequently quote the famous Gopikam Gītām śloka (from Srimad Bhagavatam, 10.31.4):

na khalu gopīkā-nandano bhavān, akhila-dehinam antarātma-drk<sup>108</sup>

Kṛṣṇa, don't think we are deceived by your beautiful form, we know that is māyā mānuṣa veśa (a human costume created by māyā). In reality you are not this physical Kṛṣṇa; we understand you to be **akhila-dehinam antarātma-drk**, the innermost self, residing in every living being including ourselves also. This is aham asmi advaita jñānam. Therefore, they enjoyed Kṛṣṇa bhakti, but they always knew that Kṛṣṇa was not another person, and that this was not a human-human relationship, but rather, the relationship between bhakta and Bhagavān. Therefore, the relationship is not an adharmic one between one married female and another married male, but the most sacred and elevating relationship between a bhakta and Bhagavān in which each was intimately and intensely aware of who the other was. Therefore, never take it as an adharmica sambandha (adharmic relationship), but as the most puṅgava (venerable) sambandha. Accordingly, Nārada says: **yathā Vraja-gopikānām**—it is like the dvaita-advaita bhakti that existed between the Gopis and Bhagavān. According to the Purāṇas, the Gopis are simply Ṛṣis who wanted to enjoy this particular form of dvaita bhakti, and so deliberately took this form. How can we be sure that this sambandha is sacred? Superficially, it appears as though the Gopis are running toward Kṛṣṇa in a manner like the affairs depicted in films and television serials, so how does one distinguish between dharmica and adharmica sambandha? This can only be deciphered from the motive underlying the relationship, which is articulated in the next sutra.

**Sutra 22. tatrāpi na mähātmyajñāna vismṛty apavādaḥ**

***Even in the case of the Gopis, one cannot criticize them for forgetting the Lord's greatness.***

In the bhakti of the Gopis, there was no flaw or drawback of an inappropriate motive. There was no doṣa because throughout their bhakti, they never lost sight of who Kṛṣṇa was: **na mähātmya-jñāna-vismṛty**. Even though the Gopis had female bodies and Kṛṣṇa had a male body, it was not a physical relationship but one existing at a higher level. And what level is that? **Mähātmya-jñānam**, the knowledge of Bhagavān's glory as sṛṣṭi-sthiti-laya-kartā Īśvara (the creating, maintaining, and destroying cause of the universe) and we are all bhakta; he is kartā and we are bhakta. So Īśvara's mahatmya-jñānam was never forgotten.

**\*\*\*End of Teaching 10\*\*\***

Nārada gave different definitions of bhakti provided by different ācāryas. Although these definitions are superficially different, they are expressions of one bhakti alone: bhakti toward the Lord born of appreciation of his glory. Initially it is appreciation of saṅgūṇa mahimā (one with the quality of greatness) and later is the appreciation of nirguṇa vibhūti (the pervading formless one). Initially it is apara prakṛti bhakti and later it is para prakṛti bhakti. Apara prakṛti bhakti is dvaita bhakti, whereas para prakṛti bhaktiḥ is advaita bhaktiḥ, wherein appreciation of the Lord happens to be appreciation of oneself because there is no difference between the essential nature of Bhagavan and that of the bhakta. After providing these definitions, Nārada wanted to give an example of the ideal bhakti, and the example he came up with was the bhakti of the Gopis described in the Bhagavata Purāṇam, who understood both saṅgūṇa and nirguṇa Īśvara. You may recall the famous Gopikam Gītām śloka I gave you: **na khalu**

<sup>108</sup> You are not actually the son of the Gopi, Yasoda, O friend, but rather, the indwelling witness in the hearts of all embodied souls. Because Lord Brahma prayed for you to come and protect the universe, you have now appeared in the Satvata dynasty.

**gopika-nandano bhavan, akhila-dehinam antarātma-dṛk.**<sup>109</sup> Having given the example of the Gopis in Sutra 21, Nārada wants to clear up certain controversies that are likely to arise regarding their bhakti toward Kṛṣṇa. In the Bhagavata Purāṇam as well as the literature of other ācāryas, the Gopi's bhakti toward Kṛṣṇa is described. There are some people who appreciate it as great devotion, and others who question its propriety, arguing that in their adoration of Kṛṣṇa, the Gopis neglected their svadharma to their own families. The Bhagavad Gītā (3.35) says:

**svadharme nidhanaṃ śreyahaḥ, paradharmo bhayāvahaḥ**<sup>110</sup>

Nārada wants to briefly address this controversy in three sutras and establish that the Gopis' bhakti is proper and genuine. How does one establish whether the Gopis' relationship with Kṛṣṇa was appropriate or inappropriate? One needs to look at the motive behind their bhakti—that motive alone indicates whether it is appropriate or inappropriate. If the motive is aviveka janya raga—desire or attachment to a particular person born of lack of discrimination or delusion, it can be considered improper. If their relationship is viveka janya bhakti—based on devotion born of discrimination and knowledge—then the relationship can be considered proper and genuine.

In the Bhagavad Gītā, Lord Kṛṣṇa talks about moha when he says (9.11):

**avajānanti māṃ mūḍhāḥ, mānusīṃ tanum āśritam  
paraṃ bhāvam ajānantaḥ, mama bhutamaheśvaram**<sup>111</sup>

Deluded people will look at me as a mortal, like any other human being. They do not know my higher nature. Such deluded people will have aviveka janya, or an improper attitude. But the Gopis never looked upon Kṛṣṇa as a mortal saṃsārī; they knew Kṛṣṇa as Īśvara. Therefore, Nārada says: **na māhātmyajñāna-vismṛty-apavādaḥ**—the Gopis' understanding of Kṛṣṇa never lacked knowledge of the real glory of Īśvara. **Na māhātmyajñāna vismṛty** means Kṛṣṇa's glory was not forgotten, and **na apavādaḥ** means the lack of that knowledge was not there. This is a double negative, which means they had the knowledge. And because their attitude was viveka janya bhakti, their attitude was beyond reproach. Therefore, **tatrāpi**—it is even the highest form of devotion. The Gopis saw Kṛṣṇa neither as male nor female, but as everything. They had an awareness that Kṛṣṇa's embodiment does not represent a single form, but a totality. This puts them in the category of jñānī bhaktas.

**Sutra 23. tadvihīnaṃ jārāṇamiva**

***If that mindfulness is forsaken, what exists is selfish passion.***

So **tadvihīnaṃ** means forsaking *that* (i.e., mindfulness). Hypothetically speaking, if the Gopikas' attitude toward Kṛṣṇa had lacked this knowledge, it would have been considered aviveka janya rāga, and thus an adharmic relationship akin to that of an ignorant human being. **Jārāḥ** refers to a person, male or female, with aviveka janya rāga who carries out an inappropriate and secretive relationship with

<sup>109</sup> You are not actually the son of the Gopi, Yasoda, O friend, but rather, the indwelling witness in the hearts of all embodied souls. Because Lord Brahma prayed for you you to come and protect the universe, you have now appeared in the Satvata dynasty.

<sup>110</sup> Even in death, one's own duty is better. Another's duty is harmful.

<sup>111</sup> Not knowing my higher nature as the great Lord of all beings, those deluded ones look down upon Me who has taken a human form.

another. **Jārāḥ** literally means a secret lover, or paramour, but the śāstric definition is ‘aviveka janya adharmica rāgavan jara.’ Because the Gopis relationship with Kṛṣṇa was based on viveka, it was pure devotion rather than impure attachment. Nārada then concludes with the final sutra of the chapter:

**Sutra 24. nāstyeva tasmin tatsukhasukhitvam**

***In selfish passion, one’s personal happiness is independent of the happiness of the Beloved.***

In concluding the 1<sup>st</sup> Chapter, Nārada says that even though aviveka janya rāga and viveka janya bhakti may appear alike superficially, they are poles apart. The difference can be found by examining the underlying motive. One makes the person a maha- saṁsārī, whereas the other makes a person a maha-jñānī. Rāga and bhakti may initially look alike, much like the horse and the donkey, but their difference is bound to emerge because rāga and bhakti are diametrically opposed. Kṛṣṇa talks about the difference between rāga and bhakti. Rāga, or attachment, is always selfish and it is always demanding. Never giving yet always demanding. In a relationship born of attachment, a person seeks his own happiness without bothering to consider the other person’s comfort or discomfort; without caring for the other. The attitude of rāga is: I want my share of happiness. In bhakti, which is divine or pure love, such an attitude will not be there at all. The Gopis would never dream of an adharmic relationship because it may give them happiness because Bhagavān would never be happy about that. Indeed, Kṛṣṇa has taken avatāra for a very specific reason (Bhagavad Gītā, 4.8):

**paritrāṇāya sādḥūnām, vināsāya ca duṣkṛtām  
dharmaśamsthāpanarthāya, sambhavāmi yuge yuge**<sup>112</sup>

Dharma samsthapana—establishing dharma—is Kṛṣṇa’s goal, which means he will never approve of adharma. So if Kṛṣṇa disapproves of adharma, is he going to enter into an adharmic relationship himself? He could never be happy with such a thing and the Gopis always knew this to be the case. Therefore, they only had a dharmic relationship with Kṛṣṇa in the form of viveka janya bhakti. When a person has attachment, **tatsukhasukhitvam nasti**—he or she will demand happiness without considering the happiness of the other, or will even demand happiness at the cost of the other. That is rāga and it is the mark an impure relationship. The Gopis never had such rāga; theirs was a pure and genuine bhakti.

Before concluding, we have to derive some corollaries and make some side notes. In the last three sutras, Nārada discussed the Gopis’ bhakti toward the Lord as a person, which is called informal dvaita bhakti. In my introduction, I distinguished between informal and formal bhakti. Informal bhakti is emotional bonding with the Lord as a person—a beautiful, attractive personal God. This type of bhakti is the focus of all bhakti schools of philosophy, which are collectively called bhakti darśanam. The bhakti schools of philosophy never talk about viṣvarūpa bhakti, and if ever they do, it is minimal. For them, bhakti is only this kind of bhakti. By contrast, Vedānta darśanam gives a warning: Informal bhakti can be practiced by a spiritual seeker for a limited period; it is merely a stepping-stone for formal bhakti in the form of intellectual appreciation of viṣvarūpa Īśvara. Emotional bonding with a personal God, known as informal dvaita bhakti, should be brief; sooner or later we must transform informal dvaita bhakti into formal bhakti, which amounts to an intellectual appreciation of viṣvarūpa Īśvara (God in all forms).

<sup>112</sup> For the protection of the righteous ones, the destruction of the unrighteous ones, and the establishment of dharma I take birth in every age.

Although informal dvaita bhakti does have certain advantages and benefits, it is crucial to note that it has several disadvantages and pitfalls as well. That is why several bhakti schools of philosophy ran into problems after some time. They took to varieties of practices, which morphed into corrupt practices called vāmācāra bhakti.<sup>113</sup> Gradually this bhakti and its expression can become corrupt, so this is a risk. That is one disadvantage of informal dvaita bhakti. Another, bigger disadvantage is that informal bhakti can keep a person stuck at this level, and in stagnation one will never come to jñānam. An overdose of informal bhakti can become an obstacle to jñānam. Therefore, Vedānta darśanam gives a warning: never get trapped in bhakti darśanam. You can use their informal bhakti, but sooner or later you should come to Bhagavān as sarvam Kṛṣṇa māyām jagat (the universe as the manifestation of Kṛṣṇa). That is why Kṛṣṇa only highlights formal bhakti in the Bhagavad Gītā, which is an intellectual appreciation of Bhagavān as everything (7.8-9):

**raso’ham apsu kaunteya, prabhāsmi śaśisūryayaḥ  
praṇavaḥ saravedeṣu, śabdaḥ khe pauruṣaṃ nṛṣu  
puṇyo gandhaḥ pṛthivyāṃ ca, tejaścāsmi vibhāvasau  
jīvanam sarvabhūteṣu, tapaścāsmi tapasviṣu<sup>114</sup>**

I am the sunlight. I am the moonlight. I am the rain. I am the taste in the water. And when the rain comes, the beautiful fragrance of the earth. Don’t limit Bhagavān; instead expand your vision. There is a difference between bhagavatā Kṛṣṇa bhakti and Bhagavad Gītā Kṛṣṇa bhakti and we should all come to the Bhagavad Gītā Kṛṣṇa, who is everything and everyone, including the mosquitos that we kill with our zappers (remember that the next time you kill one). See all Vedic bhakti, or formal bhakti, in the form of intellectual appreciation of viṣvarūpa as the foundation for karma yoga and upāsana yoga. As Ramana Maḥarṣi says in Upadesa Saram (Verse 5):

**jagata īshadhī yukta sevanam, aṣṭamūrti bhr̥d devapūjanam<sup>115</sup>**

And who is aṣṭamūrti Īśvara (from Dakṣiṇāmūrti Aṣṭakam Stotram, Verse 9)

**bhūrambhāmsyanalo’nilo’mbaramaharnātho himāṃśuḥ pumān  
ityābhāti carācarātmakamidaṃ yasyaiva mūrtyaṣṭakam  
nānyatkiñcana vidyate vimṛśatāṃ yasmātparasmādvibhoḥ  
tasmai śrīgurumūrtaye nama idaṃ śrīdakṣiṇāmūrtaye<sup>116</sup>**

Don’t confine Kṛṣṇa, Rama, or Dakṣiṇāmūrti into an idol or an attractive person. Instead, learn to appreciate everything as Bhagavān. The bhakti of Vedānta is appreciation of viṣvarūpa Īśvara. We can only come to karma yoga and upāsana yoga by going through formal viṣvarūpa bhakti, which involves more intellect than plain emotion. Kṛṣṇa prescribes viṣvarūpa upāsana alone as an expression of Kṛṣṇa bhakti. If you look at all the Upaniṣads, they also talk about bhakti and its expression in the form of

<sup>113</sup> This refers to the left-hand practices of the tantric doctrines, which involve ritualistic use of the pañcamakara, five heterodox items including: madya (wine), māṃsa (meat), matsya (fish), mudra (parched grain), and maithuna (sexual intercourse)

<sup>114</sup> I am the taste in the water. I am the radiance in the moon and the sun. I am the OM in all the Vedas. I am the sound in space. I am the manliness in men. Moreover, I am the fragrance in earth. I am the heat in fire. I am the life in all beings and I am the austerity in ascetics.

<sup>115</sup> Serving the world with the attitude of serving the Lord is the true worship of God, who is the wielder of the eightfold forms [ether, fire, air, water, earth, sun, moon, and living beings].

<sup>116</sup> He whose subtle and unmanifest eightfold form causes the moving and unmoving universe, and by whose grace alone does all this manifestation disappear to reveal that ‘All that exists is Brahman.’ To that Dakṣiṇāmūrti, who is embodied in the auspicious Guru, I offer my profound salutations.

upāsana. And what is Bhagavān’s upāsana? If you recall in the Taittirīya Upaniṣad (Śikṣāvallī, Verse 7), it says:

**prīthivyantarikṣaṃ dyaaurdiśo’vāntaradiśāḥ  
agnirvāyurādityaścandramā nakṣatrāni  
āpa ośadhayo vanaspataya ākāśa ātmā  
ityadhībhūtam  
athādhyātmam  
prāno vyāno’pāna udānassamānaḥ  
caksuḥ śrotram mano vāktvak  
carma māṃsaṃ snāvāsthi majjā  
etadadhividhāya ṛṣiravocat  
pāṅktaṃ vā idaṃ sarvaṃ  
pāṅktaiva pāṅktaṃ spr̥ṇotīti  
sarvamekaṃ ca<sup>117</sup>**

If someone asks: What is Bhagavān? Your counter-question should be: What is *not* Bhagavān? We want to say that this Kṛṣṇa, son of Vasudeva, is Bhagavān. Kṛṣṇa says: “Don’t think that way. That is just a temporary form that I took. Don’t get stuck there.” And don’t quarrel as to whether Kṛṣṇa is the real God or Śiva is the real God.” These are all forms of delusion. Vaiṣṇavas and Śaivas will quarrel with Vaiṣṇavas saying “everything is Viṣṇu, so we won’t set foot in a Śiva temple.” Well if everything is Viṣṇu, why don’t you revere Śiva? These are all the disadvantages of getting too hooked on informal bhakti. Never allow informal bhakti to stunt your growth. Don’t become a bonsai tree. There is a difference between bhakti darśanam and Vedanta darśanam: whereas bhakti darśanam overemphasizes informal bhakti, Vedantic ācāryas say: Grow out of that and from ekarūpa bhakti may you come to viṣvarūpa bhakti. And even viṣvarūpa bhakti is not the ultimate destination, from there come to arūpa bhakti. As Kṛṣṇa says (Gītā 10.20):

**aham ātmā guḍākeśa, sarvabhūtāśayasthitāḥ  
aham ādiś ca madhyaṃ ca, bhūtānām anta eva ca<sup>118</sup>**

The Gopis came to this conclusion themselves and yet, ironically, in the name of the Gopis we practice informal bhakti, refusing to grow further. So what is Vedanta? It is the path from informal dvaita bhakti to formal dvaita bhakti, in the form of karma yoga and upāsana yoga, to Vedanta vicāra, to advaita bhakti. That is what Nārada intends to teach. But even the Nārada Bhakti Sutra, if improperly read, will lead the reader to the conclusion that Kṛṣṇa as a person is the ultimate God. To give an example, there was a group of Kṛṣṇa Consciousness followers who were critical of Swami Chinmayānanda. Swami Chinmayānanda had established a gurukulum in Mumbai for the spiritual training of interested people and in it he had a Śiva temple built. The critics said: “Chinmayānanda gives talks on the Gītā all over the world and earns money because of our Kṛṣṇa and now he has built a Śiva temple. Kṛṣṇa will punish

<sup>117</sup>Translation with parenthetical bhāṣya by Śaṅkarācārya: The earth, sky, heaven, the primary quarters, and the intermediate quarters [constitute the groups of five in the context of the worlds]. Fire, Air, Sun, Moon, and Stars [constitute the group of five deities, literally the shining ones]. Water, herbs, trees, space, and ātmā [The word ‘ātmā’ implies the cosmic gross body, Virat, because this is a context of natural factors. **Iti adhibhūtam** means this is with regard to natural things and is used to imply the two groups of five worlds and the five deities]. Then atha, after that, **adhyātmām**, with regard to the personal, the three groups of five each are being stated. [The vital functions]—Prāṇa [exhaling], Vyāna [pervading], Apāna [inhaling], Udāna [leaving the body], and Samāna [digesting]; [The five sense organs]—eye, ear, mind, speech, and sense of touch; [and the five material constituents of the body]—skin, flesh, muscles, bones, and marrow. This is all that pertains to the personal. And the external also is fivefold, therefore, **etadadhividhāya**, having imagined these thus, **ṛṣiḥ avocat**, the Vedas (or some seer endowed with this vision) said: **pāṅktaṃ vā idaṃ sarvaṃ**, all this is verily constituted by five factors, **pāṅktaiva**, through the fivefold ones [the ones relating to the personal] **spr̥ṇotīti**, one strengthens or fills up, **pāṅktaṃ**, the external fivefold ones [because of the similarity of the number; that is, they are realized as identical. This means that the one who realizes all this existence as fivefold becomes identified with Prajapati, who is constituted by the five gross elements].

<sup>118</sup> I am the self residing in the heart of all beings. I am the beginning, the middle, and the end of all beings.

him!” All these silly arguments arise, even after scriptural study, demonstrating that one and the same scripture can lead to delusion when improperly studied. Thus, to summarize the essence of the first chapter: Advaita bhakti, which is attained by going through four stages—informal dvaita bhakti, formal dvaita bhakti, Vedanta vicāra, and advaita jñānam—leads to God-love, which is self-love because God is non-different from myself. I love God and I love myself.

## **Chapter 2: Parābhakti Mahatvam (The Glory of Advaita Bhakti; Sutras 25-33)**

**Sutra 25. s̄a tu karmajñānayogebhyo'py adhikatarā**

***Advaita bhakti is even superior to karma yoga and jñāna yoga.***

Nārada starts with the pronoun **s̄a**, meaning ‘that one.’ And he says that one is **adhikatarā**, meaning superior. Superior to what? **karmajñānayogebhyo'py**. So what is the meaning of **s̄a**? Most people will conclude that **s̄a** refers to bhakti yoga; after all, this is the Nārada Bhakti Sutra. Accordingly, they will take the sutra to be saying: bhakti yoga is superior to karma yoga and jñāna yoga, and therefore stop attending Vedanta classes. All kinds of misinterpretations arise from the bhakti schools of philosophy. We are not against bhakti, but we are against the bhakti schools of philosophy, which are full of confused ideas. Kṛṣṇa himself dedicates an entire chapter of the Bhagavad Gītā to dealing with bhakti. Here, **s̄a** does not mean bhakti yoga; if this were the case the pronoun would be in the masculine gender (i.e., **sah**). The very fact that he says **s̄a** reveals that its referent is bhakti. So then what bhakti is Nārada talking about? The fact that he uses a pronoun means he is referring to the bhakti discussed in the previous chapter. Suppose we had just been talking about Rama. We would say: Rama is the son of King Dāsaratha. Then *he* married Sita. In this case, the ‘he’ refers to Rama. Similarly, in the previous chapter we were talking about parābhakti, which is advaita bhakti. Therefore, advaita bhakti, which is non-different from advaita jñānam, is what is being indicated by the pronoun **s̄a**. And Nārada is saying that this advaita bhakti, otherwise known as advaita jñānam, is superior to jñāna yoga and karma yoga.

This is perfectly logical because both karma yoga and jñāna yoga are sādhanās; they are paths or means. Jñānam is the sadhyam, or destination. So advaita bhakti or advaita jñānam is the destination. Between the means and the end, the end is always superior because we take to the means only for the sake of the end. The means is subservient to the end. Indeed, when the end is reached, the means are become irrelevant. Therefore, jñānam is superior to jñāna yoga, which is to say śravaṇa, manana, nididhyāsana. Jñāna yoga will always be inferior because we are using it only as a means toward the destination: aham brahmasmī (‘I am Brahman’). Therefore, what Nārada says is perfectly logical. In the 7<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the Gītā, Kṛṣṇa makes a similar point (7.16):

**caturvedhā bhajante mām, janāḥ sukṛtino 'rjuna  
ārto jijñāsurarthārthi, jñānī ca bhartarṣabha<sup>119</sup>**

The one who practices jñāna yoga is a jijñāsu bhakta, whereas the one who is a jñānī is a jñānī bhakta. Between the jijñāsu bhakta and the jñānī bhakti, who is superior? Kṛṣṇa gives us the answer (Gītā 7.17-18):

<sup>119</sup> Four types of virtuous people surrender to me—the distressed, the seeker of wealth, the seeker of knowledge, and the wise, Oh Arjuna!

**teṣām jñānī nityayuktaḥ, ekabhaktirviśiṣyate  
priyo hi jñānino'tyārthaḥ, ahaṃ sa ca mama priyaḥ  
udārāḥ sarva evaite, jñānī tvātmaiva me matam  
āsthitaḥ sa hi yuktātmā, mam evānuttamāṃ gatim**<sup>120</sup>

The jñānī bhakta is superior because the jñānī is no longer a bhakta; the jñānī is Bhagavān himself. Whose words are these? Kṛṣṇa's words, but somehow those lines seem to get selectively blocked out by the bhakti schools of philosophy. They forget that dvaitam is a stepping-stone to advaitam, wherein the division between bhakta and Bhagavān is removed. Someone once put it very nicely: Even when you are hungry and there is tasty food in front of you on the banana leaf, there is a division between you and the delicious food. Would you like to permanently look at the food, or would you like to come to advaitam? Even in eating when you behold the beloved food, it is only temporary dvaitam. What you really love is advaitam, when the food merges into you and there is no division between the food and the eater. The same is true of bhakti and therefore jñānam is superior. Nārada provides the reason explicitly in the next sutra.

**Sutra 26. phalarūpatvāt**

***Advaita bhakti is the fruit of all endeavor.***

The bhakti we are talking about here is neither informal dvaita bhakti nor formal dvaita bhakti; we are talking about advaita bhakti, otherwise known as jñānam. That is the phalam—the destination and culmination of all this sādhanā. Being the phalam, or result, it is superior to all. And that is why in the Gītā, Kṛṣṇa says (6.46):

**tapasvibhyo'dhiko yogī, jñānibhyo'pi mato dhikaḥ  
karmibhyaścādhiko yogī, tasmād yogī bhavārjuna**<sup>121</sup>

Kṛṣṇa is talking about the nididhyāsana yogī, the advaita bhakta, and he says that this advaita bhakta is superior to all others. Because advaita bhakti is **phalarūpatvāt**, the fruit. That is one reason. The other reason is discussed in the next sutra.

**\*\*\*End of Teaching 11\*\*\***

In the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter, comprising 24 sutras, Nārada talked about parābhakti svarupam. And now in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Chapter, beginning with the 25<sup>th</sup> Sutra, we are getting parābhakti mahatvam or mahatmyam—the glory of parābhakti. When we say 'parābhakti,' we should remember that this refers to jñāna bhakti, or advaita bhakti. In the 25<sup>th</sup> Sutra, Nārada said that parābhakti is superior to both karma yoga and jñāna yoga. This should be properly understood; it is not about avoiding jñāna yoga. Seeing that parābhakti is superior to jñāna yoga, one might be inclined to ask: Why can't we head straight to parābhakti and drop jñāna yoga? Parābhakti is superior to jñāna yoga precisely because jñāna yoga is what takes one to parābhakti. As we have already established, the end is always superior to the means because the

<sup>120</sup> Among them the man of wisdom who is always engaged exclusively in devotional service is superior. To that cultivator of wisdom, I am extremely dear and he is dear to me.

<sup>121</sup> The dhyana-yogī is greater than ascetics. He is considered even greater than the jñāna yogī. The dhyana-yogī is also greater than the karma yogī. Therefore, become a dhyana yogī. (Dhyana refers to a deeper awareness of oneness, which is inclusive of perception of body, mind, senses, and surroundings, yet remaining unidentified with these).

means is in the service of the end alone; without the end, the means does not have any relevance. We should also remember that at the jñāna yoga level, a person is practicing śravaṇam and mananam, which means that he or she is a jijñāsu bhakta; he or she is still a dvaita bhakta. A jñāna yogī is also a dvaita bhakti because he or she is still working for knowledge, whereas the jñānī is an advaita bhakta. This is precisely why Nārada says that parābhakti, jñānī bhakti, or advaita bhakti, is superior to jijñāsu bhakti, which is otherwise known as jñāna yoga.

Another reason parābhakti is superior to karma yoga and jñāna yoga was given in Sutra 26: **phalarūpatvāt**. Jñānī bhakti is the final result of all spiritual endeavor. Even the Jijñāsu bhakta still has kama, or desire, albeit a noble one. This desire is mokṣa. The jñānī doesn't even harbor a desire for mokṣa—not because he has vairāgya but because he has already discovered mokṣa. It is for all these reasons that jñānī bhakti is the superior bhakti.

**Sutra 27. Īsvarasyāpy abhimānidveṣitvāt dainyapriyatvāt ca**

***Furthermore, the Lord dislikes the proud but is pleased with the humble.***

In the previous sutra it was said that parābhakti is superior to the other yogas because it is the sadhyam, or destination, and a goal is always superior to the path. This is true of any endeavor. We value our school until we have completed our education; thereafter, we forget that the school even exists. The school is only important and relevant insofar as it is a means for attaining knowledge. Human beings are always utilitarian: once something is no longer of use, a person loses interest in it. Therefore, between sādhanam and sadhyam, the sadhyam is more valuable; it is a universal law.

Now Nārada is giving another reason for the supremacy of jñānī bhakti or advaita bhakti: if you were to secretly interview God and ask: 'Which bhakta among all of them do you like most,' what would the answer be? In fact, it is not even a secret; Bhagavān has openly put it on the internet—by internet here we are referring to the Bhagavad Gītā. He says (7.16-18):

**caturvidhā bhajante mām, janāḥ sukṛtino 'rjuna  
ārto jijñāsurarthārthi, jñānī ca bhartaṣabha**

**tesām jñānī nityatuktaḥ, ekabhaktirviśiṣyate  
priyo hi jñānīno'tyārtam, aham sa ca mama priyaḥ**

**udārāḥ sarva evaite, jñānī tvātmaiva me matam  
āshitaḥ sa hi yuktātmā, mām evānuttamāṃ gatim<sup>122</sup>**

All bhaktas are great, but the jñānī bhakta is myself. And at the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> Chapter, while Kṛṣṇa talks about his dear one, he describes the glory of the jñānī (12.14):

**santuṣṭaḥ satataṃ yogī, yatātmā ḍṛḍhaniścayaḥ  
mayyarpitamanobuddhiḥ, yo madbhaktaḥ sa me priyaḥ<sup>123</sup>**

<sup>122</sup> Four types of virtuous people surrender to me—the distressed, the seeker of wealth, the seeker of knowledge, and the wise, Oh Arjuna! Among them, the wise man who is ever steadfast and who has undivided devotion is superior for, I am very dear to the wise man and he is very dear to me. All these devotees are certainly noble. However, the wise man is myself—this is my teaching. Because, with a steadfast mind, he has resorted to me alone who is the highest goal.

Being dearest to Bhagavān, the jñānī bhakta is superior to all. Thus, we can talk about the superiority of jñānī bhakti from several angles. First, jñānī bhakti is a destination whereas the other bhaktis are paths. Second, in all other bhaktis, kama continues to exist: the ārtā bhakti, despite loving Bhagavān, is a distressed bhakta; his attention is divided between Bhagavān and some problem that he would like to have solved. Wherever sakāma bhakti or desirous devotion exists, we love that thing we want more than even Bhagavān; our very prayer to Bhagavān is for such ends. Therefore, the ārtā bhakta is a bhakta, but his attention is on ārti nivṛtti, getting out of the soup. The arthārthī bhakta is also a bhakta, but he wants some benefit and this is where his attention is primarily focused. Even the jijñāsu bhakta doesn't have full attention on Bhagavān. He, too, is a sakāma bhakti because he wants jñānam or mokṣa. So although they are all bhaktas, their bhakti is not fully directed toward God; it is divided. Part of the bhakti is directed toward the goal in which they are interested, be it duḥkha nivṛtti (relief of sorrow), ārtā pratti (attaining security), or mokṣa pratti (attaining liberation). When a jñānī bhakta goes to the Lord and says "I love you" there is nothing dividing his life and his mind because he seeks no help. Knowing 'aham Brahmaṣmi' (I am Brahman) makes him incapable of getting into the soup. The jñānī bhakta doesn't seek to attain anything either, knowing 'purna aham' (I am fullness) what could he possibly seek? This bhakta doesn't even have desire for mokṣa. Because the jñānī's love toward God is an undivided love, because it is niṣkāma (motiveless/desireless), it is superior. That is what is meant by pure bhakti. Pure bhakti means motiveless.

The third angle from which to understand the superiority of the jñānī bhakti is that Bhagavān also loves the jñānī bhakta above the three other bhaktas. A very interesting reason is given: the jñānī alone is free from ahaṅkāra and mamākāra. All other bhaktas have ahaṅkāra and mamākāra because all of them harbor ajñānam (ignorance). Anyone other than a jñānī will be an ajñānī; you don't need a PhD to see that. And every ajñānī has ajñānam. Because of ajñānam, ahaṅkāra is seen in the body-mind complex and mamākāra is seen in family, property, and profession. As Kṛṣṇa says (12.13-14):

**adveṣṭā sarvabhūtānāṃ, maitraḥ karuṇa eva ca  
nirmamo nirahaṅkāraḥ, samaduḥkhasukhaḥ kṣamī<sup>124</sup>**

and then...

**santuṣṭah satataṃ yogī, yatātmā dṛḍhaniścayaḥ  
mayyarpitamanobuddhiḥ, yo madbhaktaḥ sa me priyaḥ<sup>125</sup>**

The jñānī bhakta alone will fall under nirmama nirahaṅkāra (free from worldly possessiveness, free from egotism). Now the next question is: why does Bhagavān love this nirmama nirahaṅkāra bhakta (the devotee free of possessiveness and ego) most? In fact, Nārada goes as far as saying that Bhagavān hates the sahaṅkāra samama bhakta (egotistical, possessive devotee), but hate is a strong word. It is perhaps more accurate to say that Bhagavān doesn't approve of ahaṅkāra and mamākāra and therefore such a bhakta is inferior.

Why does Bhagavān disapprove of ahaṅkāra and mamākāra? There are several reasons. The first reason is that these stem from moha, delusion born of ignorance. The second reason is that ahaṅkāra and mamākāra are causes of saṃsāra, and given that Bhagavān loves all bhaktas, he doesn't want

<sup>123</sup> That devotee of Mine whose mind and intellect are fixed upon me and who is ever contented, tranquil, self-restrained, and with clear knowledge is dear to me.

<sup>124</sup> My devotee is a non-hater of all beings; is friendly, compassionate, free from the 'I'-notion, free from the 'mine'-notion, the same in comfort as well as discomfort, and forbearing.

<sup>125</sup> That devotee whose mind and intellect are fixed upon me and who is ever contented, tranquil, self-restrained, and with clear knowledge is dear to me.

them to be trapped in saṃsāra by ahaṅkāra and mamākara. The third reason is commercial: any person who has ahaṅkāra and mamākara is claiming ownership of the body, mind, family, property, and so on. But in reality, everything belongs to viṣvarūpa Śvara, and thus nobody has a legitimate claim on anything. So when people claim what is not legitimately theirs, it is tantamount to stealing or trespassing on Bhagavān's property. Everything existed before we were born as individuals. Because Bhagavān doesn't want to lose his property, when a bhakta claims what does not legitimately belong to him, Bhagavān is going to punish him as a trespasser. Bhagavān has put up a sign: Trespassers will be prosecuted. Whoever has ahaṅkāra and mamākara is a trespasser, and his or her punishment is imprisonment in saṃsāra. So as long as we have ahaṅkāra and mamākara, we will be imprisoned in saṃsāra. This imprisonment is experienced in the form of insecurity, anxiety, and stress—all are Bhagavān's punishments. Every anxiety we suffer is Bhagavān's punishment for ahaṅkāra and mamākara. Every time we refer to *my* husband, *my* wife, *my* children, and so on, we experience anxiety. All worry is connected to ahaṅkāra and mamākara. When I am not an owner of anything, I am only a caretaker. The caretaker only has to take care; it is the owner's job to worry. Therefore, if I become a caretaker and let Bhagavān be the owner, Bhagavān will handle the worry and I will be free of it. Every time worry affects me it means I have forgotten my caretaker status and I am claiming ownership. Ownership is taxing because it will be taxed.

The fourth and final Vedantic reason that Bhagavān loves the jñānī bhakta most is that as long as a bhakta has ahaṅkāra and mamākara—the feeling *that* is Bhagavan and *I* am a bhakta—as long as the bhakta is clearly differentiating between Bhagavān and himself, he will not include Bhagavān and Bhagavān will not include him; in short, there will be separation from Bhagavān. In dvaita bhakti, the bhakta excludes Bhagavān and Bhagavān excludes bhakti, rendering both apurna (incomplete). If every bhakta excluded Bhagavān, saying: “I am this bhakta and this is my property,” Bhagavān would become maha-apurna. Dvaita bhakti makes both Bhagavān and the bhakta apurna. And if I make Bhagavān apurna, not only will I be a saṃsārī, I will be responsible for making Bhagavān apurna and a saṃsārī. To this, Bhagavān says: “I don't mind you being a saṃsārī but don't make me a saṃsārī.” Therefore, Bhagavān never loves dvaita bhakti and the dvaita bhakta; if at all Bhagavān loves the dvaita bhakta, Bhagavān's intent will be to convert this dvaita bhakta into an advaita bhakta—and the sooner, the better. Bhagavān loves advaita bhakti alone because only in this form are both the bhakta and Bhagavān purna: **pūrṇamadaḥ purnamidam**. I don't have abhimānam (pride) in jīva namarūpa or bhakta namarūpa (individual name and form) and Bhagavān doesn't have abhimānam in Śvara namarūpa—both of us give up namarūpa abhimānam and discover purna-eka-ātmā (one whole and complete self). Therefore Bhagavān also enjoys that bhakta, making advaita bhakti the greatest bhakti.

The dvaita philosophers will offer a funny counterargument. They will say: “Do you want to be sugar or do you want to taste sugar? If I become sugar than I cannot taste it, therefore I want to be distinct from sugar so I can continue to enjoy it. I don't want to become Bhagavān; I want to taste the joy of Bhagavān.” All this seems very convincing until we respond: “OK, you taste the sugar. And tasting the sugar, what happens? When you put the sugar on your tongue, the sugar becomes one with you and you enjoy it only when this is the case. Therefore, even if you taste Bhagavān instead of becoming Bhagavān, Bhagavān will become one with you. Whether Bhagavān becomes you or you become Bhagavān, ultimately the joy is in this merging, this oneness.

In Sutra 27, Nārada says: **Śvarasyāpy abhimānidveṣitvāt**. Literally, **dveṣi** means ‘hates’ but we are taking this to mean ‘disapproves of.’ Even Śvara disapproves of abhimāna ahaṅkāra mamākara (pride born of egoism and ownership) and the dvaita bhakti born of it. Then what does Bhagavān like? Nārada says: **dainyapriyatvāt**. The word **dainyam** refers to amānitvam (humility), which is considered a virtue. Śvara wants to embrace us and become one with us and we are pushing him away; Śvara wants advaitam and we are asking for dvaitam. He says: “Why can't you allow me to embrace?” And what is this embrace? The absence of division. Love is that which does not want distance; love is that which does not want division. That is why hugging is an expression of love—to such an extent that it can become, as they say, a bear hug. So why this tight hugging? Because I don't want division between me

and the one I love. Bhagavān is saying: “Let us merge into advaita.” Therefore, advaita bhakti is the greatest bhakti. That is why in the 13<sup>th</sup> Chapter, when Kṛṣṇa talks about various qualifications, the first one mentioned is amānitvam.

So what is the sādhanā, or spiritual discipline for discovering this greatest advaita bhakti—this parābhakti or jñānībhakti? Different people present the sādhanā in different ways. Three different views are given with regard to parābhakti sādhanam, the last being Nārada’s own view.

**Sutra 28. tasyā jñānameva sādhanamityeke**

***Translation. Some people say that knowledge is the means for developing devotion.***

Some people say **jñānameva sādhanamityeke**—because parābhakti is jñānī bhakti, to attain parābhakti one must become a jñānī. And naturally, one becomes a jñānī by getting jñānam. These people say that jñānam alone is the sādhanā for parābhakti, or advaita bhakti. This is the Vedantic reasoning. There is another general rule that applies here, too. You can only love something that you know. Suppose I ask you to love so-and-so. And you ask me: “Who is he or she?” And I respond: “Somebody. Please love that person intensely.” How can you love what you do not know? So the first condition for any form of love is that I should know the object of love. And not only know it, I should also feel that it is worth loving. One person says: “You should understand your spouse, and only then can you love him.” And the other person replies: “I do understand my spouse and that is precisely why I don’t love him.” Knowledge can lead to love and knowledge can also lead to court. Therefore, there are two preconditions: I should know the object and I should know the object as lovable.

Similarly, Īśvara bhakti, be it dvaitam or advaitam, is impossible if we don’t know what that blessed God is. Some may even wonder whether there is even a God at all. Modern science is progressing and it warns us to never blindly believe anything. In the past, it was easier to have faith, but nowadays, your children are likely to be far more skeptical. Many parents find their children asking: “Is there really God? And if so, what is the proof, because science doesn’t offer any proof?” If you reply that scriptures talk about God, the child will say: “Why should I believe scriptures written by some unknown people? Maybe they didn’t have anything better to do? Maybe they were just a bunch of unemployed people? Why should I read the writings of some unemployed people living on the riverbanks of the Ganga?” Such arguments present a challenge. Therefore, not only should I know that Bhagavān exists, but I should also know that Bhagavān is lovable. Without these two conditions, I cannot love. For this, I require aparā prakṛti jñānam (knowledge of reflected Consciousness) and parā prakṛti jñānam (knowledge of original Consciousness)—without either of these, there is no possibility of love. Dvaita bhakti requires aparā prakṛti jñānam and advaita bhakti requires parā prakṛti jñānam; either way, bhakti cannot exist without jñānam. First, jñāna śakti works (I know something), then icca śakti works (I desire that thing), thereafter kriya śakti (action, deed, and effort) is required to procure it. In that order: know, desire, and strive. Here, icca śakti comes only after jñānam, therefore jñānam is the sādhanam for bhakti. Nārada doesn’t say whether this is right or wrong, which suggests that this view is acceptable to him.

**Sutra 29. anyonyāśrayatvamityeke**

***Other people consider devotion and knowledge to be mutually interdependent as cause and effect.***

Other people present it differently. They say: “You cannot say jñānam is the sādhanā and icca, or love, is the sadhyam because we find that love is also the sādhanā.” We have said that because of knowledge there is desire; and thus, knowledge is the cause and desire the effect. These people argue that to acquire knowledge in the first place, you need desire: the desire to know. If you are attending the class for knowledge, it is because you desire, or love, knowledge. Therefore, knowledge is the cause of desire and desire is the cause of knowledge. Without desire you cannot even attempt to know something. Different people take different subjects in college because they want knowledge of that subject; knowledge of a particular subject comes because of desire. Therefore, one cannot say which is cause and which is effect— knowledge and desire are mutually connected as cause and effect. It is like saying you have to exercise a lot to be healthy. But you also need to be healthy to exercise. So is exercise because of health or is health because of exercise? They are interdependent. Does wealth come because of knowledge or does knowledge come because of wealth (does Lakṣmī cause Sarasvatī, or does Sarasvatī cause Lakṣmī)? If you want knowledge and you want to join a reputable institution, you have to pay—in fact, some people start saving for their children’s education before they even have children. You need money to get knowledge, and later, if you want to earn money, you need a degree. Therefore, knowledge is the result of money and money is the result of knowledge; everything is interconnected. Similarly, because of bhakti, knowledge comes and because of knowledge, bhakti comes. Dvaita bhakti leads to advaita jñānam and advaita jñānam leads to advaita bhakti, so bhakti and jñānam are mutually connected as cause and effect. Because of Īśvara bhakti alone, we got a guru; because of that guru alone, we got knowledge; and because of knowledge, we got advaita bhakti. Therefore, to gain access to knowledge requires bhakti, and to get advaita bhakti requires knowledge. Each of these sutras (28 and 29) is correct from an angle. And now Nārada is presents his own view, which is also correct if understood from yet another angle.

**Sutra 30. svayaṃ phalarūpateti Brahmakumāraḥ**

*But the son of Brahma, Nārada, says that bhakti is its own fruit.*

There are two readings of the word **Brahmakumāraḥ**—one is plural and the other is singular—and both are acceptable. If the plural reading is taken, it refers to Sanakadi Ṛṣis because they are all manasāputra (mind-born sons) of Brahma. If the singular reading is taken, it refers to Nārada, who is also considered a Brahmakumāra (son of Brahma) according to a Purāṇic version (Matsya Purāṇa), and so the verse will be taken as Nārada’s opinion. And what does Nārada say? For advaita bhakti, the kāraṇam (cause) is dvaita bhakti. Dvaita bhakti initially comes in the form of āṛta bhakti because in Indian culture, parents teach their children that whenever they have a problem, they should pray to God. This is especially true before important exams—and particularly pronounced in subjects in which the student is weak or ill-prepared because of distraction by the previous day’s cricket match. Therefore, the āṛta bhakta is a bhakta because he wants to get out of problems. Even now, 99 percent of bhaktas pray to Bhagavān for problem-solving of one form or another. Later, it becomes arthārthī bhakti—I want to get something and so bhakti is introduced. Thus, we start with āṛta-arthārthī bhakti and Bhagavān alone, out of compassion, gradually converts this āṛta-arthārthī bhakta into jijñāsu bhakta because of Īśvara-anugra (God’s gentleness). Āṛta-arthārthī bhakti will give some citta-śuddhi (mental purification) because we have Īśvara in our minds, if only for pragmatic reasons. So āṛta bhakti and arthārthī bhakti will get converted into jijñāsu bhakti, and jijñāsu bhakti alone will get converted into jñanī bhakti or advaita bhakti. Therefore, according to Nārada, dvaita bhakti is the cause of advaita bhakti. Bhakti is both the cause and the effect. We travel from bhakti to bhakti—from sakāma bhakti to niṣkāma bhakti; dvaita bhakti to advaita bhakti; aparābhakti to parābhakti. Therefore bhakti is both the means and the end.

### \*\*\*End of Teaching 12\*\*\*

In this 2<sup>nd</sup> Chapter, Nārada is talking about the glory, or mahatmyam, of parābhakti. In Sutra 30, Nārada says that it is glorious because it is the goal of all sādhanā: karma yoga, bhakti yoga, and jñāna yoga all culminate in parābhakti. Thus, as the ultimate destination it is glorious. Another reason that Nārada had given us (Sutra 27) is that Bhagavān loves advaita bhakti alone; Bhagavān doesn't love dvaita bhakti or the dvaita bhakta because dvaita creates a division in both the bhakta and Bhagavān. Bhagavān dislikes division because in division everyone becomes apurna. Bhagavān and the bhakta will each become divided, finite entities. That is why so many Upaniṣadic mantras say that dvaitam should be abolished. For example:

**dvitīyād vai bhayam bhavati**—certainly fear is born of duality. ~Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, 1.4.2

**udara mantaram kurute atha tasya bhayam bhavati**—even a little bit of difference will be a source of fear. ~Taittirīya Upaniṣad, X.X.X

**mrtyoh sa mrtyum apnoti ya iha nana iva pasyati**—whoever sees division or duality will travel from death to death. ~Katha Upaniṣad, 2.1.11

**atha yo'nyāṃ devatām upāste'nyo'sāvanyo'hamasmīti na sa veda**—Now, one who worships the Divine as something other than oneself, saying: “That is one thing and I am another” does not know. ~Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, 1.4.10

Dvaitam is permissible as a stepping-stone or temporary means, but never as the destination. Therefore, parābhakti is superior because Bhagavan loves parābhakti, but not aparābhakti. Having established this, from the 28<sup>th</sup> Sutra onward, Nārada talks about various sādhanās, means or disciplines for attaining that ultimate goal of advaita bhakti or parābhakti. Although these sādhanās will be separately discussed and elaborated upon in the next chapter, here he introduces the primary sādhanā of parābhakti. And different ācāryas offer different opinions regarding the sādhanā for parābhakti. Nārada presents three of these opinions in Sutras 28, 29, and 30, the last of which is his own view. In the 28<sup>th</sup> Sutra, Nārada says that jñānam is the sādhanā for advaita, or parābhakti because Kṛṣṇa has very clearly said (Gītā, 7.16):

**caturvidhā bhajante mām, janāḥ sukṛtino 'rjuna  
ārto jijñāsurarthārthi, jñānī ca bhartarṣabha**<sup>126</sup>

In talking about the highest of these four bhaktas, Kṛṣṇa calls the wise person a 'jñānī bhakta' (Gītā, 7.18):

**udārāḥ sarva evaite, jñānī tvātmaiva me matam  
āsthitaḥ sa hi yuktātmā, mām evānuttamām gatim**<sup>127</sup>

From this, it becomes quite clear that jñānam alone leads to the highest advaita bhakti, or parābhakti. Therefore, jñānam is the sādhanā. That was the first view given in Sutra 28.

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<sup>126</sup> Four types of virtuous people surrender to me—the distressed, the seeker of wealth, the seeker of knowledge, and the wise, Oh Arjuna!

<sup>127</sup> All these devotees are certainly noble. However, the wise person is myself—this is my teaching. Because with a steadfast mind, he has resorted to me alone who is the highest goal.

The second view was given in Sutra 29. Ācāryas who hold this view say: There is no doubt that jñānam alone leads to parābhakti, but to attain jñānam one requires bhakti. Before attaining jñānam one must practice karma yoga and this requires bhakti. Īśvara arpaṇa-bhāvana (dedicating one's actions to the Lord) requires bhakti, and prasāda-bhāvana (offering the fruits of one's actions to the Lord, knowing the results are based on karma alone) requires bhakti. Similarly, when Kṛṣṇa talks about various sādhanas for jñānam in the 13<sup>th</sup> Chapter, he includes bhakti as a means of jñānam (Gītā, 13.11):

**mayi cānanyayogena, bhaktiravyabhicārinī  
viviktadeśasevitvam, aratirjanasaṃsadi**<sup>128</sup>

Therefore, from this angle, bhakti is the cause and jñānam is the effect. In the previous sutra we had said that jñānam is the cause and bhakti is the effect, and here we are saying that bhakti is the cause because bhakti alone brings citta śuddhi (mental purification), guru prapti (finding a teacher), etc. Even to study śāstra, we require bhakti and that bhakti alone produces jñānam. Thus both statements are equally true: jñānam is the cause and bhakti is the effect; bhakti is the cause and jñānam is the effect. They are mutually cause and effect; thus **anyonyāśrayatvam** (Sutra 29). And how do we understand this logically? We can further clarify by specifying the type of bhakti to which we are referring: Dvaita bhakti is the cause and advaita jñānam is the effect, then advaita jñānam is the cause and advaita bhakti is the effect. Whereas dvaita bhakti is the karyam, advaita bhakti is the karyam. Or if you say that jñānam is the kāraṇam and bhakti is the karyam, we need to specify that advaita jñānam is the kāraṇam and advaita bhakti is the karyam. The journey is from dvaita bhakti to advaita jñānam to advaita bhakti. Full stop. There is nowhere else to go; that is the end of the journey.

Then Nārada comes in and says something different; he gives a rather ingenious view. We have to think very clearly to understand Nārada's view properly. In interpreting Sutra 30, we have to remember that Nārada is a very great advaitic ācārya, a śiṣya of Sanatkumara, as we know from the 7<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the Chāndogya Upaniṣad. We may commonly associate Nārada with devotional songs, but he is a very great thinker as well, and here he makes a very interesting observation. He says: **svayaṃ phalarūpateti**—bhakti is both the sādhanam and the sadhyam. Therefore, bhakti eva kāraṇam and bhakti eva karyam; he does not bring jñānam in between. **Svayaṃ phalarūpata** means bhakti itself, which now enjoys the sādhanam status, will in due course acquire sadhyam status. What is now called the means will later become the end.

We can understand the implied meaning of this sutra by analyzing several potential misinterpretations. First, when we say that bhakti itself is kāraṇam or sādhanam and bhakti is sadhyam, we should include the precise nouns: whereas dvaita bhakti is sādhanam, the means, advaita bhakti is sadhyam, the goal or end. Bhakti as āṛta-arthārthī-jijñāsu bhakti is sādhanam and bhakti as jñānī-bhakti is sadhyam. Dvaita bhakti ripens into advaita bhakti much like a green banana ripens into a yellow one. This is Nārada's first observation. This may raise the question: How does Nārada say that dvaita bhakti *itself* becomes advaita bhakti? As you will recall from the introductory sessions, we established that dvaita bhakti never becomes advaita bhakti naturally, but rather, there is an important corridor connecting them. Through dvaita bhakti, one must acquire sādhanā chatuṣṭaya sampatti, then go through Vedānta vicāra (i.e., śravaṇa, manana, nididhyāśana), and through jñānam alone does dvaita bhakti become converted into advaita bhakti. When there is this necessary intermediary of jñānam, how can Nārada quietly avoid discussing it and casually assert that dvaita bhakti is the sādhanam and advaita bhakti the sadhyam? Will it not confuse people? In fact, it has confused many people. Many think that if they keep doing Ramanama, jñānam will one day descend. Or ascend. This is the magical thinking among bhakti

<sup>128</sup> The 19<sup>th</sup> virtue is awareness of the distinction between *ātmā* and *anātmā*. Fix your consciousness always on ātmā and dismiss the body and senses as impermanent and unreal. Ātmā is the eternal; so establish yourself only in that and not in transient illusions or objects. Life is a struggle to achieve victory over the illusion that haunts; I am the eternal ātmā in you and in all. So fix your mind on me and engage yourself in the struggle, confident of victory.

schools of philosophy, which Vedanta rejects outright. We say that jñānam cannot be bypassed; it is compulsory. Kṛṣṇa himself says (Gītā 4.34):

**tad vidhhi praṇipātena, paripraśnena sevayā  
upadekṣyanti te jñānam, jñāninastattvadarśinaḥ**<sup>129</sup>

Kṛṣṇa never says just sing Kṛṣṇanama and you will get jñānam. Instead, he advises Arjuna to go to a guru, then proceeds to teach Arjuna himself in the ensuing 17 Chapters. If jñānam automatically came through nāma-sankīrtanam, why would Kṛṣṇa teach the Bhagavad Gītā and why would the Gītā be a centerpiece of Vedanta courses? The easy method is to say: “I will initiate you into some mantra to sing, and one day, by the grace of God, you will get jñānam. It’s that simple!” Remember all the Upaniṣads educate the student. Kṛṣṇa educates Arjuna, which means nāma-sankīrtana alone cannot produce knowledge. It may purify the mind, but a systematic program of education—namely, Vedanta—is required to produce knowledge. Nārada quietly skips this aspect in saying that dvaita bhakti is the means and advaita bhakti is the ends. How can a great Vedantic Upaniṣadic ācārya change parties and join the bhakti school of philosophy? Rest assured that Nārada has not changed parties, we simply have to interpret his writings properly. What Nārada wants to say is this: Jñānam is required for advaita bhakti; there is no compromise there. Jñānam comes only through Vedanta vicāra; there is no compromise there either. And Vedanta vicāra janya jñānam is the corridor linking dvaitam and advaitam.

But Nārada also wants to say that jñānam does not *produce* advaita bhakti because advaitam is not a product. In the Kena Upaniṣad vākya bhāṣyam, it has been made clear that advaitam is not karma phalam (the result of action); not apyānam (something to be reached), not utpadyam (something brought to birth), not samskāryam (something to be perfected), not vikāryam (something to be changed)—it is none of these. Jñānam does not produce advaita bhakti; this is point number one. If it were produced, what would happen? Whatever has a manufacturing date also has an expiration date. The same is true of advaita bhakti. If this were the case, we would say: “Yesterday jñānam came and today it left.” Jñānam does not produce advaita bhakti. Jñānam does not convert dvaita bhakti into advaita bhakti. Advaita bhakti is not a converted or transformed product; it is not vikāryam; it is not born of converting something, like dvaita bhakti getting converted into advaita bhakti. In short, jñānam does not produce advaita bhakti. Jñānam does not bring advaita bhakti from somewhere or take you to advaita bhakti somewhere. It is not apyānam. It is not far away to be reached by travel. Then what does jñānam do? It negates dvaitam as avidyā, or mithyā. Dvaitam is not factual; it is a product of ignorance. As the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad says (2.4.14):

**yatra hi dvaitam iva bhavati, tad itara itaram jighrati tad itara itaram paśyati, tad itara itaram śṛṇoti tad itara itaram abhivadati, tad itara itaram manute tad itara itaram vijānāti yatra tv asya sarvam ātmāivābhūt, tat kena kaṃ jighret, tat kena kaṃ paśyet, tat kena kaṃ śṛṇuyat, tat kena kaṃ abhivadet, tat kena kaṃ manvīta, tat kena kaṃ vijānīyāt? yenedam sarvaṃ vijānāti, taṃ kena vijānīyāt, vijñātāram are kena vijānīyād iti.**<sup>130</sup>

Therefore, jñānam does not do anything to bhakti itself, it simply removes the dvaitam, the duality or plurality. When dvaitam is removed, the dvaita bhakti itself, which was previously divided, becomes unified; the dividing blocks are removed. When the dividing blocks are removed, the very same dvaita

<sup>129</sup> May you gain knowledge by prostration, service, and proper inquiry. The wise sages will impart that knowledge to you.

<sup>130</sup> Where there is an object of knowledge, naturally it can be known. Where there is something other than the eye, the eye can see it. Where there is something outside the nose, the nose can smell it; that is true. Where the sound is outside the ear, the ear can hear the sound. Where the spoken word is outside speech itself, one can speak about something. Where the thought is different from the object that is thought, it is possible to think. Where the object of understanding is different from understanding, it is possible to understand that object.

bhakti now “becomes” advaita bhakti. It is like removing a wall that seems to separate the space into two rooms and winding up with one large space. There was only ever one space all along, but because of the wall, it appeared as though it was divided. Similarly, bhakti is only one, but because of ignorance it was thought to be divided into dvaitam. Jñānam doesn’t produce or transform; it removes the dividing barrier. What was previously dvaita bhakti has now seemingly transformed into advaita bhakti. Therefore, dvaita bhakti “becomes” advaita bhakti when the duality is removed by jñānam. Therefore, jñānam does not really do anything; it only removes something. Then the bhakti that was already there in the form of dvaita bhakti rūpeṇa becomes advaita bhakti. Therefore, Nārada says, dvaita bhakti is the sādhanam, advaita bhakti is the sadhyam; dvaita bhakti seemingly gets converted into advaita bhakti, just as jīvātmā “becomes” paramātmā through jñānam. Without becoming, he becomes.

There is a corollary to this, which we have to derive. According to Vedanta, the very nature of ātmā is ānanda: sat cit ānanda. When this stored ānanda expresses itself outwardly, like a full reservoir that flows through various channels, ānanda becomes love. Flowing ānanda is love and stored love is ānanda. This is advaita philosophy. When this ānanda flows out in the form of love, it takes different forms, like water flowing through different rivers. When it flows out and it is tainted by ignorance, the very same pure love takes the form of raga (desire, attachment). Pure love contaminated is attachment. When that very same pure love faces obstacles, it takes the form of dveṣa (hatred). As Krishna says in the Gītā (3.37):

**kāma eṣa krodha eṣaḥ, rajoguṇasamudbhavaḥ  
mahāśano mahāpāpmā, viddhyenam iha vairiṇam**<sup>131</sup>

Kama becomes krodha when there are obstacles. A mother might say: “I love my child so much that I want the child to follow certain disciplines and rules.” But when the child doesn’t follow these, the very same loving mother becomes angry with the child. Similarly, pure love may get converted into anger, jealousy (e.g., when the neighbor’s child gets higher grades than *my* child). Jealousy, anger, hatred—all these foul emotions are flowing love. How can love be like that? Because the pure water gets polluted along the way. And the very same water, if purified through processing, becomes potable. Therefore, pure love flowing through ignorance takes on all these negative manifestations. But when the pure love comes out through jñānam, that love becomes compassion; that love becomes caring; that love becomes moral support; that love becomes empathy; that love becomes affection; that love also becomes niṣkāma bhakti—reverence toward the Lord who helped me to attain that jñānam. Oh Lord, you saved me! Instead of shaming me, you saved me! We all have love. Nobody needs to produce love; love is nothing but stored up ānanda. And because ānanda is our svarūpam, love is innately there in all of us, but it is often in polluted form. Even in dvaita bhakti, when we have bhakti toward the Lord, it is not pure love because I am expecting something in return. Imagine a woman prays for a child and Bhagavān says: “I will come to your house.” The woman replies: “No, I want a baby and not you. I don’t mind you coming, but please come in the form of a child.” This is why ārta bhakti and arthārthī bhakti are impure; they are sakāma, or impure love. Therefore, Nārada is saying that we have polluted love. That polluted love is our sādhanā. By various methods we have to convert it into pure love. Thus, dvaita bhakti is sādhanam and advaita bhakti is sadhyam. Love is the means and love is the end.

**Sutra 31. rājagṛhabhojanādiṣu tathaiva drṣṭatvāt**

***This is illustrated by the examples of a king, a royal palace, a meal, and so forth***

<sup>131</sup> It is this desire. It is this anger. It is born of rajoguṇa. It is insatiable and very sinful. Know this to be an enemy of this life.

To show how bhakti can be an end in itself, Nārada gives an example. The common, ignorant person knows bhakti only as a means. As I have said, whenever we do namaskāra in a temple as āṛta bhaktas or arthārthī bhaktas, what comes to our mind? All of our problems and desperate needs. In fact, nowadays there are television and radio programs advertising various temples. This is a good thing because we can see or hear about so many temples without needing to travel. During Navaratri, we hear about various śakti temples and during Śivaratri we hear about various Śiva temples. Invariably, at the end of these programs, they interview the temple-goers. And in most of these interviews, the bhakta will say: “Since coming to this temple, my stomach pain has gone away.” Or “Since coming to this temple, my daughter who could not be married, got married.” And then the following week, the temple is full of mothers who want to marry their daughters off. Another bhakta will say: “I went to this temple and all my loans are now settled,” and all the listeners who are in debt will rush to write down the temple address. Another will say: “I want admission to Harvard University.” Invariably, it is problem-solving or need-meeting bhakti. Thus, we all know bhakti as a means for various personal, professional, and family needs.

When Nārada talks about bhakti for the sake of bhakti—bhakti as an end in itself—many people have difficulty even visualizing that. Only a jñanī knows what this is all about. Therefore, Nārada wants to give a down-to-earth example—an example related to eating. He says: **rājagṛhabhojanādiṣu**. **Rājagṛham** means the royal residence. Today, we can think of a governor’s mansion. **Bhojanam** means eating. Eating in a governor’s mansion is not an ordinary event; it is not easily accessible. So how does **rājagṛhabhojanam** serve as an example? Normally, eating is a means for removing hunger. But when it is **rājagṛhabhojanam**, no doubt eating will remove the hunger, but it is also an extraordinary accomplishment. One must be quite special to be invited to the governor’s mansion. So when I am invited to eat at the governor’s mansion, it is a great accomplishment; removing my hunger is simply a byproduct. I want to be absolutely sure the event is photographed, and that I also appear in the photos. Even when people invite an ordinary Swamiji like me for bhikṣā, they make sure to take a photo. Thus, **rājagṛhabhojanam**—a bhojanam (meal) that is normally a sādhanam becomes a sadhyam. Similarly, bhakti can become an end in itself. Therefore, Nārada says: **rājagṛhabhojanādiṣu**—in the case of eating in a king’s palace (or in our case, the governor’s mansion) and so on (**ādiṣu**). And **tathaiva drṣṭatvāt**—so it is experienced; that is, it becomes an end in itself. This is further explained in the next sutra as well.

**Sutra 32. na tena rājāparitoṣaḥ kṣucchāntirvā**

*A king is not really satisfied merely by seeing a palace, nor can someone satisfy his hunger just by looking at a meal.*

The governor is not honored by the ordinary person’s visit; the governor may not even know who attended the event. Similarly, Bhagavān is not going to say: “I am honored.” Therefore, bhakti is not for Bhagavān’s pleasure. **Kṣucchāntirvā** means satisfaction of hunger. By that **rājagṛhabhojanam**, the removal of hunger is not the primary benefit. The governor is not inviting people to remove their hunger; if hunger-removal was the governor’s aim, she would invite a group of destitute people. She could feed all of India. Even though hunger will be removed as a byproduct of this meal, alleviating hunger is not the primary aim. Eating itself is an honor; eating itself is an accomplishment. Similarly, bhakti is its own accomplishment, it is not for any other purpose (**vā**). Therefore, Nārada concludes:

**Sutra 33. tasmāt saiva grāhyā mumukṣubhiḥ**

***Therefore, seekers of liberation should take to devotion alone.***

**Tasmāt** means for this reason (i.e., bhakti is both the means and the end), **saiva grāhyā**, meaning it only—referring to the end bhakti, sadhya bhakti or advaita bhakti—must be attained by all, especially the seekers of liberation (**mumukṣubhiḥ**). And with this, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Chapter comes to an end.

**\*\*\*End of Teaching 13\*\*\***

In the final part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Chapter, Nārada, indicated by the term **Brahmakumārah** in Sutra 30, offers his perspective regarding the primary sādhanā of parābhakti. His view is that bhakti alone is the means and bhakti alone is the end; bhakti alone is the sādhanā and bhakti alone is the sadhya; bhakti alone is the road and bhakti alone is the destination. We should understand this by presenting the precise nouns: dvaita bhakti is the means and advaita bhakti is the end; dvaita bhakti is the sādhanā and advaita bhakti is the sadhya; dvaita bhakti is the road and advaita bhakti is the destination. Naturally, a serious question will arise: Isn't there any role for jñānam at all in this view? Nārada seems to have omitted the word 'jñānam,' he seems to have dropped śravaṇam, mananam, and nididhyāsanam. We must clearly answer this question.

We appreciate the role of jñānam because dvaita bhakti doesn't become advaita bhakti automatically; the intervention of jñānam is absolutely necessary. Despite the necessary role of jñānam, however, Nārada does not explicitly give credit to it. This does not concern us. We know that jñānam plays a role and we don't mind that credit is not given to jñānam because jñānam does not produce advaita bhakti, nor can it take credit for converting dvaita bhakti to advaita bhakti. Jñānam's role is simply to remove the obstacles that prevent dvaita bhakti from naturally becoming the advaita bhakti that is our svarūpam. According to Vedānta, jñānam need not do anything to bring about advaita bhakti; advaitam is our svarūpam. And if advaita is our svarūpam, sat-cit-ānanda is also our svarūpam. If sat-cit-ānanda is our svarūpam, love is also our svarūpam. Therefore, advaita bhakti is our svarūpam. Jñānam plays more of a negative role by removing the obstacles to discovering this. When the obstacles are removed, advaita bhakti is realized. Similarly, in the case of mokṣa, we initially say that jñānam is the means for mokṣa, but later withdraw that statement and say that jñānam does not give mokṣa. Initially, we do a big publicity stunt saying jñānam gives mokṣa and after some time we say that jñānam does not actually give mokṣa. Is jñānam useless then? No. Jñānam doesn't give mokṣa because mokṣa needn't be given; mokṣa happens to be our svarūpam. Then what is the role of jñānam? It removes the obstacles to our claiming our svarūpa, allowing us to claim our svarūpa and destination of advaita bhakti. Therefore, Nārada concludes in the 33<sup>rd</sup> Sutra: **tasmāt saiva grāhyā mumukṣubhiḥ**—therefore, all mumukṣus must attain glorious advaita bhakti alone. I say 'glorious' because this chapter is titled Parābhakti Mahatvam—the glory of parābhakti. Therefore that glorious advaita bhakti alone must be **grāhyā**—sought after and accomplished by all seekers of mokṣa.

The next question that may arise is: How can Nārada say that seekers of mokṣa should seek advaita bhakti? Mokṣa seekers should seek mokṣa. To this, Nārada would respond: advaita bhakti is one and the same as mokṣa. It is like someone saying: I am not traveling via the Niligri Express. I am traveling via the Blue Mountain (Blue Mountain is the English name for Niligri Express, a freeway in Chennai). Similarly, mokṣa seekers should seek mokṣa, which is none other than advaita bhakti. Therefore mokṣa seekers should seek advaita bhakti. And what exactly is that advaita bhakti? Love of the Lord, which is equal to love of myself, which is equal to love of the world. Advaita bhakti is defined as that

love of God, which is equal to self-love, which is equal to universal love, in equal intensity and without gradation. As much intense love as I have for God, I also have for myself and for the whole universe. Advaita bhakti is purnaprema for jīva, jagat, and Īśvara. This love for God is born of admiration. Love is always preceded by admiration. In advaita bhakti, I admire God and I have equal admiration for myself. I never degrade myself. If I can chant vibhūti yoga in praise of God, I can use the same vibhūti yoga for myself, without any reservation. And I can equally admire this universe, too. Thus, advaita bhakti is equal love and admiration of jīva-jagat-Īśvara because I know that jīva, jagat, and Īśvara are three names for one and the same sat-cit-ānanda Brahma. Love and admiration of Brahman is the love and admiration for jīva-jagat-Īśvara; this is called advaita bhakti. Therefore, are you happy with yourself? I love myself and I love everyone. I love God because love is my nature. Flowing ānanda is love and stored love is ānanda. This is advaita bhakti. This is mokṣa. And Nārada says: “May you work to attain that.” Scripture tells us the same thing. For example, in the Bhagavad Gītā, 3.17:

**yastvātmaratireva syād, ātmatṛptasca mānavaḥ  
ātmanyeva ca santuṣṭaḥ, tasya kāryaṃ na vidyate**<sup>132</sup>

And in the Mundaka Upaniṣad (3.1.4):

**...ātmakṛḍaḥ ātmaratiḥ kriyāvān eṣa brahmavidāṃ variṣṭhaḥ**<sup>133</sup>

Nārada’s statement tallies with the prasthanatrayam and is thus perfectly acceptable. With this, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Chapter comes to a close and we begin Chapter 3.

### **Chapter 3: Parābhakti Sādhānani (The Means for Advaita Bhakti; Sutras 34-50)**

**Sutra 34. tasyāḥ sādhanāni gāyantyācāryāḥ**

***Great teachers have declared the means for achieving [advaita] bhakti.***

The title of the 3rd Chapter is Bhakti Sādhānani, so the topic is sādhanam. **Tasyāḥ** means ‘for that’ (bhakti). In saying for ‘that’ bhakti, we are forced to ask “Which bhakti?” because a pronoun always refers to some noun. We have been talking about both dvaita and advaita bhakti. Which one is Nārada referring to here? In the previous sutra, Nārada referred to advaita bhakti as our ultimate destination; therefore **tasyāḥ** should be taken to refer to that advaita bhakti. **Sādhānani** means various disciplines or exercises that will take us to advaita bhakti, as the advaita ācāryas **gāyanti**—this literally means ‘sing’ but here we can take it to mean ‘declare’ (Nārada is in the habit of singing all the time, so he has a fondness for the word **gāyanti**). And we already know the general answer regarding the sādhanā for advaita bhakti—namely, dvaita bhakti.

A few classes ago, I distinguished between informal dvaita bhakti and formal dvaita bhakti. In informal dvaita bhakti, śāstric rules are not followed and are, in some cases, even violated. As such, it is known as avaidha dvaita bhakti (non-conforming dualistic devotion). We have all sorts of stories of

<sup>132</sup> However, suppose there is a man who loves the self alone, is happy with the self alone, and who is contented with the self alone. There is nothing to be accomplished for him.

<sup>133</sup> [The illumined person] revels in the self, delights in the self, and is engrossed in spiritual effort. This one is chief among knowers of brahman.

Nyanmars<sup>134</sup> who expressed their devotion without following any śāstra vidhi (scriptural rules and regulations). We have heard about Kannappa<sup>135</sup> who did not know any rules or follow them. We have heard of Shabari<sup>136</sup> and the Gopis as well. And we have said that informal dvaita bhakti is an option for those who are predisposed to practicing it. Nārada himself validates and sanctions informal dvaita bhakti by quoting the examples of the Gopikas in Sutra 21: **yathā Vrajagopikānām—the Gopis of Vraja are such an example**. The second type of dvaita bhakti is formal dvaita bhakti, as described in the prasthanatrayam, especially the Bhagavad Gītā. In contrast with informal dvaita bhakti, which is optional, formal dvaita bhakti is mandatory. This is a fundamental difference between bhakti darśanam and Vedanta darśanam. Whereas bhakti schools of philosophy will say that formal dvaita bhakti is optional, Vedanta darśanam does not accept this. We say that formal dvaita bhakti is compulsory and cannot be evaded. The argument and underlying rationales for this are given in the Brahma Sutras, but we don't want to enter into those discussions now.

In the following sutra, Nārada wants to talk about formal dvaita bhakti, which is extremely important. Formal dvaita bhakti is discussed at length in the 7<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the Bhagavad Gītā, where it is said that the first level of dvaita bhakti is ārta bhakti, practicing bhakti in the name of solving problems, and the next level of formal dvaita bhakti is arthārthī bhakti. These forms of formal dvaita bhakti are accepted initially, but we must eventually graduate to the third level, jijñāsu bhakti. That is to say, we must develop the desire for Vedantic study. Kannappa Nayanar himself has said: “Don't give up study.” And Kṛṣṇa warns that we must go through ārta, arthārthī, and jijñāsu bhakti. Having come to jijñāsu bhakti, which is still dvaita bhakti, we have to nourish the jijñāsā. Initially the inquirer is feeble; he or she has desire, but experiences some difficulty in implementing it. For this desire to crystallize into action, the desire to attend the classes and study Vedanta must be nourished and the way to do this is given in a very important mantra from the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad (4.4.22):

**tametam vedānuvacanena brāhmaṇā vividiṣanti yajñena dānena tapasānāsakenaitameva viditvā<sup>137</sup>**

Thus, we have to graduate from ārta bhakti to arthārthī bhakti to jijñāsu bhakti, all of which fall under dvaita bhakti. When we come to jijñāsu bhakti, the sādhanā known as karma yoga becomes very important because it nourishes the vividiṣa (desire for learning). Karma yoga will turn the spark of desire into a glowing ember. In the Vedantasara,<sup>138</sup> there is an example given of a man whose hair has caught fire. The text says:

*Just as a man carrying a load of wood on his head that has caught fire would immediately jump into a pond to quench the flames, so will the adhikārī, scorched by the mad pains of the fire of saṃsāra, its births, deaths, and self-deluding futility, go rushing to a competent guru who, having himself discovered mokṣa now abides in serene and uninterrupted consciousness of the essence of imperishable being, ready to serve and prepared to obey in every way.*

<sup>134</sup> Holy Śaivite saints.

<sup>135</sup> One of the 63 Nyanmars.

<sup>136</sup> An elderly female ascetic appearing in the later versions of the Ramāyāna as an ardent devotee of Rama and who received his darśan and blessing due to her bhakti.

<sup>137</sup> The brahmanas seek to know It through the study of the Vedas, sacrifices, charity, and austerity consisting of dispassionate enjoyment of sense objects.

<sup>138</sup> *The Essence of Vedanta*, a 15th-century Vedantic text written by Sadānanda Yogendra Sarasvatī.

The desire for self-knowledge should become so intense that one will follow karma yoga and upāsana yoga, increasing the desire for knowledge as well as the capability to receive that knowledge. Many students say: “I have desire swamiji, but I don’t understand anything you say.” This is of no use. One needs both the desire for knowledge (jignasa jñāna icca) and the qualification to receive that knowledge (jñāna योगyata). Nārada is discussing formal dvaita bhakti in the form of āṛta bhakti, āṛtartha bhakti, and jijñāsu bhakti; karma yoga, upāsana yoga, and jñāna yoga—he wants to deal with all of them. Ultimately, they should lead to jñānī bhakti. As it says in the Bhagavad Gītā, 7.18:

**udārāḥ sarva evaite, jñānī tvātmaiva me matam**<sup>139</sup>

All the following sutras explain this path from formal dvaita bhakti to advaita bhakti.

**Sutra 35. tat tu viṣayatyāgāt saṅgatyāgāt ca**

***One achieves bhakti by giving up sense gratification and worldly associations.***

In this sutra, Nārada says that much of humanity is in the grip of delusion. All are drunk. All are deluded and confused about what they want and how to get it. Everyone wants peace, security, and happiness: PSH. PSH is what we are seeking in one way or another, without knowing what can really provide it. We seek PSH without having a clear understanding of their reliable sources. As a result of ignorance, we search for peace, security, and happiness by running around and grabbing at things. We accumulate and possess and hold onto so many worldly things, without knowing that none of them is a reliable source. The world has beauty, it has variety, and it has novelty, but it doesn’t have stability. It is like a cardboard chair. Not knowing this is called delusion. We want to increase our possessions and expand our port, and we wind up with a cluttered set-up of too many things, expecting them to give PSH. The fact is that not only can these things not give us the peace, security, and happiness we seek, they actually create more bondage. The Sanskrit word ‘bandhu,’ which means kinship, is very close to word ‘bandha,’ which means bondage. Mistaking bandha as bandhu is delusion. This may be disturbing to hear, but I have diplomatic immunity in my role as teacher, I have a right to say such things; this is known as ‘vyasa-pīṭa.’<sup>140</sup> Having certain concessions, I can share certain bitter facts: Satyam brūyāt, priyam brūyāt, na brūyāt satyam apriyam, priyam ca nanrutam brūyāt—speak truth in a way that is pleasing to others. Never speak truth that is unpleasant to others. Never speak untruth, which might be pleasant. Sometimes the truth may not be priyam (pleasant), but it is hitam, in one’s best interest. There are times when the teacher will speak the truth because it is in the student’s best interest. Nārada is doing this here and as his mouthpiece, I am doing the same.

We have a glut of possessions and we think they are a source of PSH, but Nārada says that they are all a source of bondage; in Sanskrit this is called **viṣaya** (material happiness); a bandha that is mistaken for a bandhu. Therefore, the first thing we have to do is to reduce the clutter, which we don’t want to give up. In America, they have something called a garage sale. All the possessions that someone no longer wants are put in the garage for others to browse and buy for themselves. Of course, after some time the new owners will begin to find the item useless and sell it at their own garage sales. So this stuff travel from garage to garage—the mind cannot seem to let go of stuff. We

<sup>139</sup> Among these bhaktas, the man of wisdom who is always engaged exclusively in devotional service is superior.

<sup>140</sup> This refers to the fact that when a guru takes a seat to unfold the śāstra he is to be looked upon as Īśvara.

forget the famous railway slogan: travel light and make your journey pleasurable. This value is called aparigrahaḥ—freedom from the feeling of greed, possessiveness, and dependency. I call this the fourth reduction. Nārada says **viṣayatyāgat**—drop things, reduce things, allow your life to be less cluttered; this nourishes dvaita bhakti. When we reduce our possessions, we may initially feel insecure because we were holding onto these things for security. Nārada is saying rather than holding onto things for your security, may you learn to lean more and more on God. World dependence to God-dependence to Self-dependence is our journey and therefore, reduce. If you feel insecure, hold onto Bhagavān. There is a śloka in the Mukunda-mala-stotra (Verse 5), which says:

**nāsthā dharme na vasu-nicaye naiva kāmopabhoge  
yad bhāvyam tad bhavatu Bhagavān pūrva-karmānurūpam  
etat prārthyam mama bahu matam janma-janmāntare 'pi  
tvat-pādāmbhoruha-yuga-gatā niścalā haktir astu<sup>141</sup>**

O Lord this is my one prayer. Let me drop everything except one thing: my hold on your feet. Therefore hold onto the feet of the Lord, rather than worldly things: **Viṣayatyāgāḥ**. The next concern that may arise is: We can drop many things, but we cannot drop all things because living requires many things, such as food, clothing, and shelter. And once we have a house, we require so many more things. Even a sannyāsī has cloth, chappels, a rudrākṣa mala—nobody can drop all things. Then how to practice **viṣayatyāga**? Nārada says: minimize. Drop the droppable. You can decide what is droppable, I don't want to enforce anything because what is droppable according to me may not be according to you. Therefore, drop the droppable according to your discretion.

In regard to those things that you decide to keep, drop the sense of ownership of them and become the user-cum-caretaker. Become the managing trustee of all “possessions,” including the children. This is called ahaṅkāra-mamākara-tyaga (abandonment of egoism and ownership), which I have often called CLASP reduction. The ‘CL’ stands for claiming ownership and controllership. The ‘A’ represents anxiety. The ‘SP’ represents special prayers, the natural consequence of genuine bhakti. **Viṣayatyāga** is reduction of sense gratification. **Saṅgatyāga** is CLASP reduction, or ahaṅkāra-mamākara reduction. May this renunciation come from your heart, and not just your lips. It is not a lipstick to be worn for decoration, but a wisdom to be lived for self-protection. Therefore, **saṅgatyāgāt ca**— this particular sādhanam, or path to advaita bhakti is to learn to depend more on God and less on the world. That is philosophy number one.

One may be inclined to say: “Swamiji, it is easier said than done. How does one do it?” Nārada says: “I knew this would be your complaint, so I will share the method for learning to depend more on God and less on the world in the next sutra.”

**Sutra 36. avyāvṛttabhajanāt**

***One achieves bhakti by worshipping the Lord ceaselessly.***

**Avyāvṛtta** means regular, continuous, and uninterrupted. **Bhajanām** means worship or devotional exercises. So regularly and continuously following varieties of devotional exercises as prescribed in the

<sup>141</sup> Oh my Lord! I have no attachment to religiosity, accumulating wealth, or enjoying sense gratification. Let these come as they inevitably must in accordance with my past deeds. But I do pray for this most cherished boon: birth after birth, let me render unflinching devotional service at your two lotus feet.

formal dvaita bhakti śāstram. Kṛṣṇa discusses these devotional exercises throughout the Gītā. For example, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Chapter he says (3.30):

**mayi sarvāṇi karmāṇi sannyasyādhyātmācetasā  
nirāśīrnirmamo bhūtvā, yudhyasva vigatajvaraḥ**<sup>142</sup>

...and in the 5<sup>th</sup> Chapter (5.10):

**brahmaṇyādhyāya karmāṇi, saṅgaṃ tyaktvā karoti yaḥ  
lipyate na sa pāpena, padmapatram ivāmbhasā**<sup>143</sup>

...and in the 9<sup>th</sup> Chapter (9.27):

**yat karoṣi yad aśnāsi, yajjuhoṣi dadāsi yat  
yat tapasyasi kaunteya, tat kuruṣva madarpaṇam**<sup>144</sup>

...and the 18<sup>th</sup> Chapter (18.58):

**matcittaḥ sarvadurgāṇi, matprasādāt tariṣyasi  
atha cet tvam ahaṅkārād na śroṣyasi vinaṅkṣyasi**<sup>145</sup>

Throughout the Gītā, these devotional exercises are given, and they amount to (Bhagavata Purāṇa, 7.5.23):

**śravaṇam kīrtanam viṣṇoḥ smaraṇam pādasevanam arcanam vandanam dāsyam sakhyam  
ātmanivedanam**<sup>146</sup>

Of these devotional exercises, the primary and most important one is śravaṇam, which means scriptural study, or more precisely, listening to the scripture being unfolded by a competent guru. Unfortunately, nobody in the bhakti schools of philosophy emphasizes this. They talk about nama-smaraṇam (remembering the name of the Lord), but they do not promote study of the Gītā and other scriptures. How exactly does śravaṇam help? I have said that we are holding onto worldly things because of delusion. We hold onto a worldly set-up, mistaking it for a reliable source of PSH. All delusion is born of ignorance, so to be rid of delusion we must get rid of ignorance. To be rid of ignorance, we require knowledge. To acquire knowledge, one must study śāstra. I am not referring to advaita scriptures here, but rather, scriptures that talk about triangular format Īśvara: jīva-jagat-Īśvara. I

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<sup>142</sup> Offering all actions unto me with a devout mind, fight without expectations, without possessiveness, and without anxiety.

<sup>143</sup> Dedicating actions to the Lord, he who acts without attachment is not affected by papam just as the lotus leaf is not wet by water.

<sup>144</sup> Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer as oblation, whatever you give in charity, whatever austerity you undertake, dedicate that as an offering to me.

<sup>145</sup> With your mind fixed on me, you shall cross over all obstacles by my grace. But if you do not listen due to egoism, you will perish.

<sup>146</sup> **śravaṇam**=listening (to the scriptures); **kīrtanam**=singing or talking about the glory of the Lord; **viṣṇoḥ** refers to Viṣṇu and is common to all of them (vishnoho śravaṇam, vishnoho kirthanam, etc.); **smaraṇam**=remembering; **pādasevanam**=serving the Lord, or the temples of the Lord, or the world (an expression of viṣvarūpa-Īśvara); **arcanam**=uttering the name of the Lord and offering flowers; **vandanam**=prostrating or putting namaskāra; **dāsyam**=serving the Lord by living a life that is in keeping with śāstra vidhi niṣedha; **sakhyam**=finding time to cultivate friendship with the Lord; **ātmanivedanam**=surrendering ahaṅkāra and mamākāra to the Lord.

should ask myself: “Between Īśvara and jagat, which is more reliable? Is the kāraṇam more reliable or is the karyam more reliable? Is the kāraṇam permanent or is the karyam permanent? Is water more permanent or is a wave more permanent? Please don’t say a wave! The karyam is always impermanent.

The Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad establishes that kāraṇam is eka (one), sara (substantial), nitya (eternal), satyam (true), whereas karyam is aneka, asara, anitya, asatya. The jagat is aneka, asara, anitya, asatya. Īśvara, the kāraṇam, alone is nityam. Therefore, if I want to hold onto a source of PSH, I should hold onto God, not the world. Īśvara is kāraṇam and jagat is karyam; Īśvara is substance and the world is namarūpa. As it says in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, 6.1.4:

**vācārambhanam vikāro nāmadheyam mṛtti-ketyeva satyam**<sup>147</sup>

The clay is permanent, not the pot. To really appreciate this, we have to study the Bhagavad Gītā. From Chapters 7 through 12, the crux of the teaching is: Īśvara is reliable and the world is unreliable. Therefore, use the worldly set-up to come to God, and use God to come to PSH. Instead, we pray to God for a worldly set-up. Can you see the irony? We are praying to God for a worldly set up and we want to use this worldly set-up to attain PSH. Therefore, we want to go from God, to the world, to PSH, this is called sakāma bhakti. The intelligent approach is to go from the world, to God, to PSH, or niṣkāma bhakti. To put it in simple language, learn to rely more and more on God, and less and less on the world. If anybody ever asks: on whom do you depend for your future? Never name any family member. We are not criticizing family members or questioning their intention and love. But unfortunately, even their own lives are not in their hands. They might have the best of intentions, but one day, they will be gone and we will find that the person who promised to protect me is out of the picture. Therefore, if anybody asks in whom do you trust, say: “I trust God.”

**\*\*\*End of Teaching 14\*\*\***

In this 3<sup>rd</sup> Chapter, Nārada is dealing with the topic of bhakti sādhanani—methods of nourishing devotion toward the Lord. Initially it is in the form of dvaita bhakti, which must eventually ripen into advaita bhakti. In the 36<sup>th</sup> Sutra, Nārada presents **avyāvṛttabhajanām** as a means of nourishing bhakti. The word **bhajanām** refers to any devotional exercise. It literally means worship, and here it refers to any form of worship, including the following means: **śravaṇam kīrtanam viṣṇoḥ smaraṇam pādasevanam arcaṇam vandanaṇam dāsyam sakhyam ātmanivedanam**. We can engage in any one of these; there is variety only because the mind wants variety. Idli, idli, idli every day results in boredom. We want dosa one day, sevai another day, and uttapam the following day, even though they are all made of the same rice flour. The material is the same but varieties of presentation exist because the mind wants variety. For this reason, Bhagavān has given us nava-vidha (nine-fold) bhakti. The primary method on this list is śravaṇam, or scriptural study. Scriptural study is extremely important, and study of the Bhagavad Gītā in particular because it is the essence of all Hindu literature. When we study scripture, the first thing we notice is that our relationship is primarily with the Lord because Bhagavān Paramātmā is kāraṇam and jīvātmān is karyam. This karyam-kāraṇam sambhanda (relation) between jīvātmā and paramātmā is fundamental and continues from janma to janma (birth to birth). We are not talking from the advaita angle here; we are talking from vyavahārika dṛṣṭi, the triangular format (i.e., jīva-jagat- Īśvara). From this angle, paramātmā and jīvātmā have a karya-kāraṇa sambandha (cause-and-effect relationship). This sambandha between God and me is fundamental and also distinct from all other relationships because it continues in every janma, whereas the relationship with family members or community—between one jīvātmā and another—is limited. Even parents and children get separated after some time; the children wind up in one country and the parents in another. Any other human

<sup>147</sup> All modifications of clay are only names based on words, the truth being that all is clay.

relationship is time-bound. Even the longest relationship between two human beings can only last for one particular janma; in the next janma, we may not even be of the same species. So where is the question of a permanent relationship between one karyam and another? The sambhanda between two karyams is temporary; only the sambhanda between kāraṇam and karyam is lasting. We have to clearly assimilate this: O Lord I am related to you janma after janma. Family members will come, family members will go, and even if they are still around, I can't be sure that they will continue to love me (not because of the way that *they* are, but because of the way that I am; we must never blame). Therefore, stabilize the jīva-Īśvara sambhanda; day in and day out, **avyāvṛttabhajanāt**—through different types of devotional exercises. Do this by simulating whatever it is that you normally do to nourish your human relationships. If you are close with someone, the moment you leave the class you immediately get on your cell phone to speak with them. You want to constantly be in contact. You search for opportunities to be together more often. You remember his or her birthday, graduation, wedding day, and so on, regularly sending well wishes and cards. You are continuously relating, either verbally, by giving gifts, or by spending time together. These are all methods of nourishing the relationship between two human beings. Apply the same principle to the jīva-Īśvara sambhanda by engaging in different types of devotional exercises so that you do not lose sight of this relationship.

The second important thing is that between Īśvara and any other jīva—that is, between the kāraṇam and karyam—which is more reliable? If you have to choose between the support of the ocean or that of a wave, which is more reliable? Certainly not the wave, which is subject to arrival and departure—don't hold onto another wave; hold onto the ocean, which is stable. The Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad compares four features of kāraṇam and four features of karyam. We learn that kāraṇam, the cause, is ekam, saram, nityam, satyam (one alone, essential, eternal, and true), whereas karyam, the effect, is aneka, asaram, anityam, and asatyam (many, inessential, fleeting, unreal). Karyam doesn't have an independent existence, but borrows its existence from kāraṇam. Therefore, for my peace, security, and happiness, should I depend on all the worldly things, which are karyam, or should I hold onto the kāraṇam? The more I study scripture, the more I understand why I should hold onto God. Instead of holding onto others and getting frustrated and disappointed, let me rely upon kāraṇa-Īśvara. Therefore, śravaṇa-rūpa bhakti is a very important exercise through which I come to discover that my relationship with God is more fundamental than any other relationship and that God is more reliable than any blessed thing in the creation. The more I understand this, the more my bhakti will increase.

Nārada says **avyāvṛttam**, which means unbroken, or continuous bhakti. In response to this, one might ask: How can I practice bhakti continuously? Nārada has time to do this, because he has nothing else to do. But I have to work. I have a family to take care of. The response to this, care of the Bhagavad Gītā (9.27), is as follows:

**yat karoṣi yad aśnāsi, yajjuhoṣi dadāsi yat  
yat tapasyasi kaunteya, tat kuruṣva madarpaṇam**<sup>148</sup>

Convert whatever action you perform into an offering. Imagine that every action is a flower and every performance of that action is offering the flower at the feet of the Lord. Which Lord? Anekarūpa- viṣvarūpa Īśvara. As a karta, or doer, convert every karma into a pūjā through Īśvara arpaṇa-bhāvana (an attitude of offering); it is a continuous bhājanam (bestowment). Karma phalam will keep on coming. Every mosquito bite is karma phalam because in the previous janma the mosquito was a human being and I was a mosquito, and now the roles have reversed. Whatever phalam I receive, I must receive it as Īśvara prasāda, which makes it a form of bhājanam. This reverential attitude makes life a continuous process of bhakti. Thus, I am fundamentally a bhakta, only putting on the father veṣam (dress, role, or appearance), the mother veṣam, the mother-in-law veṣam, the teacher veṣam, or the student veṣam.

<sup>148</sup> Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer as oblation, whatever you give in charity, whatever austerity you undertake, dedicate that as an offering to me.

All these roles come and go, but the role of bhakta is fundamental. Therefore, I make bhakti a continuous exercise through Īsvara arpaṇa-bhāvana and prasāda-bhāvana.

There is a second reading of Sutra 36, which involves adding parentheses so that **avyāvṛttabhajanāt** becomes **avyāvṛt(t)abhajanāt**. The word **vyāvṛttabhajanāt** means **vyāvṛttam** enclosed; **āvṛ** means to cover, enclose, fence, limit, or circumscribe. So **vyāvṛttam** means narrow and **avyāvṛttam** means the opposite. Therefore, may you have non-narrow bhakti. Sakāma bhakti is a narrow bhakti, a bhakti in which I am only praying for my personal and family benefits. This ahaṅkāra-mamamākara-centric bhakti, this ahaṅkāra-mamamākara-motivated bhakti, this ahaṅkāra-mamamākara-limited bhakti, otherwise known as sakāma bhakti, is **vyāvṛtta** bhakti. Nārada is saying avoid this trap and broaden your bhakti to niṣkāma bhakti, a non-ahaṅkāra-mamākara-centric bhakti; let it be with no motive other than pure appreciation of the glories of the Lord. The 10<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the Gītā is exclusively dedicated to describing this vibhūti yoga and viṣvarūpa darśana yoga (appreciation of the Lord's manifestation in and as all). Prayer can be in the form of motiveless, expectationless admiration of the Lord in the form of every glory in the creation (Gītā, 10.41):

**yad yad vibhūtimat sattvaṃ, śrīmad ūrjitam eva vā  
tat tad evāvagaccha tvaṃ, mama tejoṃ śasambhavam**<sup>149</sup>

Even when you see a small insect, appreciate the glory of the Lord in it. Therefore, niṣkāma bhakti means expectationless admiration of Īsvara-vibhūti. The highest bhakti is motiveless, appreciation of the glory of the Lord, and if at all you want to have a motive, let it be a pure, expanded motive, called niṣkapaṭe bhakti (unreserved devotion). What does this pure motive look like? (Śāntipath Mantra):

**sarve bhavantu sukhinaḥ  
sarve santu nirāmayāḥ  
sarve bhadraṇi paśyantu  
mā kashcit duḥkha bhāgbhavet  
Om Śāntiḥ, Śāntiḥ, Śāntiḥ**<sup>150</sup>

There is a famous Tamil saying that says: "O Lord I have only one wish: that everybody be happy. Other than that, I have no other expectations." This is called **avyāvṛttabhajanām**—niṣkāma bhakti. This niṣkāma avyāvṛtta bhakti will lead to spiritual growth by gradually diluting ahaṅkāra and mamākara. By practicing this bhakti, attachment to the body-mind and to the family, which is the most difficult thing to drop, will automatically get diluted: nirmamaḥ-nirahaṅkāra bhakti (devotion free of ownership or ego) is the jñānī's bhakti, as described in the 12<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the Gītā. This is our goal. Therefore start from there to **avyāvṛttabhajanām**.

**Sutra 37. loke'pi bhagavadguṇaśravaṇam kīrtanāt**

***One achieves bhakti by hearing and talking about the Supreme Lord's special qualities, even while being engaged in the world.***

<sup>149</sup> Whatever being is there which is glorious, rich, or powerful, may you recognize that to be born out of a portion of my splendour.

<sup>150</sup> May all be prosperous and happy. May all be free from illness. May all see what is spiritually uplifting. May no one suffer.

Here, Nārada is saying: try to maintain this bhakti bhāvana even while in the presence of others. Do not only practice this personally, but even in the company of others, create an atmosphere of glorification of the Lord. As Kṛṣṇa says in the Gītā (10.9):

**macittā madgataprāṇāḥ, bodhayantaḥ parasparam  
kathayantaśca māṃ, tuṣyanti ca ramnti ca**<sup>151</sup>

A bhakta will cease any opportunity to talk about the glories of the Lord. May you seek such company and may you seek such an opportunity, and if the opportunity is not already there, may you try to create it. Therefore, Nārada says **loke'pi**, even in the company of others, **bhagavadguṇaśravaṇa**—listen to the glory of the Lord, **kīrtanāt**—talk about the glory of the Lord. Some might say that this all sounds very impractical. At social get-togethers, people discuss all manner of subjects and it is also an ideal time for gossip. Where is the place for **bhagavadguṇaśravaṇa kīrtanām**? This is indeed a place. According to śāstra, when we talk about the virtues and accomplishments of other people, in our mind we should recognize these as the virtues of the Lord alone. So even if I am talking about a great scientist and his ingenious invention, I know that it is really Bhagavān's glory. I am talking about the glory of the Lord expressed through that scientist. And if I am appreciating someone's beauty, it is also the beauty of the Lord expressed through a person. Accordingly, the instruction is to talk about the glories of others, remembering them always to be the glories of the Lord. Conversely, never talk about the wickedness or weaknesses of others, which are juicy and tempting topics. However tempting it may be, look for the virtues in every blessed person. Talk about his or her pluses, remembering that these are all expressions of the Lord. In short, avoid speaking ill of others. When you talk about the virtues of the virtuous, it is **bhagavadguṇa kīrtanām**. When you encourage others to talk about the virtues of others, it is **bhagavadguṇa śravaṇa**. Therefore, talk about virtues and encourage others to talk about virtues. And whenever gossip or the vices of others are the topic of conversation, skillfully change the topic. Or look at your watch and quickly bid them farewell. Always have a plan in place to avoid gossip. Therefore **bhagavadguṇaśravaṇam kīrtanāt** is talking about the virtues of others and inspiring others to talk about the virtues of others while avoiding speaking ill of others. In the Bhagavad Gītā, Kṛṣṇa says **apaiśhunam** (non-calumny; **paiśhunam** means fault-finding or talking about the weaknesses of others). So in the company of others, talk about Bhagavān directly if they are bhaktas; otherwise talk about Bhagavān indirectly by highlighting the good things in others. If you talk about the glory of the ant you recently saw in a National Geographic film, this too is Īśvara. This is another method for nourishing bhakti.

Naturally, a doubt will arise: All this seems a bit too idealistic. Is it really possible to maintain bhakti when we are amid all types of people? Nārada talks about various techniques, but doubts about whether or not these techniques are practicable are bound to come up. Coming out of social interactions without mental pollution or contamination, regardless of the type of people I am around requires intelligence and skill. Nārada says the best method is satsaṅga—association with other mahātmās (great souls) who have perfected this technique of speaking kindly of other others, not speaking ill of others, and remembering that all are a manifestation of Īśvara's glory. And should gossip arise, learning how to intelligently change the topic or quietly slip out. We have to learn these skills through observation. Because mahātmās know how to manage this skillfully, try to associate with such mahatmas, this is satsaṅga mahimā. Nārada considers satsaṅga to be a very important sādhanā for nourishing bhakti. Satsaṅga is discussed at length in the scriptures. Nārada focuses on satsaṅga and its significance in five sutras (38-42). Find time to spend with mahātmās; they need not even be jñānīs, but they are sādhakas who are also attempting the same thing. As Śaṅkarācārya says in Bhaja Govindaṃ, (Verse 9):

<sup>151</sup> Fixing the mind and senses on me, mutually sharing the knowledge about me, and speaking of me, they are always contented and delighted.

satsaṅgatve nissāṅgatvaṃ  
nissāṅgatve nirmohatvaṃ  
nirmohatve niścalatattvaṃ  
niścalatattve jīvanmuktiḥ<sup>152</sup>

**Sutra 38. mukhyatastu mahatkr̥payaiva bhagavadkr̥pāleśād vā**

***However, by associating primarily with great souls through the Lord's mercy, one develops bhakti.***

Developing the skill of being in the world without our mind becoming polluted is not easily—especially in a society where the topic is always materialistic. As somebody once said, it is like the soft tongue managing amid 32 hard teeth. The teeth are among the hardest parts of the body and the tongue is among the softest. And the tongue lies between 16 hard teeth above and 16 hard teeth below; it has no satsaṅga. The tongue constantly has to move while we speak and eat without getting bitten. Once in a while, it does get bitten and this is quite painful, but it generally manages well. Therefore, may you be skilled like the tongue and not get bitten by a materialistic society and materialistic topics. To develop this skill requires **bhagavadkr̥pāleśād vā**—the grace of the Lord. Good friendship is a great and rare blessing. Thus, by the grace of the Lord—**leśām** means even the mere thought of the grace of the Lord—may you acquire this skill. Another thing is **mukhyataḥ**, the primary source for developing this skill is **mahatkr̥paya**—the grace of the company of mahātmās. In his Niti Śatakam,<sup>153</sup> the poet Bhartrihari says: “The type of person with whom you associate will heavily influence your future. Therefore, don't take it lightly.” And to convey this idea, he gives three examples. First, to check whether the hot plate is sufficiently hot, the cook will sprinkle some water on it; the instant the water droplet hits the hot plate, it evaporates without leaving a trace. And that very same droplet of water, when sitting atop a lotus leaf in a pond, gives off the glow of a pearl. So whereas in the first example, saṅga had a destructive effect, in the second example saṅga imparted a glow. Of course, this glow is only temporary; as soon as the next gust of wind comes, the droplet will be blown off the leaf. The third example is based on a belief. In the tradition they say that when a droplet of rainwater falls onto an oyster shell on the day of Svāti Nakṣatra<sup>154</sup> it turns into a pearl. Unlike the case of its association with the lotus, in which the water droplet only temporarily gives off a pearly glow, here the water droplet becomes a pearl for good because of its saṅga with the oyster shell. Thus, three different types of company result in three different outcomes. So the śloka is (Bhartrhari's Niti Śatakam, Verse 67):

**santaptāyasi saṃsthitasya payaso nāmāpi na jñāyate  
muktākāratayā tadeva nalinīpatrasthitam rājate  
svātyāṃ sāgaraśuktimadhyapatitam tanmauktikaṃ jāyate  
prāyeṇādhamamadhyamottamaḡaṇaḥ saṃsargato jāyate<sup>155</sup>**

<sup>152</sup> Being in the company of those who listen to, reflect upon, and assimilate the truth leads to non-attachment. Non-attachment leads to freedom from delusion. Freedom from delusion leads to steadiness of mind. Steadiness of mind leads to liberation.

<sup>153</sup> Niti means 'ethics' and śatakam means 100 verses.

<sup>154</sup> According to Vedic astrology (jyotiṣ), the 360 degrees of zodiac consisting of 12 constellations are divided into 27 nakṣatras, or lunar mansions, each meāsuring 13.20' (13 degrees and 20 minutes). Swati nakṣatra is one of them.

<sup>155</sup> You cannot even notice a hint of a drop of water fallen on a hot iron. The same drop shines like a pearl on a lotus leaf. And when the drop of water, under the Svāti nakṣatra, falls under a seashell, it becomes a pearl. Excellent, average, and bad states of a person depend on the company he or she keeps.

Therefore, choose your friends carefully. You can have acquaintance with many people, but thick friendships should be chosen wisely. So, **mukhyatastu mahatkrpaya**—by association primarily with great souls, one can become that pearl called jīvanmukta.

**Sutra 39. mahatsaṅgastu durlabho’gamyo’moghaśca**

*The association of great souls is rarely obtained, difficult to understand, and infallible.*

There is a catch. Even though satsaṅga is great, it is difficult to attain because satpuruṣas (wise people) are very rare in the world. Therefore, **mahatsaṅgaḥ tu**—association with mahātmās, is **durlabha** and **agamyah**—difficult to attain and unfathomable. So deep is its glory that it is incomprehensible and indescribable; one must experience it in order to fully discover and appreciate it. It is like the sweetness of sugar: how can this possibly be put into words? Then **amyoghaḥ**—it is infallible: it is certain to convert a non-bhakta into a bhakta, an atheist into a theist. Thereafter, the bhakta will be gradually transformed: from an ārta bhakta to an arthārthī bhakta, then through the same satsaṅga into a jijñāsu bhakti, and finally into a jñānī bhakta. As it says in the Gītā (9.12):

**moghāśā moghakarmāṇaḥ, moghajñānā vicetasah  
rākṣasīm āsurīm caiva, prakṛtiṃ mohinīm śritāḥ<sup>156</sup>**

Materialistic people’s efforts are full of failures, but satsaṅga never fails you; it is infallible. Therefore hold onto it. Whatever you do, don’t give this up.

**Sutra 40. labhyate’pi tatkrpayaiva**

*The association of great souls can be obtained, but only by the grace of the Lord.*

Nārada disappoints us in the last two Sutras. In the 38<sup>th</sup> Sutra, he tells us that satsaṅga is fantastic. In the 39<sup>th</sup> Sutra, he says it is incomprehensible, indescribable, and unfailing. He glorifies satsaṅga and just as we become enthusiastic about it, he says it is difficult to obtain. So if it is unavailable, then what to do? Nārada himself gives a solution. He says that even this **mahatsaṅgaḥ** can be obtained by the grace of the Lord. Therefore, pray to the Lord for satsaṅga. May I have more and more associations with mahatmas, more and more associations with jñānīs. Let me not have duhsaṅga, bad company. Therefore, he says: **labhyate’pi**—even this rare satsaṅga can be obtained, **tatkrpayaiva**—by the Lord’s grace alone. And how is that grace itself obtained? Although it is not said here, we can add that it is obtained through prayer and pūjā. Desire for spiritual growth and association with spiritual people come through the grace of the Lord, which is itself accomplished through prayer. As Śaṅkarācārya says in Verse 3 of Vivekacūdamani:

<sup>156</sup> These indiscriminate ones are full of vain hopes, vain pursuits, and vain knowledge. They take to rajasic and tamasic nature, which deludes them.

**durlabhaṃ trayamevaitaddevānugrahaḥetukam  
manuṣyatvaṃ mumukṣutvaṃ mahāpuruṣasaṃśrayaḥ<sup>157</sup>**

A human birth, desire for liberation, and association with spiritual people—all these three come by the grace of the Lord. Therefore, **labhyate'pi**—it can be obtained.

**\*\*\*End of Teaching 15\*\*\***

We are currently in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Chapter of the Nārada Bhaṭi Sūtra. The focus of the 1<sup>st</sup> Chapter was the nature of advaita bhakti, and the focus of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Chapter was the glory of advaita bhakti. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> Chapter, the topic is the means of advaita bhakti, which is synonymous with parābhakti or advaita jñānam and which can only be attained through Vedānta vicāra. We should never forget this basic truth. In this 3<sup>rd</sup> Chapter, Nārada discusses various supportive sādhanās for parābhakti, or advaita bhakti. Vedānta vicāra is the primary and direct means, but there are many other supportive, or indirect sādhanās, for advaita bhakti. Broadly speaking, dvaita bhakti is the sādhanā that will ultimately lead to advaita bhakti; it is the compulsory stepping-stone to advaita bhakti. I pointed out that there is an informal version of dvaita bhakti, as described in the Āgamas,<sup>158</sup> Purāṇas, and other non-Vedic śāstras. This informal bhakti is considered optional because it requires a particular type of mindset. Informal dvaita bhakti involves humanizing God and having varieties of interactions with that personalized God in which no formal śāstric prescriptions are followed. Vedānta accepts this informal dvaita bhakti and acknowledges its usefulness for some people, but ultimately considers it to be optional. Nārada validates informal dvaita bhakti by pointing to the Gopis as an example of great bhaktas in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Chapter.

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> Chapter, Nārada is focusing on formal dvaita bhakti, the śāstra-based dvaita bhakti that is primarily expounded upon in the Bhagavad Gītā. This formal dvaita bhakti is generally taken to mean the pañca mahāyajñas (i.e., the five major rituals for inner purification, which fall under sattvic karmas), and the values enumerated in the Gītā. In broadest terms, formal dvaita bhakti exists in the form of karma yoga and upāsana yoga. Nārada also highlights the important role of satsaṅga in several sūtras that talk about the association with satpuruṣas or mahātmās. What is the definition of a mahātmā? A mahātmā is one who is keenly aware of the Vedic tradition. Those who are only acquainted with the Āgamas and informal dvaita bhakti cannot be considered mahātmās because without knowledge of the Vedic tradition, they will be limited to talking about the bhakti schools of philosophy. In the introduction itself, I talked about bhakti schools of philosophy, which are totally different from the Vedic tradition. We should be extremely careful to avoid the traps of bhakti schools of philosophy, which views dvaita bhakti as both the means and the end, and which construes informal dvaita bhakti as a direct means of liberation. Such a philosophy, which vehemently asserts that Vedāntic study is not required and even goes to the extent of saying that Vedāntic study is an obstacle, should be recognized as a trap and carefully avoided. Therefore, satsaṅga means association with mahātmās who know about śrūti-yukti-anubhava pramāṇa and who belong to Adi Śaṅkarācārya's tradition and never violate his traditional method of teaching. All bhakti schools of philosophy deviate from the śrūti-yukti-anubhava pramāṇa teaching of Adi Śaṅkarācārya. The Kaivalya Upaniṣad clearly proclaims that other than jīvātmā-paramātmā aikyam jñānam (knowledge of the identity between jīvātmā and paramātmā) there is no means of liberation. That is the Vedic tradition. We should be forewarned that nowadays bhakti schools of philosophy are springing up like mushrooms and taking us away from the Vedic tradition. Therefore, may you have regular association with a satpuruṣa who follows the Vedic tradition, the Upaniṣadic tradition because the value of such satsaṅga is immeasurable. As Sūtra 39, says: **mahatsaṅgastu**

<sup>157</sup> These three blessings are rare, difficult to achieve, and attained only by the grace of God: A human birth, the desire for liberation, and association with a great sage.

**durlabhaḥ**—mahatsaṅga is rare because mahātmās are themselves rare. And **agamyah**—its value is immeasurable, and **amoghaḥ**—it is unfailing.

The uniqueness of satsaṅga with a traditional mahātmā is that initially he will ask bhaktas to follow karma yoga, nitya karma, and so forth. Then later, this very mahātmā will put these same bhaktas on a course of śravaṇa, manana, nididhyāsana. Traditional satsaṅga will lead to Vedānta vicāra, whereas non-traditional satsaṅga will take us away from Vedānta vicāra. In traditional satsaṅga, the bhakta will become more and more curious about studying and reflecting upon the śāstra, whereas in non-traditional satsaṅga the bhakta will lose interest in śāstric study. Satsaṅga that promotes the study of śāstra is genuine satsaṅga and it is unfailing because it leads to Mahāvākya vicāra: contemplation of the great Upaniṣadic statements. There are so many erroneous concepts floating around in the name of Hinduism, and we should know how to separate the genuine ones from the disingenuous ones. In anything we procure, there are spurious versions and it is no different here. We needn't criticize anyone—this is very important—but we should know how to quietly steer clear from the wrong way. Therefore, Nārada says **mahatsaṅgaḥ durlabhaḥ**—association with great souls is difficult to achieve.

Then we are bound to ask: “How does one know who is genuine and who is not genuine? Is there any method for discerning this?” To be able to do this, I need to know the śāstra properly. But if I knew the śāstra properly, I would not be seeking satsaṅga. Therefore, we have no way of knowing who is genuine and who is not genuine when we are still in the dark. A blind person never knows whether his guide is blind or not. The Upaniṣads themselves talk about this difficulty. Therefore what can we do? The only thing to do is pray to God: “O Lord, I don't know who is a genuine guru and who is not. Every guru claims he is genuine and the others are spurious. You alone can lead me to a genuine guru.” As is said in Vivekacūdamani (Verse 3):

**durlabhaṃ trayamevaitaddevānugrahaḥ hetukam  
manuṣyatvaṃ mumukṣutvaṃ mahāpuruṣasaṃśrayaḥ**<sup>159</sup>

Therefore, Nārada says: **labhyate'pi tatkr̥payaiva**—the companionship of great souls is itself obtained by their (satpuruṣa's) grace. So we have a catch-22: only through satsaṅga with great souls can we get their **kr̥pa** (divine grace), and only through **kr̥pa**, can we get satsaṅga with these great souls. It is impossible to explain. It is a mysterious thing, and so you pray. Mahatsaṅga is thus attainable only through mahat kr̥pa, the grace of those mahātmās.

**Sutra 41. tasmimstajjane bhedābhāvāt**

*[One can attain bhakti by association with great souls or directly by the Lord's grace because] there is no difference between the Lord's grace and those great souls arising from that grace.*

In the previous sutra, Nārada said that mahatsaṅga is possible only through mahat(ma)-kr̥pa—the grace of a mahātmā. One might wonder: “Why do you say that mahatsaṅga is attained by mahat-kr̥pa, shouldn't you say Bhagavat-kr̥pa, or Ívara-kr̥pa? We have heard the phrase **dev'anugraḥ hetukam**, by Divine grace; why are changing it to mahat-kr̥pa?” To this, Nārada responds: “In my vision, there is no difference between a mahātmā and Bhagavān because a mahātmā is a jñānī, and a jñānī is one

<sup>159</sup> These three blessings are rare, difficult to achieve, and attained only by the grace of God: A human birth, the desire for liberation, and association with a great sage.

who has discovered Bhagavān in himself. Even if a mahātmā is not a jñānī, even if a mahātmā is a dvaita bhakta, a mahātmā still invokes the Lord in his heart all the time. Because Bhagavān resides in the hearts of mahātmās at all times, there is no difference between mahātmās and Bhagavān. When you do namaskāra to Hiranyakashipu,<sup>160</sup> the namaskāra will go to Hiranyakashipu, but when you do namaskāra to Prahlada,<sup>161</sup> it will never go to Prahlada because Bhagavān is in his heart. This is the difference between namaskāra to a mahātmā and namaskāra to a durātmā (ill-natured person). Durātmā namaskāram will go to the durātmā, whereas mahātmā namaksaram will go to Bhagavān who is installed in the mahātmā's heart all the time. As we find in the Bhagavad Gītā (10.9 and 11.55, respectively):

**maccittā madgataprāṇāḥ, bodhayantaḥ parasparam  
kathayantaśca mām nityam, tuṣyanti ca ramanti ca**<sup>162</sup>

**matkarmakṛmatparamaḥ, madbhaktaḥ saṅgavarjitaḥ  
nirvairaḥ sarvabhuteṣu, yaḥ sa mām eti pāṇḍava**<sup>163</sup>

Whether we are talking about a dvaita bhakta or an advaita bhakta, both are mahātmās because they have God in their hearts. Thus, Nārada declares, **bhedābhāvāt**—there is no bheda, or difference, between, **tasmin**—that (Bhagavān's) grace and **tajjane**—those great souls arising from it. There is no difference between Bhagavān and bhagavata (the devotee of Bhagavān). Therefore, grace is required to obtain the company of a genuine mahātmā. In fact, the term 'genuine mahātmā' is redundant because a mahātmā is necessarily genuine; nonetheless, because there is much confusion on this topic, it helps to specify that we are talking about a genuine mahātmā who follows the śrūti-yukti-anubhava tradition, as opposed to the bhakti school of philosophy. The latter is our pūrvapakṣa and we should avoid getting trapped in it.

**Sutra 42. tadeva sādhyatām tadeva sādhyatām**

***That only should be strived for, that only should be strived for.***

Given that satsaṅga is the best sādhanā, which gradually takes one to mokṣa, one should get hold of an available mahātmā. Whether you know how to search for a genuine mahātmā or not, start by putting trust in Bhagavān or any mahātmā who talks about Bhagavān. Even if they belong to the bhakti school of philosophy and you don't know the difference, go to them. One day or another you will be brought to Vedānta darśanam. Even if we unwittingly enter into bhakti darśanam, it will gradually take us to Vedānta darśanam. Therefore, may you take to mahatsaṅga whether it is genuine or not; you have to start somewhere. There is only one important criterion: bhagavat bhakti, or devotion to the Lord. In Sādhanā Pañcakam (Verse 2), Śaṅkarācārya says:

<sup>160</sup> An asura from the Purāṇas. The name is said to depict one who is fond of wealth and sex.

<sup>161</sup> A saintly boy from the Purāṇas known for his piety and bhakti to Viṣṇu.

<sup>162</sup> Fixing the mind and senses on me, mutually sharing the knowledge about me, and speaking of me, they are always contented and delighted.

<sup>163</sup> He who does works for me, who is my devotee, who keeps me as the supreme goal, who is free from attachment, and who is free from hatred toward all reaches me.

## saṅgam satsu vidhīyatām bhagavato bhaktirdṛḍha dhīyatām<sup>164</sup>

Hold onto Bhagavān all the time and take to satsaṅga. Therefore **tadeva sādhyatām**—may you take to bhagavat bhakta saṅga all the time. And because satsaṅga is so important, Nārada repeats this instruction a second time. Whether it is nāma-sankīrtana, Radha kalyanam, a discourse on Purāṇic stories, or Vedānta class—it doesn't matter; gradually you will come to know what is what. Gradually you will be able to distinguish between the 1<sup>st</sup> Stage, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Stage, and so on. Gradually clarity will come. It takes time but Bhagavān will guide you. This is also what Śaṅkarācārya says in Baja Govindam:

**sat-saṅgatve nissaṅgatvaṃ  
nissaṅgatve nirmohatvaṃ  
nirmohatve niścalatattvaṃ  
niścalatattve jīvanmuktiḥ<sup>165</sup>**

**Sutra 43. duḥsaṅgaḥ sarvathaiva tyājyaḥ**

***One should renounce all kinds of bad association.***

There is a complementary value as well, and what is that? Satsaṅga pravṛtti (keeping company with wise and virtuous people) is one value and duḥsaṅga nivṛtti (renouncing associations with bad or ignorant people) is its complement. We have to practice both. Satsaṅga pravṛtti, duḥsaṅga nivṛtti—be sure not to interchange them. Therefore, Nārada says: **duḥsaṅgaḥ sarvathaiva tyājyaḥ**—may you renounce association with duḥstha puruṣas (wicked people) or durātmā (degraded souls). It doesn't mean you should hate them. Hatred must always be avoided because Bhagavān resides even in the duḥsthas and rakṣasās (degraded and demonic). All means absolutely all; Bhagavān is there in everyone—even a terrorist. That doesn't mean that you should praise and kiss a terrorist. Keep a safe distance, but don't hate him. Instead, may you pray:

**durjanaḥ sajjano bhūyāt sajjano śāntim āpnuyāt  
śānto mucyeta bandhebhya muktaścānyān vimocayet<sup>166</sup>**

Therefore, **durjanaḥ sajjano bhūyāt**—I will even bring the wicked into my prayers, saying: they are all durjanaḥ (crooked people), not because they are intrinsically bad, but because ignorance has created confusion in them. Therefore, the advice here is to keep away from such people but never hate them. Then the next question is: What is the definition of a durātmā dushtha? The first condition for satsaṅga was that person must be an āstika, a believer in God. Avoid association with nāstika puruṣas because the arguments of nāstikas will initially be convincing. Until we have studied the scriptures thoroughly and know the appropriate answers, atheism may appear attractive. In our tradition, atheism is called

<sup>164</sup> Seek companionship with wise people. Be established in firm devotion to the Lord.

<sup>165</sup> From association with wise and virtuous souls (satsaṅga) comes non-attachment, from non-attachment comes freedom from delusion, from non-delusion comes steadfastness, and from absolute steadfastness comes liberation in this life (jīvanmuki).

<sup>166</sup> May the wicked realize their goodness, may the good attain peace, may the peaceful attain liberation, and may the liberated help to set others free.

Carvāka darśanam,<sup>167</sup> which comes from caru (attractive) and vāk (words). They will say: “Why do you talk about puṇyam and pāpam—who has seen that? Why do you say that dharma will make you happy and adharma will make you unhappy? Look at the world. All the adharmic people are driving it. Only you are getting into trouble. Learn to live practically.” This is especially so amid problems. I’ve been talking a lot about a new book called *Does He Know a Mother’s Heart?* In this book, the author, Arun Shouri, talks about suffering in his family. When suffering after suffering comes, the mind begins to question whether there is justice in this world; the mind questions Bhagavān’s compassion. The subtitle of this book is *Suffering Refutes Religion*, and throughout the book, the author consistently questions the existence of a compassionate God by invoking logic and statistics. The author is highly informed. He analyzes Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism, then goes on to challenge the existence of God. What is Nārada’s advice? Until you are well versed in śāstra, avoid such books. Therefore, the first condition for satsaṅga is to make sure the one with whom you keep company is an āstika.

The second condition for satsaṅga is that the person must respect dharma, or values. Veda pūrvabhāga dharma śāstra (the first or early part of the Vedas) should be respected, even though dharma is a mysterious thing rather than a tangible thing. The third condition is that it is preferable to keep company with one who values the Vedic tradition because the Vedas have an answer for everything. However, we have to be sure to study the scriptures patiently, systematically, and with thorough analysis. Until we do so, we will be shaken. Thus, the three criteria for satsaṅga are: one who accepts Bhagavān, one who accepts dharma, and one who accepts Vedic scripture. There are many Āgama systems that have come up with their own philosophy that deviates from the Vedas. And should there be any deficiencies in that philosophy, Bhagavān himself will bring you out of the relationship. Therefore Bhagavān and dharma will reject the person who does not fulfill these three conditions. The first two are extremely important; the third one is a bonus. Even if the third one is not there, be sure the first two are there. If the first two criteria are not there, greet the person politely then promptly go your way. You may have an acquaintance with this person, but don’t have any thick or long-term interactions with such people. This is Nārada’s advice. And he says: **sarvatha**—by all means.

**Sutra 44. kāmakrodha mohasmṛtibhramśa buddhināśasarvanāśa-kāraṇatvāt**

***Material association is the cause of lust, anger, confusion, forgetfulness, loss of intelligence, and total calamity.***

Nārada’s advice is that satsaṅga pravṛtti and duhsaṅga nivṛtti are two important values for spiritual seekers. Of these two values, which should we implement first? Duhsaṅga nivṛtti. Nārada does not say this himself, I am adding a bit of a side-note. A wise person once said: tell me who your friends are and I will tell you what your future will be. Therefore, start watching and filtering your friends and associations. Duhsaṅga nivṛtti must be started first because it will help you to discover satsaṅga and start implementing it gradually. The next question is: “If I don’t follow duhsaṅga nivṛtti and maintain bad company, what will happen?” Suppose we say to Nārada: “Ok, I will follow satsaṅga nivṛtti, but I would like to retain duhsaṅga.” We will wind up with one type of spirituality in the morning and another type of spirit in the evening. And why can’t we have both? Why can’t we have two types of abhiṣekam? Nārada gives a warning: even if you don’t have satsaṅga, please give up duhsaṅga. If you don’t have satsaṅga, you might not progress spiritually; but if you have duhsaṅga, not only will you not progress spirituality, you will slip down from whatever level you are at now. Spiritual fall is inevitable because duḥstha puruṣas do not accept all four puruṣārthas (ārta, kama, dharma, and mokṣa); they have only ārta and

<sup>167</sup> One of the nāstika or heterodox schools of Indian philosophy, which rejects spirit and emphasizes materialism and philosophical skepticism.

kama. Nāstikas do not recognize dharma or mokṣa because these two are more subtle; they are not scientifically provable. Nāstikas value whatever is practically useful. This is the value they follow. If selfishness is profitable, they take to selfishness. If helping another person is profitable to me, then I will help; otherwise I won't bother. Because this is their philosophy, their goals will be limited to āṛta and kama. Dharma will not be respected. And because such people are given to āṛta and kama, when I associate with them unknowingly, I will also develop kama for material things. As Lord Kṛṣṇa says in the Gītā (2.62-63):

**dhyāyato viṣayān puṃsaḥ saṅgasteṣūpajāyate  
saṅgāt sañjāyate kāmaḥ kāmāt krodho' bijayāte  
krodhād bhavati saṃmohāḥ, saṃmohāt smṛtibhramah  
smṛtibhramśād buddhināśaḥ, buddhināśāt praṇaśyati**<sup>168</sup>

Nārada is essentially repeating these verses in Sutra 44. In associating with such people, discussions will center on different types of cars, different types of houses, different types of clothes, and different types of jewelry. I recently saw an advertisement that said: Ears are not for hearing, ears are for earrings. And thus, desire grows. This will be the topic morning, noon, and night—materialism, consumerism, and comparison. Each time someone comes my way, the first thing I notice is the car that he drives or the brand of clothes she is wearing. So Nārada says that **kāma** (selfish desire), **krodha** (anger), **moha** (delusion), **smṛtibhramśa** (forgetting scriptural knowledge; assuming one is even studying scripture in the first place) are all inevitable when we keep such company. Nārada assumes you are all students of the scriptures because one of the pañca mahāyajñas is Brahma yajña, or scriptural study. It is one of our daily duties. In the Vedic tradition scriptural study is emphasized, whereas bhakti schools of philosophy emphasize nāma-sankīrtana. They are somewhat familiar with the scriptures and will quote them, but they discourage bhaktas from scriptural study. One should never discourage a bhakta from scriptural study because it is one of the prescriptions of Pañca Maha Yajña. But if we fall into the grip of kama and krodha, scriptural study will be forgotten. Then **buddhināśaḥ**—the destruction of the thinking intellect, and **śasarvanāśa**—this one does not appear in the Gītā, but it is supplied by Nārada and means total spiritual destruction. Swami Chinmayānanda put it very nicely when he said: “There are three types of people, animal-man, man-man, and God-man. The human being is a man-man. He can grow into a God-man or he can slip into an animal-man. Sliding into kama and krodha converts a man-man into an animal-man.” This is what is meant by **śasarvanāśa**. Therefore, Nārada's advice is whether you follow satsaṅga or not, may you begin by dropping duhsaṅga.

### \*\*\*End of Teaching 16\*\*\*

In this 3<sup>rd</sup> Chapter, Nārada is presenting dvaita bhakti as an indirect means for attaining advaita bhakti, which is synonymous with both advaita jñānam and mokṣa. Previously, Nārada had touched on the topic of informal dvaita bhakti, in which devotees do not follow any śāstric rules, through his mention of the Gopis. In the present chapter, Nārada is introducing formal dvaita bhakti, as described in the prasthanatrayam, and particularly the Bhagavad Gītā. Whether one chooses to practice informal dvaita bhakti or not, the formal dvaita bhakti described in the Bhagavad Gītā is compulsory and should be clearly differentiated from the dvaita bhakti of various Āgama (i.e., non-Vedic scripturally based) darśananams, collectively known as the bhakti schools of philosophy. There are several Āgama-based bhakti darśananams that talk about dvaita bhakti, but we should be extremely careful, as their dvaita bhakti is our pūrvapakṣa. We should only follow dvaita bhakti as clearly presented in the Bhagavad

<sup>168</sup> For a person who dwells on the sense objects, a fancy toward them arises. From fancy, desire is born. From desire, anger arises. From anger arises delusion; from delusion, the loss of memory; from the loss of memory, the loss of discrimination; and because of the loss of discrimination, he perishes.

Gītā. That dvaita alone is the traditional form accepted by Vedanta darśanam. One may wonder how to tell whether a particular version of dvaita bhakti is the proper one, because just as a real diamond and a fake one look very similar, we may have difficulty differentiating between proper and improper forms of dvaita bhakti. As I have often said, traditional dvaita bhakti will always encourage Vedanta vicāra, and the gurus of this proper dvaita bhakti will advise developing an interest in Vedanta vicāra. This is precisely why in the Bhagavad Gītā, Kṛṣṇa talks about the jijñāsu bhakti after dealing with āṛta and arthārthī bhakti. The term ‘jijñāsu bhakti’ refers to consistent and systematic Vedanta vicāra. By contrast, the non-traditional dvaita bhakti practiced by the bhakti schools of philosophy will never encourage Vedanta vicāra. They will even directly or indirectly discourage Vedanta vicāra. This should be a clear signal that we have fallen out of the realm of Vedanta darśanam and into the realm of bhakti darśanam. The Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad (4.4.22) tells us:

**tametam vedānuvacanena brāhmaṇā vividiṣanti yajñena dānena tapasānāśakenaitameva veditvā<sup>169</sup>**

The more pūjā and so on that I do, the more I will become interested in Vedanta vicāra. One should also associate with other bhaktas who encourage bhakti as a limb of Vedanta vicāra; such association falls under satsaṅga. Keeping company with those who discourage Vedanta vicāra is not satsaṅga. This is why Nārada talked about the importance of satsaṅga, and thereafter presented its complementary value: avoiding duhsaṅga. I would consider duhsaṅga to include anyone who discourages Vedanta vicāra. We need not criticize such people. We can do namaskāra to them, we can listen to their bhajans, but it is best to confine ourselves to their bhajans. When they begin to talk without traditional knowledge, their talking will only confuse. Nāma-sankīrtana is wonderful, but when it is preceded or followed by talking that lacks knowledge of the prasthanatrayam, their talking is bound to mislead. Therefore, the advice is that you can participate in the nāma-sankīrtana of the bhakti schools, but be wary of their speech, as it can easily fall into the category of duhsaṅga. As Sutra 43 says, **duhsaṅgaḥ sarvathaiva tyājyaḥ**—all company that is not in harmony with the values and teachings of Vedanta should be renounced.

There are two types of duhsaṅga. First is the type that discourages Vedanta. We must always bear in mind that the Vedas include both Veda pūrva-bhaga, the early part or Karma Kanda, and Veda anta-bhaga, the latter part or Jñāna Kanda. The Veda pūrva-bhaga is a stepping-stone to Veda anta-bhaga. When we start drifting from Vedanta, the Veda pūrva will itself become redundant and meaningless. Thus, anything that takes us away from Vedanta can be considered duhsaṅga. The second type of duhsaṅga is association with āṛta-kama pradhāna, people who prioritize material wealth and physical enjoyment over dharma and moksha. How do we differentiate a materialistic person from a non-materialistic one? Those who have four puruṣārthas fall within the Vedic tradition, which accepts all four as important. Materialistic people accept only two puruṣārthas: āṛta and kama. They reject dharma, and of course, they reject mokṣa. Never associate with such people. Nārada tells us that when we associate with such people we unwittingly slide down. It’s like slipping while trekking in the Himalayas. It is a very deep slope and you can see the Ganga down below: one wrong step and you fall down helplessly. I had an experience once while walking along the Nachiketa Tal in Uttarkashi. I stepped on some dry leaves with my right foot and slipped. While trying to catch myself with the other foot, I again stepped on some dry leaves, so both feet slipped and I wound up sitting on the ground. For support, I touched the ground with one hand, which also wound up on some dry leaves, so I kept sliding. I had a nice ride for a good 10 or 15 feet, there was no pain or anything because I was on a pile of dry leaves, the kind children play in. But thank God that after a distance there was the stump of a plant. I held that stump and saved myself. What I am trying to say is that sometimes we slip and even though we know we are slipping, we have no way of stopping ourselves. Similarly, Kṛṣṇa says (Gītā, 2.62-2.63):

<sup>169</sup> The brahmanas seek to know the self through the study of the Vedas, sacrifices, charity, and austerity consisting of dispassionate enjoyment of sense objects.

**dhyāyato viṣayān puṃsaḥ saṅgasteṣūpajāyate  
saṅgāt sañjāyate kāmaḥ kāmāt krodho' bijayāte  
krodhād bhavati saṃmohāḥ, saṃmohāt smṛtivibhramah  
smṛtibhramśād buddhināśaḥ, buddhināśāt praṇāśyati<sup>170</sup>**

**Sutra 45. taraṅgāyitā apīme saṅgāt samudrāyanti**

***Rising like waves from material association, these bad effects amass into a great ocean of misery.***

Nārada gives another warning. All doṣas—kama, anger, delusion, forgetting our spiritual goal, and loss of the faculty of discrimination—do not appear in their full scale initially. They gradually build in us without our knowledge or awareness. They are like certain diseases in which there are no apparent symptom, but then we go for a test and learn that the disease has already become full-blown. Similarly, these negative tendencies, or āsurī-sampat (i.e., rajasic and tamasic traits) do not come on suddenly. Take anger, for example: the more you dwell on it—“he said this, she said that”—the more it grows to rage or even hatred. Therefore, Nārada is warning: **taraṅgāyitā apīme**. All these negative tendencies, even though they appear like a small ripple in the ocean, when they are fanned by the wind they can gradually grow into a huge tidal wave, sometimes becoming a tsunami. Kama is initially not very strong and we can nip it in the bud, but if we repeatedly dwell on the sense object that kama becomes fully nourished. Thereafter, the attachment becomes so powerful that we are never able to give up the object. So initially we may say: “It is nice, it is attractive,” an objective sort of statement. Then we say: “It is worth having.” And the next stage is: “I desperately want it.” Until finally it is: “Without it, I cannot even survive.” These are the four stages of every āsurī-sampat. And these four stages will unfold not by themselves, but with our cooperation and collusion. The scriptures say that even when we are still in the first stage, it is time to set a sankalpa (intention). There is an old proverb that says: treat a loose stitch in time and you save the entire cloth. If we do not nip desire in the bud, the pressure of it becomes very difficult to handle. Therefore, Nārada says: **taraṅgāyitā apīme saṅgāt samudrāyanti**—even though all of the above (i.e., **kāmakrodha moha smṛtibhramśa buddhināśasarvanāśa**; Sutra 44) may initially appear like feeble ripples, through continued association they become like a swelling ocean or tidal wave. Hence, **duḥsaṅgaḥ sarvathaiva tyājyaḥ**—forever avoid the company of those who are a bad influence (Sutra 43).

**Sutra 46. kastarati kastarati mājām? yaḥ saṅgaṃtyajati yo mahānubhāvaṃ  
sevate nirmamo bhavati**

***Who can cross? Who can cross beyond illusion? One who abandons material association, serves the sages, and becomes selfless.***

<sup>170</sup> For a person who dwells on the sense objects, a fancy toward them arises. From fancy, desire is born. From desire, anger arises. From anger arises delusion. From delusion, the loss of memory. From the loss of memory, the loss of discrimination. Because of the loss of discrimination, he perishes.

Satsaṅga pravṛtti and duhsaṅga nivṛtti are both extremely important for the bhakta-cum-spiritual seeker. Only then can this person cross over māyā, which is the cause of saṁsāra. Māyā is a powerful temptress that can easily deceive us. That is why Kṛṣṇa warns (Gītā, 7.14):

**daivī hyeṣā guṇamayī, mama māyā duratyayā  
mām eva ye prapadyante, māyām etāṁ taranti te**<sup>171</sup>

Kṛṣṇa gives a warning: māyā is my śakti and it is extremely difficult to cross over, and then he provides a solution: “Whoever associates with me, surrenders to me, will cross over.” But here Nārada is diverging slightly. He is saying: “You may want to surrender to God, but when you look around, you don’t see God anywhere. Therefore, rather than saying surrender to God, surrender to the mahatma, for this is as good as surrendering to Bhagavān. Bhagavatā śaranagati is as good as Bhagavat śaranagati. Thus by surrendering to satpuruṣas, one will cross over māyā. Nārada himself asks the question: **kastarati māyām**—who will cross over māyā? And this being an important question, he repeats it. (Strictly speaking, this is supposed to be the Nārada Bhakti *Sutra*. What is the definition of a Sutra? I don’t want to get into all the details here, but one of the important criteria for a sutra is it must be very short, or aphoristic. But even though this is the general rule, sometimes the authors, in their zeal, make the sutras very long. In the Brahma Sutra there are also some rare sutras that are very long. Here Nārada also forgets it is a sutra and the question ‘**kaḥ māyām tharati?**’ is repeated). To answer this question, Nārada offers a set of rules for becoming an intelligent dvaita bhakta and coming to advaita bhakti, beginning with Sutra 46 and ending with Sutra 49. Then in the 50<sup>th</sup> Sutra, he says: **saḥ tarati saḥ tarati**—whoever follows these instructions will cross over. Nārada asks the question twice and repeats the answer twice. He assures us that one will cross over provided these instructions are implicitly executed.

The first instruction that Nārada offers is: **yaḥ saṅgamtyajati**—watch your friends and associations (here ‘saṅga’ should be understood to mean ‘duhsaṅga’). What do your friends do to pass the time on their holidays? Do they assemble to sing Bhagavān’s praises or do they prefer to gamble? If you belong to such a group, renounce it today. Who says this? Nārada does. These are all wrong practices. The second rule is: **yaḥ mahānubhāvaṁ sevate**—either (the association) must be a jñanī bhakta, which is the ideal scenario, or at the very least a jijñāsu bhakta. Even association with ārta and arthārthī bhaktas is not advisable because they use religion to serve their own worldly needs, such as solving family problems, financial problems, or professional problems. Religion is not meant for such purposes. This is akin to bringing Ganga water home from Panch Prayag<sup>172</sup> and then using it to clean the bathroom. Sure you can use it, it is water after all. But when you have brought it all the way home, it is meant for a higher purpose. Religion and bhakti are not meant for solving worldly problems and attaining success in worldly pursuits; this is ārta-arthārthī bhakti and it is an underutilization of religion. Thus, a spiritual seeker should slowly reduce ārta and ārtartha bhakti and gradually come to jijñāsu bhakti, having the wisdom and strength to accept the results of karma. And we should not only be jijñāsu bhaktas but also have satsaṅga with jijñāsu bhaktas, who are not religious materialists but religious spiritualists. The greatest disadvantage of religious materialism, using religion to solve our problems and attain worldly success, is that such bhaktas are bound to remain in spiritual stagnation or even spiritual deterioration. Spiritual growth means using religion for sādhanā chatuṣṭaya sampatti (obtaining the fourfold qualification). One who does so is called a jijñāsu bhakta and mahanubhava (noble-minded). Anubhava—apprehension, direct perception, and fruition is glory, and may you increase your companionship with such glorious bhaktas, jijñāsu bhaktas and jñanī bhaktas. The third rule is **nirmamo bhavati**, which Lord Kṛṣṇa says repeatedly in the Gītā. Reduce your mamākara by handing over every object to Bhagavān. May you become the caretaker of your family members and your possessions. We don’t want you to be careless, but be a caretaker instead of being an owner. Drop

<sup>171</sup> This divine māyā of mine, which consists of three guṇas is indeed difficult to cross over. Only those people who surrender to me cross over this māyā.

<sup>172</sup> An expression used to connote a holy place in Uttarakhand in the Himalayas where five sacred rivers meet.

ownership by repeatedly meditating upon viṣvarūpa darśana yoga, wherein Kṛṣṇa says: “I am everything.” And let that prayer come from the innermost heart. It is not merely a lipstick to be worn on the lips. I own nothing. And all the Gopi vastrapaharanams must be seen from that spiritual angle. Giving up everything means all external things. At the time of sannyāsa, a sannyāsī has to become completely naked, throwing away all of his clothes. And thereafter, through Vedanta vicāra, he also hands over his body to Bhagavān. So give up the house, give up the clothes, and give up the body too. They are all symbolically presented through Gopi vastrapaharanam, which is nothing other than saṁnyāsāśrama. Therefore, don’t own anything. We can use things, but we should see ourselves only as leasees. And what is the contract length? Prārabdham. We can use things for the duration of prārabdham only, but not after that. As the old proverb says:

**runānubandha rūpeṇa paśu patrī sutālayaḥ runākṣaye kṣayayānti tatra k ā paridevanā**<sup>173</sup>

Runām literally means a debt. We must understand it as a contract. Because of some prārabdha contract, we are related to people as husband, wife, children, grandchildren, and so forth—they are all prārabdha contract-based and last only until the contract has run out. Let it be clear that the children are not yours. It is a disturbing fact, but it is a fact. Nothing is yours. If you consider yourself a real bhakta, this point needs to register clearly. Fake bhakti is used for getting things, whereas real bhakti is used for giving things up. To determine whether your bhakti is real or fake, ask yourself: Do I use bhakti to get things or do I use it to give things up? The more I use bhakti to get things, the more I misuse it. I am moving in the wrong direction. As Kṛṣṇa says to Arjuna (Gītā 18.66):

**sarvadharmān parityajya, mām ekaṁ śaraṇaṁ vraja  
ahaṁ tvā sarvapāpebhyaḥ, mokṣayiṣyāmi mā śucaḥ**<sup>174</sup>

Therefore, **nirmamaḥ bhavati**. This is not a physical giving up; it is only a mental and attitudinal mamākara bhāvana tyaga (attitude of abandoning the “my”-sense). This is Nārada’s third instruction.

**Sutra 47. yaḥ viviktasthānaṁ sevate yo loka-bandham unmūlayati yo  
nistraiguṇyo bhavati yo yogakṣemaṁ tyajati**

*[Who can cross beyond illusion?] That person who stays in a secluded place, cuts off attachment to mundane society at the root, becomes free from the influence of the three guṇas, and gives up craving for material gain and security.*

You can see how Nārada is borrowing from the Bhagavad Gītā to this point, and this Sutra is saying: **viviktasthānaṁ sevate**—may you take to seclusion once in a while, away from those things that you are used to having all the time. When we get used to having things all the time, like our cell phones, mamākara is gradually strengthened and becomes an integral part of us. We are willing to renounce everything, but we won’t renounce our cell phones (“I will put it in silent mode and I will only look at it”). We become hooked on so many things, Many of these things initially come as a luxury, but they soon turn into a necessity. Thus, we are traveling from dependence to more dependence. Once in a while, we must learn to drop these things and see whether we can be without them for a few days.

<sup>173</sup> Cattle, wife, children, and home are the result of previous birth bondage. Once the debt is annihilated there is no relationship and hence end of suffering in this saṁsāra.

<sup>174</sup> Having renounced all actions, seek me, the non-dual, as shelter. I shall liberate you from all sins. Do not grieve.

There was a retirement home run by a Swami who wanted to help senior citizens by getting them to break away from certain habits and engage in more spiritual activities. In this spirit, the retirement home had a no-TV policy and so most of the rooms remained vacant because nobody wanted to be without television. Why can't we take to seclusion, without watching TV, without radio, without newspaper, and without a cell phone. When I used to hold Vedanta camps, you should have seen people's struggle to hold onto their newspapers and phones. They were unwilling to renounce these things for just seven days. How attached we are! Therefore, Nārada says: may you learn to be without things for some time.

This instruction appears in the 13<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the Bhagavad Gītā, where Kṛṣṇa says (13.11):

**viviktadeśasevitvam, aratirjanasaṃsadi**<sup>175</sup>

As well as in the 18<sup>th</sup> Chapter (18.52):

**viviktasevī laghvāśī, yatavākkāyamānasaḥ  
dhyānayogaparo nityaṃ, vairāgyaṃ samupāśritaḥ**<sup>176</sup>

Nārada's instructions seem to be getting tougher and tougher! The next one is: **yaḥ loka-bandham unmūlayati**. So **viviktasthānaṃ** is learning to be without some of the things we are used to; that is, thing renunciation, and here Nārada is saying: **loka-bandham unmūlayati**—learn to be without any other person for some time. We are always moving from one person or another. May you learn to be ekākī, without any company or contact with others. We see this instruction in the Bhagavad Gītā (6.10) as well:

**yogī yuñjīta satatam, ātmānaṃ rahasi sthitaḥ  
ekākī yatacittātmā, nirāśīraparigrahaḥ**<sup>177</sup>

What typically happens is that we will be physically alone, but as we so often observe when walking down the street, nobody is really alone. People constantly have their cell phones attached to their ears. At home we use the landline and outside it's the mobile; we go to the cremation ground with our phones. And the bills keep coming until the very end. We always have to be talking to one person or another. Why can't we observe maunam (silence) for a day? Therefore, may you see whether it is possible to snap your connections with others for a time, because ultimately in sannyāsa, one does so for good. Nārada is not asking us to do this permanently, just for a day or two, or even a week—a temporary practice of sannyāsa. When Swami Chinmayānanda used to conduct his Vedanta camps, he would ask the campers to take solitary walks during the breaks to reflect upon the teachings. And what did people do? They would leave the ashram alone, but they would have made prior arrangements to meet up with their friends and spouses once outside. They were not able to walk alone for even an hour. This is called the problem of attachment. Therefore, Nārada says: **loka-bandham unmūlayati**—the one who uproots attachment to people [crosses over]. Here **loka** means family members, friends, and other relations. May you learn to live without them. Then comes: **yaḥ nistraiguṇyo bhavati**—free from any and all worldly desires other than mokṣa. This phrase is also borrowed from a famous Gītā verse (2.45):

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<sup>175</sup>...seclusion, non-indulgence in the company of others.

<sup>176</sup> Resorting to a secluded place, taking limited food, restraining the speech, the body, and the mind, taking to detachment, one should be ever devoted to dhyānayoga.

<sup>177</sup> Remaining alone in solitude with a restrained mind and body, without any desire, and without any possession, a yogī should constantly engage the mind in meditation.

**traiguṇyaviṣayā vedāḥ, nistraiguṇyo bhavārijuna  
nirvadvando nityassattvasthaḥ, niryogakṣema ātmavān**<sup>178</sup>

In his commentary on this verse, Śaṅkarācārya writes that traiguṇya means anything within the three guṇas. In other words, all worldly objects, worldly people, and worldly relationships fall under traiguṇyam. All the worldly puruṣārthas—ārta, kama, and dharma—also fall under this and may you renounce your attachment to all of them. You cannot physically run away from them because we require food, clothing, shelter, and even people for living. Nārada is not talking about physically getting away, but mentally remembering that none of it really belongs to me. Let that remembrance be there. In the 5<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the Gītā, Kṛṣṇa defines the sannyāsī as (5.3):

**jñeyah sa nityasannyāsī, yo na dveṣṭi na kāṅkṣati  
nirdvandvo hi mahābāho, sukhaṃ bandhāt pramuscyate**<sup>179</sup>

Even a gr̥hastha is a sannyāsī if he lives in the family without attachment or hatred toward anyone. And the last one is: **yogakṣemaṃ tyajati**—yoga means acquisition of more and more possessions; it does not mean karma yoga, upāsana yoga, or bhakti yoga. The word ‘yoga’ here means parigraha (the sense of proprietorship over all possessions), of grabbing more and more and more. Once we add more things, what is the natural consequence? We have to maintain them. Anything we don’t use, we lose, including the body. Every object thus requires maintenance—even relationships require maintenance. All that maintenance-related worry and anxiety is called **kṣema**. All human worry falls under two basic types: one is acquisition anxiety and the other is maintenance anxiety. As long as these two worries occupy the mind, one cannot properly listen to Vedanta class. A **yogakṣema**-preoccupied mind cannot properly practice śravaṇaṃ. Then who will take care of these things, Swamiji? Kṛṣṇa gives the answer (Gītā, 9.22):

**ananyāścintayanto māṃ, ye janāḥ paryupāsate  
teṣāṃ nityabhiyuktānāṃ, yogakṣemaṃ vahāmyaham**<sup>180</sup>

Don’t worry too much about the future. Among couples, the discussions after 40 or 50 years of marriage are often about who will go first. And then they say: “If you go first, how will I manage?” And: “If I should go first, how will you manage?” Why worry? At the right time Bhagavān will give us the strength to handle it.

**\*\*\*End of Teaching 17\*\*\***

In this 3<sup>rd</sup> Chapter, Nārada is presenting formal dvaita bhakti as a means, or stepping-stone, toward the destination of advaita bhakti. I said that Nārada approves of informal dvaita bhakti as well, but that informal dvaita bhakti alone is not enough; it should be supplemented with formal dvaita bhakti, which alone will bring a person to jñānam and advaita bhakti. Formal dvaita bhakti refers to the bhakti disciplines prescribed by the traditional scriptures, the most important being the Bhagavad Gītā. Based on the Gītā, Nārada prescribes following formal dvaita bhakti, which consists of two important

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<sup>178</sup> The Vedas deal with the world of three guṇas. Be free from the desire for the world of three guṇas. Be free from the hold of the pairs of opposites. Be ever established in sattvaguṇa. Be free from the concern for acquisition and preservation. Be mindful.

<sup>179</sup> He who does not desire and does not hate is to be known as a permanent sannyāsī. Because one who is beyond the pairs of opposites is completely freed from bondage effortlessly.

<sup>180</sup> Those people who see me as non-different from them offer worship by dwelling on me. I take care of the yoga and kṣema of those ever-steadfast ones.

disciplines: karma yoga and upāsana yoga. This is compulsory for all who want to attain the spiritual destination. Of these two yogas, Nārada is highlighting karma yoga based on the Bhagavad Gītā. In particular, Nārada emphasizes an important śloka in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Chapter of the Gītā (Verse 45), which says:

**traiguṇyaviṣayā vedāḥ, nistraiguṇyo bhavāṛjuna  
nirvadvando nityasattvasthaḥ, niryogakṣema ātmavān**<sup>181</sup>

This is the pillar śloka of karma yoga, the sara, or essence, and foundation of karma yoga. In this verse, Kṛṣṇa uses the words **nistraiguṇyaḥ** and **niryogakṣemaḥ**, which are both introduced in Sutra 47. **Nistraiguṇyaḥ** is a technical word, which Śaṅkarācārya defines as: a karma yogī who is following the Karma Kanda of the Veda in preparation to enter the Jñāna Kanda. The Karma Kanda can be followed with different motives: for the worldly benefit of karma phalam, consisting of dharma, āṛta, and kama, or alternatively, without any interest in dharma-āṛta-kama, but as a stepping-stone to the Jñāna Kanda. This latter attitude of a karma yogī is called **nistraiguṇyaḥ**. Such a yogī wants to become guṇātīta, beyond or free of the guṇas. And Nārada also says **yogakṣemaṃ tyajati**, another term adopted from the same Gītā śloka, which says **niryogakṣema**.

In this context **yogaḥ** refers to acquisition of more and more things—expanding our base in terms of family, possessions, bank balance, and so forth. Grabbing more and more is called **yogaḥ**, and **kṣemaḥ** refers to the fact that having acquired more and more, there is a struggle to preserve and maintain that is even greater than the struggle to acquire. It is a lot like dieting: losing weight is almost impossible, but when we somehow manage to bring it down to some desired point, keeping it there is an even tougher task. Reducing both **yogaḥ** and **kṣemaḥ** of all varieties is crucial because both lead to preoccupation and worry, and a mind free from preoccupation and worry will be more available for śravaṇa, manana, and nididhyāsanam. Therefore, **niryogakṣemaḥ bhavati**. Naturally, when we reduce the possessions and relationships we have acquired for security, a sense of insecurity may bite us. When we choose to shed our possessions we may wonder: “Is what I have enough in these days of inflation and with medical expenses being what they are?” Lord Kṛṣṇa knows that when we reduce our preoccupation with **yogakṣema**, insecurity is bound to creep in and offers a solution (Gītā, 9.22):

**ananyāścintayanto mām, ye janāḥ paryupāsate  
teṣāṃ nityābhilyuktānām, yogakṣemaṃ vahāmyaham**<sup>182</sup>

The best life insurance is bhakti, or śaranagati (surrender) at the level of karma yoga. Nārada also incorporates several other disciplines mentioned in the Gītā, namely, **viviktasthānaṃ sevate**—finding solitude in oneself; **viviktasevī laghvāśī**—moderate eating; and **loka-bandham unmūlayati**—giving up attachments to those who are nearest and dearest. This last guidance may be especially disturbing to hear because we want to hold onto those people to whom we feel closest. Giving up attachment is not an easy thing. This is why Kṛṣṇa advises (Gītā, 13.10):

**asaktiranabhiṣvaṅgaḥ, putradāragṛhādiṣu**<sup>183</sup>

Relinquishing attachment to spouse, children, and grandchildren is all very painful, but spiritual growth involves such pain: no pain, no gain. These are unavoidable pains. If you want to grow out of individuality and embrace universality, ahaṅkāra and mamākāra must be loosened. The good news is

<sup>181</sup> The Vedas deal with the world of the three guṇas. Be free from desire of the world of the three guṇas. Be free from the hold of the pairs of opposites. Be ever established in sattvaguna. Be free from the concern for acquisition and preservation. Be mindful.

<sup>182</sup> Those people who see me as non-different from them offer worship by dwelling on me. I take care of the yoga and kṣema of those ever-steadfast ones.

<sup>183</sup> Dispassion and non-identification with son, wife, house, etc.

that very little needs to be done; their own behavior will gradually reduce our attachment. We need only to cooperate with Bhagavān. By the time we are old, the people in our lives will have all taught us what detachment is. Thus, the **loka-bandham unmūlayati** of the 47<sup>th</sup> Sutra is the **asaktiranabhiṣvaṅgaḥ** of the 13<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the Gītā.

**Sutra 48. yaḥ karmaphalaṃ tyajati karmāṇi sannyasyati tato nirdvandvo bhavati**

***[Who can cross beyond illusion?] That person who renounces material duties and their profits, and the hold of the pairs of opposites.***

Here, Nārada gives another three practices as part of formal dvaita bhakti or karma yoga. I will rearrange the order. First, we will take up the word **nirdvandvaḥ**, which was also given in the Bhagavad Gītā (2.45) as: **nirdvando nityasattvastaḥ**—be free from the hold of the pairs of opposites. **Nirdvandvaḥ** means may you transcend all the pairs of opposites: sukha/duḥkha (joy and sorrow), labha/alabha (gain and loss), jaya/parajaya (victory and defeat), māna/apamāna (pride and disgrace), saṃyoga/viyoga (merger and division). Life is a continuous experience of pairs of opposites and we have a tendency to develop rāga and dveṣa (longing and aversion) toward these pairs of opposites; indeed, rāga-dveṣa itself is the most powerful pair of opposites. If there is rāga for sukha, there is dveṣa for duḥkha; if there is rāga for labha, there is dveṣa for alabha; if there is rāga for māna, there is dveṣa for apamāna, and so on. Thus, rāga-dveṣa is the crowning pair of opposites. May you transcend all the pairs of opposites means may you avoid rāga-dveṣa toward all pairs of opposites. Learn to welcome all experiences brought on by our own prārabdha karma. No experience we go through is forcibly imposed by the Lord; rather, every experience Bhagavān gives is because we ourselves, knowingly or unknowingly, in the immediate past or in the remote past, have asked for it. Bhagavān only gives us what we have asked for because Bhagavān doesn't have rāga-dveṣa (Gītā, 9.29):

**samo'haṃ sarvabhūteṣu, na me dveṣyo'sti na priyaḥ**<sup>184</sup>

Any experience given is nothing but karma phalam, which is given by the Lord as a karma-phala-dhata (dispenser of the fruits of action). Anything we go through is the price we pay for our past deeds, therefore we must learn to accept it without resistance or reactivity. This is what is known as prasāda-bhāvana. Everything is Bhagavān's prasādam, or going one step further to the level of viṣvarūpa darśana yoga, everything is Bhagavān himself. Therefore, may you welcome prasāda-bhāvanaya or Īśvara bhāvanaya itself: **āgate svāgatam kuryāt nirgate na nivarayate**—whatever comes, welcome; of whatever goes, let go. May you appreciate all that comes your way with an open and unreactive mind. As Kṛṣṇa said (Gītā, 2.38):

**sukhaduḥkhe same kṛtvā lābhālābhau jayājayau  
tato yuddhāya yujyasva, naivaṃ pāpam avāpsyasi**<sup>185</sup>

The next bit of advice Nārada gives is **karmaphalaṃ tyajati**—one who renounces karma phalam (will cross over illusion). This is another technical topic taken from the Bhagavad Gītā. When we talk about renunciation of karma phalam, one question that frequently arises is: “The very purpose of karma is for karma phalam, so if I am supposed to renounce the karma phalam, why would I perform the karma at

<sup>184</sup> I am the same toward all beings. There is no one hateful to me nor dear to me.

<sup>185</sup> Regarding happiness and sorrow, gain and loss, victory and defeat alike, prepare for war. In this manner, you will not incur sin.

all?” Lord Kṛṣṇa gives the answer to this question. There are some karmas prescribed by the Vedas, which we have to perform. We have certain karmas that do not stem from our likes and dislikes, but rather, are required, such as paying taxes. The government doesn’t ask us whether we would like to pay taxes or not. Thus, some karmas are not based on our likes and dislikes; they are compulsory duties known as pañca mahāyajñas, which I will not elaborate upon here because you are already experts on the topic. So the first guidance is: May you never drop these compulsory actions because if you do, you will get a special kind of pāpam: pratyavāya pāpam, a negative result for the sin of omission.

With regard to compulsory actions, the Vedas describe two types of karma phalam. For all other karmas only one phalam is offered. The first phalam is materialistic benefit, or anātma rūpa, such as money, name, fame, position, possession, etc. The second phalam is spiritual benefit, such as mental purification (sādhāna chatuṣṭaya sampatti), guru prapti (attaining a qualified teacher), śravaṇa prapti (gaining the opportunity to study scripture). Thus, two benefits are offered for these pañca mahāyajñas alone. And of these two results, we get to choose only one—that is the trick; we cannot choose both. Choosing one automatically means losing the other because the two results are mutually exclusive. Therefore, I must perform the pañca mahāyajñas, or compulsory actions, because omitting them will bring pratyavāya pāpam, and I must examine and decide whether I am seeking the material result or the spiritual result. This choice is in my hands, not in Bhagavān’s. Bhagavān has given us a pen and two checkboxes and we place a tick mark in one of these boxes with our sankalpa. Bhagavān is all ears. Here a karma yogī must be very alert. What to do? One should deliberately renounce the material benefits offered by the pañca mahāyajñas, relegating material benefits to other types of karmas (e.g., going to the office to earn a salary). But when we perform the pañca mahāyajñas and a material result is offered, we must carefully say: “No, I don’t want it.” I need not even say that I want the spiritual result; the moment I reject the material result, I get the spiritual result by default. If we do not accept any of the material results, this karma puṇyam will automatically be credited to our spiritual puṇyam account. This is the principle of karma yoga being expounded by Nārada: **karmaphalam tyajati** should be understood as pañca mahāyajña lokika karma phalam tyajati—giving up the worldly benefits of performing the pañca mahāyajñas. We do this not by giving up the pañca mahāyajñas themselves, but by performing them with a clear and deliberate intention. This is a very important aspect of karma yoga. This is Nārada’s second bit of advice.

Finally, after following this for some time, one should give up even those karmas. Nārada says: **karmāṇi api sannyasyati**. In the traditional sense of the term, this means vividiśa sannyāsa (formal renunciation of family life). Quitting the family and taking to a monastic life, going to a gurukulam to engage in Vedānta śravaṇa manana nididhyāsana, and wearing the clothes of a sannyāsī. Although Nārada is formally prescribing vividiśa sannyāsa, we need not follow his advice literally. There are other versions of sannyāsa that I have previously discussed, which involve reducing karma and increasing śravaṇa manana nididhyāsanam. Even the pañca mahāyajñas are retained in grihasthāśrama, but they are gradually reduced. If a gr̥hastha renounces them completely, he will accrue pratyavāya pāpam. Thus, while remaining in gr̥hasthasrama one should continue performing the pañca mahāyajñas, but the scale and extent of these karmas can be gradually reduced. There is a very important caveat to this: the time saved by this scaling back the pañca mahāyajñas should not be put toward watching television, but rather, toward the study of Vedānta, cultivating mananam and nididhyāsanam. This process is called vividiśa sannyāsa. In other words, the proportion of jñāna yoga should be gradually increased while the proportion of karma yoga is gradually decreased. Karma yoga can be totally given up only under one condition alone—when one gives up grihasthāśrama itself. As long as I am in family life, karma yoga can never be totally given up, but the proportions can be shifted. I may begin with 25 percent jñāna yoga and 75 percent family duties, and gradually I try to tilt these proportion so that jñāna yoga becomes 75 percent and karma yoga is 25 percent. Therefore **karmāṇi api sannyasyati**, and vividiśa sannyāsa is also welcome, if possible.

**Sutra 49. yo vedānapi sannyasyati kevalamavicchinnānurāgam labhate**

***[Who can cross beyond illusion?] That person who renounces even the Vedas obtains exclusive and uninterrupted attraction for God.***

Let us assume that a person has become an actual vividiśa sannyāsī, or he has remained in grivasthashram itself but has shifted the proportion of time spent on śravaṇa, manana, and nididhyāsana, enabling him to gain jñānam. He will be called a gauna sannyāsī—this is not an external sannyāsī, but one who has mentally detached from everything. Kṛṣṇa defines a gauna sannyāsī as follows (Gītā, 5.3):

**jñeyah sa nityasannyāsī, yo na dveṣṭi na kāṅkṣati  
nirdvandvo hi mahābāho, sukhaṃ bandhāt pramucyate**<sup>186</sup>

Even while remaining in family life, if a person renounces worldly attachment (rāga-dveṣa), that gr̥hastha is a nitya (eternal) sannyāsī. And Kṛṣṇa makes a promise as well: that gr̥hastha gauna sannyāsī can also practice śravaṇa, manana, nididhyāsanaṃ while remaining in gr̥hasthāśramam and become a vidvat sannyāsī. From vividiśa sannyāsa to vidvat sannyāsī, he can become a jñānī sannyāsī also.<sup>187</sup> This person has become a vividiśa sannyāsa, or a gauna sannyāsī, and having gone through śravaṇa-mananam and gained jñānam, his life is only one of nididhyāsanaṃ. He does not even require śravaṇaṃ any longer. Therefore, **vedānapi sannyasyati**—he drops the Veda pramāṇam because a pramāṇam is relevant for generating knowledge; once knowledge is generated, the pramāṇam becomes irrelevant. As Śaṅkarācārya says (Nirvana Daśakam, Verse 7):

**na śāstā na śāstraṃ na śiṣyo na śikṣā  
na ca tvaṃ na cāhaṃ na cāyaṃ prapañcaḥ  
svarūpāvabodho vikalpāsahiṣṇuḥ  
tadekovaśiṣṭaḥ śiva kevaloham**<sup>188</sup>

And in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad (4.3.22): **...tatra Veda aveda bhavanti...**<sup>189</sup>

<sup>186</sup> He who does not desire and does not hate is to be known as a permanent sannyāsī. Because one who is beyond the pairs of opposites is completely freed from bondage effortlessly.

<sup>187</sup> Sannyāsa refers to the renunciation of everything and is of two types: vividiśa sannyāsa and vidvat sannyāsa. Vividiśa sannyāsa is taken for studying the scriptures ('vividiśa' means a desire to know). Vividiśa sannyāsa is a step toward vidvat sannyāsa ('vidvat' means advanced in knowledge). A vidvat sannyāsī is not interested in attaining anything for he or she has already attained firm self-knowledge. The vidvat sannyāsī does not hold on to anything, not even the idea: 'I am a jñāni'. He or she does not even have abhimāna, or pride, in self-knowledge. So whereas aim of vividiśa sannyāsa is committed study of the scriptures, the aim of vidvat sannyāsa is total renunciation.

<sup>188</sup> There is no ruler nor rule; no pupil nor training; no you nor I. This universe is not, for the realization of the true nature of the self does not tolerate any distinction. That one, the residue, the auspicious, the alone, am I.

<sup>189</sup> [In this state a father is no more a father, a mother is no more a mother, the worlds are no more the worlds, the gods are no more the gods,] the Vedas are no more the Vedas. [In this state a thief is no more a thief, the killer of a noble brahmin is no more a killer, a caṇḍāla [the lowest of men] is no more a caṇḍāla, a pulkaśāḥ [the son of a niṣāda or śūdra father and a kṣatriyā mother] is no more a pulkaśāḥ, a monk is no more a monk, an ascetic is no more an ascetic. This form of his is untouched by good and evil deeds, for he is then beyond all the woes of his heart.]

Thus, for the jñanī, the vidvat sannyāsī who is committed to nididhyāsana, even śāstra becomes irrelevant. Whereas Sutra 48 referred to the vividiśa sannyāsī, Sutra 49 refers to the vidvat sannyāsī. Thus, the journey is from karma yoga, to vividiśa sannyāsa, to vidvat sannyāsa, in which even the Vedas are renounced. From that point on, **avicchinnānurāgam labhate**—uninterrupted self-love obtains. The vidvat sannyāsī enjoys the ānanda born of jñānam. After advaita jñānam, does this jñanī derive ānanda from jīvātmā or paramātmā? After advaita jñānam, this distinction between jīvātmā and paramātmā itself becomes irrelevant; jñānam has reduced jīvātmā and paramātmā to eka-ātmā. You can say he derives ānanda from the Lord, who is non-different from himself, or that he derives ānanda from himself, who is non-different from the Lord. So eka-ātmā ānandam labhate—he achieves the limitlessness of one self. And the same is said in the Gītā (3.17):

**yastvātmaratireva syād, ātmatṛptasca mānavaḥ  
ātmanyeva ca santuṣṭaḥ, tasya kāryaṃ na vidyate**<sup>190</sup>

Kṛṣṇa uses the word **ātmaratiḥ**—loves the self—without specifying whether it is jīvātmā or paramātmā because at this level, the adjective ‘jīva’ or ‘parama’ is no longer relevant. If you want to say **paramātmaratiḥ**, that is your problem, for the jñanī it is **ekātmaratiḥ**.

And the Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad (3.1.4) says:

**ātma-kṛḍaḥ ātma-ratiḥ kriyāvān eṣa brahma-vidāṃ variṣṭhaḥ**<sup>191</sup>

Therefore, **avicchinnānurāgam labhate**—he enjoys unbroken love toward eka-ātmā. And what about anātmā? You say he only has love for eka-ātmā because jīvātmā and paramātmā have merged into eka-ātmā. What about anātmā? Does he have prema or dveṣa toward anātmā? In the jñanī’s vision, there is no anātmā that is different from ātmā. As it says in the Gītā (5.18 and 6.29, respectively):

**vidyāvinayasampanne, brāhmane gavi hastini  
śuni caiva śvapāke ca, paṇḍitāḥ samadarśinaḥ**<sup>192</sup>

**sarvabhūtastham ātmānaṃ, sarvabhūtāni cātmani  
ikṣate yogayuktātmā, sarvatra samadarśanaḥ**<sup>193</sup>

The so-called anātmās are also nothing but ātmā; therefore, he loves anātmā, too. In the jñanī’s vision, anātmā is also ātmā, therefore his love is universal love. His self-love is equal to God-love, and his God-love is equal to universal love: self-love, God-love, and universal love have all merged into one because there is no question of a separate self, a separate God, and separate universe: jīva-jagat-Īśvara bheda is gone. Therefore, **avicchinnānurāgam labhate**—he enjoys unbroken love of God. Because this is a bhakti sutra, we will translate this as ‘unbroken love of God,’ in the Vedānta grantha we would say ‘unbroken love of the self.’ And if I am giving a talk at the Rotary Club, I will say unbroken love of the entire society.

<sup>190</sup> However, suppose there is a man who loves the self alone, is happy with the self alone, and who is contented with the self alone. There is nothing to be accomplished for him.

<sup>191</sup> In every breath, a kriyavan sharply watches the indwelling self, which is nothing less than the universal self.

<sup>192</sup> The wise see the same brahman in a brahmin who has knowledge and humility, in a cow, in an elephant, in a dog, and in a dog-eater.

<sup>193</sup> One whose mind is disciplined through meditation perceives the ātmā in all beings and all beings in the ātmā. He has the same vision everywhere.

Remember we have to interpret these sutras very carefully. If we are careless, these sutras can create confusion. If we hand these sutras over to the bhakti schools of philosophy, they will interpret them completely differently. We are interpreting them in keeping with śrūti-yukti-anubhava, which produces this picture. If we read them through the lens of the bhakti schools of philosophy, they will be seen in a totally different color. For example, in our approach, we say that informal dvaita bhakti is permitted, but that it must be supplemented with formal dvaita bhakti, which is to be followed by Vedanta śravaṇa, manana, and nidhidhyāsanā, which will lead to advaita bhakti. This is the Vedantic route. By contrast, bhakti schools of philosophy will always emphasize informal dvaita bhakti. Formal dvaita bhakti is given short shrift by them, and they will discredit śravaṇa, manana, nidhidhyāsanā. The bhakti schools will always present informal dvaita bhakti as a direct means to mokṣa, and if we are not alert their stories can create serious misunderstanding. Whether it is the stories of Nyanars or Alvars, invariably we find a narrative in which bhaktas are forbidden from entering the temples and are disrespected by the priests who know the scriptures and pūjās and follow formal dvaita bhakti. The story will then end with Bhagavān rooting for this ostracized bhakti, and the priests and pūjāris carrying the bhakti on their shoulders in glory. No doubt this storyline amounts to a glorification of informal bhakti, but unknowingly something else is happening: if we are not alert, we may find ourselves gradually and unwittingly losing respect for all of the formal pūjās and ceremonies, and developing the idea that informal dvaita bhakti is superior to formal dvaita bhakti, or even that formal dvaita bhakti can be renounced. If formal dvaita bhakti itself is renounced, what to say of Vedanta vicāra? We must be careful to avoid this trap.

These informal dvaita bhaktas will discredit karma yoga, pañca mahāyajñas, nitya pūjā, sandhyavandanam,<sup>194</sup> and Vedanta śravaṇa-manana. They will argue that you need only to love Bhagavān morning, afternoon, and night, and Bhagavān himself will appear and carry you to mokṣa. This is typical of the bhakti school of philosophy and it is a trap we must be careful to avoid. We should respect Nandanar and informal bhakti, but we should remember that karma yoga and pañca mahāyajña are important, and must all be followed by Vedanta śravaṇa, manana, nidhidhyāsanam, which will ultimately lead to advaita bhakti. The **avicchinnānurāgam** that Nārada is referring to here should not be mistaken for iṣṭa-devatā dvaita bhakti. Rather, it should be understood as Vedanta nidhidhyāsanam. This alone is in keeping with śrūti, yukti, and anubhava, otherwise known as Vedanta darśanam. If we interpret it the other way, we are treating Vedanta darśanam as the pūrvapakṣa and bhakti darśanam as the siddhānta. There are a lot of bhakti schools of philosophy floating around and as students of Vedanta, we must know how to discriminate between Vedanta darśanam and bhakti darśanam. So **vedānapi sannyasyati** comes after karma yoga, upāsana yoga, and Vedanta śravaṇa-mananam. And **avicchinnānurāgam** means aham brahmasmi nidhidhyāsanam. It means ānanda svarūpaḥ aham. **Avicchinnānurāgam** means nidhidhyāsanam. The Nārada Bhakti Sutra is a tricky text and we should be very alert to understanding the meaning of all these sutras properly. And what will happen if we follow Nārada's instructions from the previous four Sutras? Nārada tells us in the final sutra of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Chapter:

**Sutra 50. sa tarati sa tarati sa lokāmṣṭārayati**

***Such a person certainly crosses [beyond illusion], and he also helps all the world to cross.***

Here, Nārada supplies the answer to the question that he himself raised in Sutra 46: **kaḥ māyām**

<sup>194</sup> Sandhyavandanam literally means salutation to Sandhya, the three transition times of day. Traditional sandhyavandanam is a Veda-based practice that combines specific mantras, prāṇayama (breathing practice), and dhyana (meditation). It is practiced three times daily (for about 10 to 15 minutes): just before sunrise (prātaḥsaṃdhyā), at noon (mādhyānika), and just before sunset (sāyaṃsaṃdhyā). Vedic saints believed that it is those times of the time that the mind & body is fully alert, and we could leverage those periods to strengthen the mind.

**tarati? kaḥ māyām tarati?**—who will cross over māyā? He says: **saḥ tarati**. Here, **saḥ** refers to the person who follows the disciplines mentioned in Sutras 46 through 49 in sequential order; that is, avoiding duḥsaṅga, then taking to satsaṅga, then following karma yoga consisting of the pañca mahāyajñas, then gradually and proportionally reducing karma yoga and coming to jñāna yoga, otherwise known as Vedānta vicāra śravaṇa, manana, nididhyāsana. Finally, one transcends the Veda pramanam and dwells in the Vedāntic teaching. As Śaṅkarācārya says (Nirvāṇaṣaṭkam, Verses 1):

**manobuddhyahaṃkāra cittāni nāhaṃ  
na ca śrotrajihve na ca ghrāṇanetre  
na ca vioma bhūmir na tejo na vāyuh  
cidānandarūpaḥ śivo'ham śivo'ham**<sup>195</sup>

Śiva prema and ātmā prema become identical for this jñānī. Kṛṣṇa prema and ātmā prema become identical for this jñānī. This is called nididhyāsanaṃ. Thus, by following this progression: **saḥ tarati**—he crosses beyond māyā or avidya. Nārada even extends a guarantee and says, certainly he will cross over. And not only will he cross over, **saḥ lokāṃstārayati**—he will be so strong that he will help others to cross over saṃsāra as well.

### \*\*\*End of Teaching 18\*\*\*

With Sutra 50, we completed the 3<sup>rd</sup> Chapter of Nārada Bhakti Sutra, titled (Para)Bhakti Sādhānani. Several sādhānas were enumerated in this chapter, all of which fall under formal dvaita bhakti, which is presented in the Bhagavad Gītā as karma yoga. In the context of bhakti, karma yoga is called formal dvaita bhakti sādhānam and is based on the traditional texts. This dvaita bhakti, in the form of karma yoga, is presented as the sādhānam for advaita bhakti, which is synonymous with advaita jñānam. We should carefully note that dvaita bhakti, otherwise known as karma yoga, does not lead directly to advaita bhakti. There is no direct road connecting dvaita bhakti and advaita bhakti. If you wanted to go to Jaipur from Chennai, you'd have to take a connecting flight to Delhi first. Similarly, there is no direct flight to advaita bhakti from the dvaita bhakti airport. If you board the flight with such an intention, you will be left hanging. To get to advaita bhakti, you have to go through an intermediary station called jñāna yoga, otherwise known as Vedānta śravaṇa, manana nididhyāsanaṃ. This should register with crystal clarity; only then will our understanding be aligned with Vedānta darśanam. The moment we try to skip jñāna yoga, we are no longer talking about Vedānta darśanam and have unwittingly landed in the bhakti school of philosophy.

There are many bhakti schools of philosophy called bhakti darśanani. The only common feature between bhakti darśanam and Vedānta darśanam is that both talk about Rama-bhakti, Kṛṣṇa-bhakti, and so on. The two are similar insofar as they both talk about bhakti, but their underlying philosophies are fundamentally different. We should clearly note that we don't accept any one of the bhakti darśanam philosophies, as most of them are based on Āgama sāstrani. Śaṅkarācārya and Vyasācārya—another great Guru, a Viṣṇu avatar—took pains to analyze the Āgamas in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Chapter of the Brahma Sutras. Therein, Śaṅkarācārya examines several bhakti schools of philosophy and says they are wonderful because they talk about bhakti, pūjā, temple, nāma-sankīrtana, and so on, but that we must remember that their philosophy is against śrūti, yukti, and anubhava. Śaṅkarācārya says: take their bhakti teachings—take their nāma-sankīrtana, their bhajans, their nama upadeśa (instructions on the process of chanting), etc. But when it comes to mokṣa, kindly refrain from following them. This is analogous to our view of Patanjali's yoga. Patanjali's yoga also has two aspects, one of which is ashtanga yoga, and Śaṅkarācārya says learn it and practice it, that is wonderful. But when you want mokṣa, don't follow yoga philosophy. Whereas yoga sādhāna is acceptable, yoga darśanam is not because they talk about jīvātmā bahutvam (the plurality of individual souls), they talk about jagat

<sup>195</sup> I am not the mind, the intellect, thought, or the ego; I am not the organ of hearing, tasting, smelling, or seeing; I am not the sky, the earth, the fire, or the air; I am the ever-pure blissful consciousness; I am Śiva, I am Śiva.

satyatvam (the truth of the creation), they talk about jīvātmā-paramātmā bheda (the difference between the jiva and the self). In short, their philosophical foundations are shaky. Practice yoga but don't follow their philosophy. Similarly, there are so many people out there talking about bhakti. Listen to them, sing their bhajans, but don't follow their philosophical fundamentals. And what is the problem with doing so? They talk about permanent duality. Just as we accept yoga sādhanā but reject yoga darśanam, accept bhakti sādhanā but never accept bhakti darśanam. Śaṅkarācārya says follow cakani rājā mārgamu—the beautiful, royal path. Follow Vedanta darśanam, which includes dvaita bhakti, but which adds that from dvaita bhakti we need to come to Vedanta śravaṇa, manana, and nididhyāsana: Vedantic self-inquiry under the guidance of an ācārya. That is the Vedic instruction.

And which ācārya or guru? The Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad (1.2.12) tells us:

**tad-vijñānārthaṃ sa gurum eva abhigacchet  
samiṭ-pāṇiḥ śrotriyaṃ brahmaṇiṣṭam**<sup>196</sup>

The śrotriyaṃ brahmaṇiṣṭam guru, who will teach, as the Kaivalya Upaniṣad says (Verses 16-17):

**yatparaṃ brahma sarvātmā viśvasyāyatanaṃ mahat  
sūkṣmātsūkṣmataraṃ nityaṃ tattvameva tvameva tat  
jāgratsvapnasuṣṭyādiprapañcaṃ yat prakāśate  
tadbrahmāhamiti jñātva sarvabandhaiḥ pramucyate**<sup>197</sup>

That is called advaita bhakti. Therefore, the sādhanas are: dvaita bhakti and karma yoga, which should be followed by vividiśa sannyāsa (as mentioned in Sutra 48) if possible, and later by vidvat sannyāsa (Sutra 49). To be sure, vidvat sannyāsa does not mean renouncing wise people; it means renouncing ignorance as a wise person. Renouncing ahaṅkāra and mamākāra, and ultimately, renouncing jīvātmā-paramātmā bheda. As it says in the Taittiriya Upaniṣad (Brahmavalli, 2.7):

**asadvā idamagra āsīt  
tato vai sadajāyata  
tadātmānaṃ svayamakuruta  
tasmāttathsukṛtamucyata iti  
yadvai tathsukṛtam  
raso vai saḥ  
rasaṃ hyevāṃ labdhvānandī bhavati  
ko hyevānyāt kaḥ prāṇyāt  
yadeṣa ākāśa ānando na syāt  
eṣa hyevānandayāti  
yada hyevaiṣa etastminnadrśye'nātmye'nirukte'nīlayane'bhayaṃ pratiṣṭhāṃ vindate  
atha so'bayam gato bhavati  
yada hyevaiṣa etasminnudaramantaraṃ kurute  
atha tasya bhayaṃ bhavati  
tattveva bhayaṃ viduṣo'manvānasya  
tadapyeṣa śloko bhavati**<sup>198</sup>

<sup>196</sup> [To understand the Truth], one must humbly approach a proper teacher, who is learned in the Vedas and having made that knowledge his own revels in it.

<sup>197</sup> That which is the supreme self, the soul of all, the support of the universe, subtler than the subtle and eternal—that is thyself and thou art That. That which manifests the phenomena, such as the states of wakefulness, dream, and deep sleep, I am that self—realizing this, one is liberated from all bondage.

<sup>198</sup> In the beginning [not the start of any age, but the first in order], this was indeed non-being. From that, verily, being sprang up. That of itself assumed a self. Therefore, It is called the self-made or the well made [brahman, being the cause *par*

Whenever you read bhakti literature, you should consult the Upaniṣads in parallel, using them as a lens of interpretation. If one follows karma yoga, vividiśa sannyāsa, and vidva sannyāsa and discovers jīvātmā-paramātmā aikyam (oneness), then what happens? Nārada concludes: **saḥ tarati saḥ tarati**. Sanskrit students will note that in the four previous sutras, beginning with Sutra 46, the relative pronoun **yaḥ**, meaning ‘whoever,’ is used. A relative pronoun indicates the sentence is incomplete. Therefore all these sutras are incomplete; we have to complete the relative pronoun by adding **saḥ**, meaning ‘that one,’ which appears in the 50<sup>th</sup> Sutra. Therefore, what will happen to that one who follows all the sādhanās mentioned in Sutras 46-49—namely, informal dvaita bhakti, formal dvaita bhakti, vividiśa sannyāsa, and vidvat sannyāsa? **Tarati**—crosses over. **Saḥ māyām tarati**—he will cross beyond illusion. And not only does the one who has crossed over māyā become a wise person, **saḥ lokāmstārayati**—he also becomes qualified to help others cross over as well. He becomes an ācārya. And with that, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Chapter comes to a close.

#### **Chapter 4: Prema Nirvacanam (The Definition of Love; Sutras 51-66)**

**Sutra 51. anirvacanīyaṃ premasvarūpam**

***The essential nature of pure love of God is beyond description.***

This chapter is titled *Prema Nirvacanam*, the Definition of Love. The previous chapters were titled *Bhakti Svarūpam* (The Nature of Bhakti), *Bhakti Mahatvam* (The Glory of Bhakti), and *Bhakti Sādhanani* (The Process or Means of Achieving Bhakti). The 4<sup>th</sup> Chapter is talking about Bhakti Nirvacanam, but the word ‘prema’ is used in place of the word ‘bhakti.’ We should note that Nārada uses the words ‘prema’ and ‘bhakti’ interchangeably, and he can afford to use them this way because in Sutra 2 he defined bhakti as paramaprema svarūpa. Thus, throughout the text, bhakti and prema are synonymous. So when we encounter the word ‘prema’ we should be clear that it is something distinct from the word ‘love’ that gets tossed around in the popular media. Don’t think of romantic love or any other worldly context. Nārada is using the word ‘prema,’ or love, in the context of Bhagavān.

This chapter is titled *The Definition of Love* and Nārada starts it by saying that love is undefinable. Imagine a whole crowd is gathering to hear him give his definition of love, and he says that love is that which cannot be defined. What an anticlimax! Anyway, Vedānta has analyzed love very thoroughly, particularly in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad. According to Vedānta, love is nothing but ānanda expressed outwardly as a mental attitude. This alone is called love. Thus, when I say that I love something—be it a person, a pet, a place, a time, or a condition—I am saying that in the presence of that object that I claim to love, at least for now, I feel happy. Therefore, whenever the attitude of love is expressed, there is ānanda in my mind. Vedānta says that ānanda and love always coexist. When ānanda is experienced inside, love is expressed toward those external conditions, such as people, material objects, conditions, etc. Thus, love is expressed ānanda. There is no difference between ānanda and prema. When I say that I love someone, I have ānanda, and when I have ānanda inside, I express it at that time as love.

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*excellence*]. He truly is the flavor that is the essence of existence. Surely by grasping the flavor, this one, the individual soul, becomes blessed. Who indeed would breathe, who would remain alive if this bliss was not in the ether. Indeed, it is he and he alone that causes blessedness. Now, the individual soul becomes fearless only when it obtains a firm and peaceful ground in that invisible, selfless, unutterable, supportless reality. Whenever it assumes the smallest amount of separation, it has fear. That is why even a wise person has fear in those moments when he is unreflective.

Once I have experienced the connection between the external loved condition and the internal experienced ānanda, I posit a cause-effect relationship. Thereafter, my aim is to have ānanda not only now but all the time. Therefore, my struggle becomes to maintain the loved, lovable condition because I have assumed a cause-effect relationship. If it is a person, I want to meet that person often. I want to meet and meet and meet and meet. And then what? I want to keep that person near me by striking up a relationship. Thereafter, certain things happen and a story forms. This is called saṃsāra because the cause-effect relationship was actually a misconception. Similarly, if it is an animal, I want to buy it and keep it as a pet. Or if it is a place, such as Chennai in December, I want to come back again next December. So I come back and enjoy it again in the following December and then decide to buy a house. Then April, May, June, and July come around, and suddenly I find myself wanting to escape Chennai.

Vedanta says that love is nothing but expressed ānanda. Because ānanda and love are one and the same, and because ānanda is of two types, love must also be of two types. To understand love, we must first try to understand ānanda. Once we understand ānanda, all the conditions and rules can be extended to love as well. There is an analysis in the Taittirīya Ānanda Mimāṃsa, which deals with the two types of ānanda. The first type is original ānanda, or bimbānanda, and is my own nature. When this very same ānanda gets reflected in the mind under conducive conditions, it is reflected love, or pratibimba ānanda. Thus, ānanda is of two types: ānanda ātmā (ātmānanda) and ānanda kośa (koshānanda). Similarly, prema or love is of two types. One is original love, or bimbaprema, which is the very nature of ātmā, sat-cit-ānanda. When this love, which is my very nature, gets reflected in the mind under conducive conditions, it is experienced as reflected love, or pratibimba prema.

When we analyze the nature of pratibimbānanda, we find that it has three defining characteristics. Pratibimbānanda is samvadyam (experiential), meaning it requires an object. Pratibimbānanda is anityam (temporary); that is, it comes about only in the presence of certain conducive conditions. Pratibimbānanda is sātiśayātvam (graded); for example, there is priya, the happiness that arises from the mere site of the desired object; then moda, the happiness one experiences from obtaining the desired object; and pramoda, the happiness one gets from the actual enjoyment of the desired object. By contrast, with bimbānanda these conditions—experiential, temporary, graded—do not apply. The same principle can be extended to pratibimba prema. When original love is reflected in the mind, it is also experiential, temporary, and graded. That is why in Bhaja Govindaṃ, Śaṅkarācārya says (Verse 4):

**āvadvittopārjana saktāḥ  
stāvannija parivāro raktāḥ  
paścājjīvati jarjara dehe  
vārtāṃ ko'pi na pṛcchati gehe**<sup>199</sup>

We say “honey, honey,” but when the money goes, the honey goes. First I love you and then I unlove you. So reflected love is anityam, or temporary. Pratibimba prema is also graded. If there are several people around, we can always place them in a rank-ordered list. We may not declare this list aloud, but if someone were to ask us: “If you had to live the rest of your life with one person...?” We would find that we actually do have a first preference, a second preference, and so on. We have these preferences because pratibimba prema is subject to gradation. Even though we casually write “Dearest so-and-so,” it is not so. Thus, pratibimba prema has the same three features as pratibimbānanda: it is experiential, temporary, and graded. By contrast, original love, or bimbaprema, which is the same as ātmā ānanda and is my very svarūpam, is not experiential. It is not an object because it happens to be

<sup>199</sup> So long as a man is fit and able to support his family, see the affection all those around him show. But no one at home cares to even have a word with him when his body totters due to old age.

my very nature. Śaṅkarācārya analyzes this in his commentary on the final verse of the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad (3.9):

**vijñānam ānandam brahma, rātir dātuḥ parāyaṇaṃ tiṣṭhamānasya tadvidah<sup>200</sup>**

Thus, original love is not experiential because it is myself. Original love is also not temporary because it is the very nature of ātmā, which is eternal. If ātmā is nityam, then ātmā-svarūpa-prema is also nityam. Don't ask how to experience it because the moment you talk about experience, it has become a temporary object. Experiential love is necessarily anityam, even the love we have for our own body. We will only love it as long as it is serving our purposes. But suppose in old age we acquire a certain disease that is incurable, painful, incurs exorbitant hospital expenses, and causes trouble to those around us. What will be our prayer? Whether stated explicitly or not:

**anāyāsēna maraṇam vinādainyēna jīvanam  
dēhi mē krūpayā Śambho tvayī bhaktim acancalam<sup>201</sup>**

May this body die soon so that I am free from trouble and others are free from trouble, too. The honeymoon is over, as they say. In this case, the honeymoon with the body is over. Our love for the body is temporary because the body is an object. Under certain conditions, the body can give one the sense that it has the capacity to reflect ānanda, but when the body is sick it cannot give ānanda. Therefore, original love is permanent. Original love is not an experienceable object, it is myself. And original love is not subject to gradation, it is ekaḥ (one).

On this basis, when we want to define original or pure love, which is the very nature of ātmā, we can use the same five features that we use to define sat, cit, and ānanda: (1) Pure love is not a part, product, or property of the mind; (2) Pure love is an independent principle that pervades the mind when the conditions are ideal, making the mind a loving mind; (3) Pure love is not limited by the boundaries of the mind; (4) Pure love continues to exist even after the mind is resolved. That is why in deep sleep we have love. Love of what? Love of deep sleep. Does anyone experience duḥkha in deep sleep? Both ānanda and love continue in the deep sleep state because both are my nature; (5) Pure love is not accessible to us, not because it is absent, but because there is no medium for us to express pure love, which is my very nature. Thus, we must be clear about differentiating between reflected love (pratibimba prema) and pure love (bimba prema). Only then does it make sense to say that the nature of ātmā cannot be described in words (Taittirīya Upaniṣad, 2.9.1):

**yato vāco nivartante aprāya manasāsaḥ**—the mind and speech return back from it baffled as they are not able to grasp and describe it.

If ātmā svarūpam is inexplicable, the nature of sat, the nature of cit, the nature of ānanda, and the nature of love, **premasvarūpam**, is **anirvacanīyaṃ**—indescribable; we can only experience it when it is available in pratibimba, or reflected, form. You cannot talk about original love; you can only experience it when it is available in its reflected form. I cannot see my original face, but I can see it

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<sup>200</sup> It (sat-cit-ānanda) is the support of not only the individual in future birth, but also the ultimate support of one who is established in it, by knowing it. [So, the supreme being, the absolute, is the support not only of the individuals who transmigrate in the process of samsāra, but also the ultimate resort of the liberated soul who knows It and becomes It by self-identification. So, it is the goal not only relative to all the jīvas, but also absolute to the ātman in all jīvas. The supreme brahman is the source of all. Every value, visible or perceivable in life, is due to its being. It functions not as individuals do. It acts not, but its very existence is all action. Its very being is all value and the goal of the lives of all individuals is the realization of this brahman].

<sup>201</sup> A painless cessation, a life devoid of misery, please grant these out of compassion, Śambho, and unwavering devotion to You.

when it is reflected in a mirror. When prema cannot be expressed, how can we express pratibimba prema for Īśvara? And how can I later express pratibimba prema when it is discovered to be the bimba prema that is my very nature? They are all beyond description. Therefore prema svarūpam: the nature of original love, which is sat-cit-ānanda ātmā, is **anirvacanīyaṃ**—indescribable. Indescribable like what? Nārada gives a very interesting example in the next sutra.

**Sutra 52. mūkāsvādanavat**

***[Trying to describe the experience of pure love of God] is like a mute person's effort to describe what he tastes.***

He says it is like a mute person experiencing something extraordinary—an extraordinary form, taste, smell, or wonder of the world. After you experience such a thing, assuming you can speak, you will say “Wonderful! Wonderful! Wonderful!” but you cannot say much more than that. Now the mute person cannot even say that much. Like a wonderful experience for a mute person, original love can never be described, but it can be discovered in the form of the firm conviction Aham Brahmasmi (‘I am the self’). It is a matter to be claimed, not one to be known or experienced as an object. If you want to experience love, there is a possibility, but it will not be the experience of pure or original love; it will be reflected love and it will be dependent upon many conditions. That’s why experiential love will always be temporary. Dvaita bhaktas who objectify God struggle with this problem. You’ll find that among their songs there are some scolding ones because reflected love means it will be subject to āgama and apaya—arrival and departure. Therefore, Nārada says: **mūkāsvādanavat**—it is like a mute person trying to describe what he tastes.

**Sutra 53. prakāśyate kvāpi pātre**

***In rare cases [this pure love of God] is revealed in a qualified person.***

So this highest love, which is permanent, ungraded, non-experiential, and my very nature, can only be discovered or claimed through an appropriate pramāṇam. If discovering myself as pure existence requires a pramāṇam, and if discovery of myself as pure consciousness requires a pramāṇam, then discovery of myself as pure love also requires a pramāṇam. It cannot be discovered by sitting with closed eyes or by singing bhajans. Nāma-sankīrtana can never help me discover bimba prema; nāma-sankīrtana can only help me to discover pratibimba prema. Indeed, divyanāma-sankīrtana is certainly something to be experienced. As a child growing up in a small village, my father was associated with one of these groups and I used to attend some of their overnight sessions—it’s a fantastic experience. So much so, that even now I find myself craving it. In fact, I would recommend developing a taste for it instead of going to rock concerts; you will find just as much of a thrill. You can stand, you can dance, and you can shout. Nāma-sankīrtana helps us to discover ānanda and love for God, but Vedanta says tells us that this ānanda falls under pratibimba prema. It is disturbing news for those committed to nāma-sankīrtana and have a distaste for Vedanta. And what is our reasoning for saying this? You experienced that ānanda only while singing and thereafter saṃsāra returned. This is evidence that nāma-sankīrtana can help in the discovery of pratibimba ānanda, pratibimba prema for Īśvara, and sādhanā chatuṣṭaya sampatti, but bimba prema, or original love, cannot be discovered through any number of nāma-sankīrtanas. This is why we strongly advise coming to pramāṇam because it is the very nature of ātmā. It doesn’t even come from Bhagavān as an object, because even Bhagavān as an object is subject to arrival and departure. As the Kena Upaniṣad (1.5) tells us, even that objective

Bhagavān cannot be a source of nitya-ānanda:

**tad eva brahma tvam viddhi nedam yad idam upāsate<sup>202</sup>**

Upasyadevatā (deity worship) belongs to namarūpa (name and form). Pure ānanda or pure love cannot come even from an objective God. It has to be discovered (Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, 1.4.8):

**tadetatpreyaḥ putrātpreyo vittātpreyo'nyasmātsarvasmādantararam yadayamātmā  
sa yo'nyamātmanaḥ priyaṃ bruvāṇaṃ brūyātpriyaṃ rotsyatītīśvaro ha tathaiva  
syādātmānameva priyamupāsīta sa ya ātmānameva priyamupāste na hāsya priyaṃ  
pramāyukaṃ bhavati<sup>203</sup>**

Where does that pure love come from? **Antarataram, yad ayam ātmā**—that which is innermost is the self. Therefore, we have to come to ātmā, which can only be discovered through an appropriate pramāṇam. Only the Mahavākya pramāṇam will help us to come to advaita ātmā, the only source of pure ānanda and pure prema. Very few people understand this and consequently fail to come to Vedanta. They try to get eternal ānanda through divyanāma-sankīrtana, but it simply won't work. No karma is eternal. No bhajan is eternal. No pūjā is eternal. No upāsana is eternal. Upāsana is also a form of karma. Most people who are in the bhakti field don't want to listen to Vedantic instruction. The Vedanti is willing to share, not because he is arrogant for he is only repeating the guidance of the Vedas. The Vedas say you have to come to ātmā. And to whom did Nārada, the greatest bhakti, go? Sanatkumara. Dvaita gave him neither mokṣa nor permanent ānanda. If dvaita bhakti had given him permanent ānanda, would he have gone to Sanatkumara in the 7<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the Chāndogya Upaniṣad to learn about ātmā (7.24.1)?

**yatra nānyat paśyati nānyacchṛṇoti nānyadvijānāti sa bhūmātha yatrānyat paśyati anyacchṛṇoti  
anyadvijānāti tadarpaṃ yo vai bhūmā tadamṛtam atha yadalpaṃ tanmartyam sa bhagavaḥ  
kasmin pratiṣṭhita iti sve mahimni yadi vā na mahimnīti<sup>204</sup>**

Ultimately, Mahavākya vicāra is the route for discovering that I am ātmā, that pure love that expresses as love for everyone because everyone is that ātmā.

**\*\*\*End of Teaching 19\*\*\***

As we have already established, love can be defined as our attitude toward ānanda and any source of ānanda. And if ānanda is our very nature, then love, which is our attitude toward ānanda, must also be our very nature. Therefore, according to Vedanta, just as ānanda is our very nature, our love toward ānanda, in the form of self-love, is our very nature. Therefore, whatever description we give to ānanda applies to love. Love is not a part, product, or property of the mind. Love is an independent entity that pervades the mind, making it a loving mind under certain conditions. Love is not limited by the boundaries of the mind. And love, in the very form of ātmā, continues even after the mind has resolved.

<sup>202</sup> Know that the supreme is not that which the world reveres.

<sup>203</sup> This self is dearer than a son, dearer than wealth, dearer than everything else, and is innermost. Should a person holding the self as dear say to one calling anything else dearer than the self, 'What you hold dear will die,' he or she is certainly competent to say so, as it will indeed come true. One should meditate upon the self alone as dear, the dear ones are not mortal.

<sup>204</sup> Wherein one sees nothing else, hears nothing else, and understands nothing else, that is the infinite. Wherein one sees something else, hears something else, and understands something else, that is finite. That which is infinite is immortal and that which is finite is mortal. Revered one, wherein does that rest? In its own majesty or not in majesty.

This pure love that survives after the mind has resolved is not accessible—not because it is absent, but because there is no medium for its expression. Therefore, just as ānanda is of two natures—original ānanda, which is my very nature, and reflected ānanda, which appears in the mind when it is conducive—so, too, is love of two types: original love and reflected love. Original love reflects in the mind every now and then, when the condition of the mind is conducive.

Through ātmā-jñānam we discover that pure and permanent love can never be obtained from the external world. The love coming from the external world will always be conditional because others will love me only as long as they see me as a source of ānanda for them, because as we have said, love is defined as our attitude toward the source of ānanda. As long as others look upon me as a source of ānanda, love will flow from them. The moment I stop being a source of ānanda—or worse, when I become a burden for them—their love, like a bank account that is gradually depleting, is also bound to get depleted. It is very natural. It is not their fault. It is a universal thing. We have the same attitude toward a non-functioning car. As long as the car is working well and is a source of ānanda, I love it, I drive it regularly, I wash it, and I have it serviced. But the moment the car becomes a headache, my love and gratitude for it is gone and I am eager to replace it. This is not your trait or my trait; it is a universal law that love will only flow toward a source of ānanda. Therefore, any blessed person will love me only as long as they find me interesting and useful. When I want someone to love me permanently, I am expecting permanent love out of conditional love, which will last only as long as the conditions themselves last. Therefore, the first step toward Vedantic maturity is to stop expecting permanent love from others. If they are not able to give it, it is not their fault. It is simply the law of the universe. A Vedanti looks for a permanent source of love and discovers that nothing in the entire anātma prapañca<sup>205</sup> provides permanent love. At best, it reflects love temporarily. Just as anātma does not have permanent ānanda but reflects it only temporarily, love will also be temporary in anātma. Permanent love is discovered in one place alone: ātmā.

Once I discover ātmā as the source of love, I have tapped into an endless source. In discovering love for and from ātmā, and in discovering that everyone is essentially ātmā, my love becomes permanent and universal. Therefore, jñānam alone allows me to discover permanent and universal love. After discovering permanent love in myself, I no longer bother much about whether others love me permanently. If someone were to say: “I am slowly losing my love for you,” I will reply: “If you can discover it elsewhere, that is totally fine with me.” I can happily accept others’ refusing their love. We have to discover that uninterrupted supply of love. The jñānī, or advaita bhakta, is one who has discovered ānanda and love in himself and so no longer seeks it elsewhere. And even without seeking love from outside, the jñānī has the capacity to give love. Similarly, once I discover love in myself, without asking for it from outside, I have the capacity to give it unconditionally. Unconditional love can only be given by the jñānī who has an endless source of love within and doesn’t expect reciprocation from others. Thus, jñānam alone helps me to discover unconditional love. And having discovered this unconditional love, how does the jñānī express it? Nārada says **mūkāsvādanavat**—like a mute person expresses taste; it is inexpressible. This unconditional love through ātmā jñānam only exists in rare and qualified people: **prakāśyate kvāpi pātre**—**prakāśyate** means unconditional love, love without any expectation of reciprocation, toward myself and everyone else as the very same ātmā; **kvāpi** means rarely; **pātre** means a qualified person, and refers to the adhikārī puruṣa (qualified person).

So who is qualified to discover this unconditional love? A jñānī alone is fit to discover this unconditional love. Why? Because love is the attitude toward the source of ānanda, and for a jñānī everything is ātmā, and thus everything is a source of ānanda deserving of unconditional love. Thus, the advaita jñānī alone is this qualified person in whom unconditional love exists. The qualification for becoming an advaita jñānī is sādhanā chatuṣṭaya sampatti (fourfold qualification). Accordingly, the sādhanā chatuṣṭaya sampana adhikārī alone is the **pātram**, or candidate, for jñānam and unconditional love.

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<sup>205</sup> All that is known to oneself as “not self,” including the five kośas, or sheaths: annamāyā (physical), prāṇamāyā (energy), manamāyā (mind), vijñānamāyā (intellect), ānandamāyā (bliss), the three śarīras, or bodies—sthūla (gross), sūkṣma (subtle) and kāraṇa (causal).

The bhakti schools of philosophy will never talk about sādhanā chatuṣṭaya sampatti or advaita jñānam as qualifications, despite their listing all sorts of other qualifications for unconditional love. Vedānta, by contrast, is very strict: it says advaita jñānam alone will enable the discovery of unconditional love, and advaita jñānam is possible only through sādhanā chatuṣṭaya sampatti. Therefore, only in advaita jñānam does pure and unconditional love shine. As it says in the Bhagavad Gītā (7.3):

**manuṣyanaṃ sahasreṣu kaścīd yatati siddhaye  
yatatām api siddhānāṃ kaścīnmāṃ vetti tattvataḥ**<sup>206</sup>

So **prakāśyate kvāpi pātre** (Sutra 53) should be carefully understood. There is a humorous bramācārya in our community, who always puts a funny spin on one thing or another. And this person loves coffee very much. In Tamil, coffee is called 'kāpi.' So whenever he looks at a mug of kapi, he immediately recites: **prakāśyate kāpi pātre**. So infinite ānanda and love arise when there is a vessel of coffee present? Nārada is not talking about kāpi pātram, but kvāpi pātre—that is, in rare, qualified students.

**Sutra 54. guṇarahitaṃ kāmanārahitaṃ pratikṣaṇavardhamānam avicchinnam  
sūkṣmataram anubhavarūpam**

***This [pure love of God] manifests as the subtlest consciousness, devoid of material qualities and material desires, manifesting more at every moment, and uninterrupted.***

This infinite and unconditional love, which is directed toward everything in the creation, including Īśvara-Bhagavān, is **guṇarahitaṃ**—it is free of the guṇas. It does not come under saḡuṇa bhakti sattvica, rajasā, or tamasā—it is guṇātīta bhakti (love beyond the guṇas) because it is discovered through ātmā, which is guṇātītaḥ. As Kṛṣṇa says (Gītā, 14.19-20):

**nānyaṃ guṇebhyaḥ kartāraṃ yadā draṣṭānupaśyati  
guṇebhyaśca paraṃ vetti madbhāvaṃ so'dhigacchati  
guṇān etān atītya trīn dehī dehasamudbhavān  
janmamṛtyujarāduḥkhaiḥ vimukto'mrtam aśnute**<sup>207</sup>

Therefore, this advaita bhakti, this infinite and unconditional love, is **guṇarahitaṃ**. And it is **kāmanārahitaṃ**—devoid of material desire; it is a non-demanding love. A demanding love is a conditional love. Such a love says: "If you do this, then I will love you. If you do not do this, I will not love you." Such a love is conditional and anything conditional is not real or essential. Suppose I say that you are very beautiful because of your wonderful dress. I am not talking about original beauty. If I love someone based on certain conditions, then it is not real love at all. Suppose you have money and you regularly lend some to me whenever I ask. I love you as long as you are lending me money, but the moment you stop lending, my love also stops. That means I have not loved you, but I have loved your

<sup>206</sup> Among thousands of human beings, a rare one strives for liberation. Even among those seekers who strive, a rare one knows me in reality.

<sup>207</sup> When one understands the doer to be none other than the guṇas and knows the self, which is beyond the guṇas, one attains my nature. Having gone beyond these three guṇas, which are the cause of rebirth, a person becomes free from birth, death, old age, and sorrow, and attains immortality.

money. So conditional love is never real. A jñanī's love is unconditional because he does not demand anything in return, not even reciprocation. There are no conditions for the jñanī's love. Therefore, it is **kāmanārahitaṃ**. The ārta bhakta demands from the Lord: "Solve my problem." If after a few prayers, Bhagavān doesn't solve the problem, his temple visits will gradually decrease because they are not fulfilling the goal. Similarly, the arthārthī bhakta has a demand: "Give me success." Even the jijñāsu bhakta places a demand upon the Lord: "Give me mokṣa." Only the jñanī bhakta is without demand—and even when Bhagavān wants to give something, the jñanī bhakta says: "I don't want anything" because **ātmanyevātmanā tuṣṭaḥ**—he is satisfied in himself by himself; Gītā 2.5). Why do I love Bhagavān if I am not getting anything in return? Because Bhagavān and I happen to be one and the same. For me, self-love includes Īśvara. Self-love includes everything because the self is non-dual. Therefore, natural self-love becomes Īśvara love and it becomes universal love because Īśvara and the universe are included in the one, all-pervading ātmā. Thus, when Bhagavān asks the jñanī what he wants, the jñanī responds: "I wish there was something I could ask for, but there is nothing I need."

**Pratikṣaṇavardhamānam** means this love is increasing at every moment. As self-knowledge becomes more and more firm, as prajñā (insight into the true nature of reality) gets converted into sthithaprajñā (steady wisdom), as jñānam gets converted into jñāna-niṣṭhā (the firm and unshakeable conviction 'I am brahman'), as my deha-abhimāna and ahaṅkāra abhimāna (prideful attachment of the 'I'-sense or egoism) decrease, as the jñānam becomes clearer and clearer, brighter and brighter—the discovery of ānanda also deepens, and naturally, my love grows. So in keeping with jñāna niṣṭhā, ānanda increases and love also increases. In fact, it is not that ānanda is increasing, but that the obstructing vāsanās are receding. Because ātmā-ānanda is infinite—how can it increase? It doesn't increase, it only *seems* to increase as my misconceptions, expectations, delusions, and confusion all decrease, ānanda and love also *seemingly* increase. On a full moon evening, the moon and the moonlight are there on the horizon, but the moon does not seem that bright early in the evening. However, as the sun recedes and night falls, the moon seems to get brighter and brighter. And at midnight on a full moon evening, the moon is brightest. Between early evening and midnight, can you say that the brightness of the moon has increased? No. The moon has the same amount of brightness, but as the obstructing sunlight recedes, the moon's brightness seems to increase. Similarly, we are the embodiment of love, but moha—defects of the mind: rāga (attachment), dveṣa (aversion), kama (desire), krodha (anger), lobha (greed)...the list goes on—all obstruct this love. As āsurī-sampat (vice, i.e., rajasic and tamasic qualities) recedes, our love increasingly manifests. Love is a discovery, never a production. I don't produce love, I discover love. Discovery means removing whatever obstructs my natural love. When the worst criminal takes stolen money and buys a gift for his only child, even that so-called cruel person is an embodiment of tenderness toward the child. But that tenderness has been obstructed for various reasons. Therefore, **pratikṣaṇavardhamānam**—this love manifests more and more at every second.

**Avicchinnam** means unbroken, because ātmā-ānanda and ātmā-prema is unbroken. **Sukṣmataram** means it is of the subtlest nature because ātmā is the subtlest; and **anubhavarūpam** means it is ever-available as 'I am.' Self-love is always available as 'I am,' and therefore it is ever-experienced. All of these sutras can only be properly understood if we remember the fundamental Vedantic equation. According to Vedānta, sat is equal to cit, cit is equal to ānanda, and ānanda is equal to prema, or love. All these four are synonymous; they are not four "parts" of ātmā—they are one ātmā manifesting in different media differently. For example, in the material world, the sat aspect alone is manifest. You say the wall *is*—its '*is*'-ness belongs to ātmā. But a wall cannot manifest cit. Remember, it is not that the wall has produced sat, but that its deficiency is such that it cannot manifest cit, ānanda, or prema. When it comes to the physical body, both sat and cit are manifest. And when conditions are conducive (e.g., all family members are acting exactly as you would like them to), the mind can manifest sat, cit, and ānanda—this is not ānanda of the mind, but ānanda belonging to ātmā and reflected in the mind. In that mind, not only is ānanda manifest, but love is, too—love toward whomever or whatever was responsible for making the mind conducive. Therefore, I have love toward whoever or whatever brings about that conducive state of mind. This love also belongs to ātmā, but it reflects or manifests in the mind. Therefore, sat, cit, ānanda, and prema all belong to me, ātmā, and express at different times and

under different conditions. Thus, **avicchinnaṃ anubhavarūpam**—this love is in the form of anubhava (direct experience, or more precisely, direct knowledge). What anubhava? Ātmā-anubhava (direct self-knowledge).

**Sutra 55. tat prāpya tad evāvalokayati tad eva śṛṇoti tad eva bhāṣayati tad eva cintayati**

***Having discovered this [pure love of God], one looks only at the Lord, hears only about him, speaks only of him, and thinks only of him.***

Having discovered this paramaprema, which is equal to sat-cit-ānanda-ātmā, **tad evāvalokayati**—one sees only paramaprema (supreme love) everywhere. Without a proper understanding of Vedānta, one can easily misconstrue these verses. What do you mean by seeing love everywhere? Love is not a person or thing, so what do you mean by this? Even the emotion of love cannot be seen everywhere all the time because the mind is given to all types of emotions at different times. As long as love is taken to be a particular substance, this statement will be meaningless because there is no substance called love. If love is taken to be an emotion or feeling, it cannot be there in all people at all times. No mental feeling can be present all the time because the mind goes through varieties of feelings. Accordingly, this sutra can only be properly understood when paramaprema is taken to be equal to ātmā: sat-svarūpam, cit-svarūpam, ānanda-svarūpam. Ānanda is not a temporary emotion. Emotional ānanda is pratibimba-ānanda; we are not talking about emotional ānanda, but ātmā-ānanda, which is the original, or bimba-ānanda. Similarly, parama prema is not a feeling. The feeling of prema can never be permanent because feelings belong to the mind and the mind is always in flux. Bhagavān himself, in the form of Rama, became angry when Samudra Raja did not come and meet him as requested.<sup>208</sup> Feeling means it is subject to fluctuation; therefore, the feeling of prema cannot be everywhere all the time. Thus, the parama-prema we are talking about is not a person, not a thing, and not a feeling—it is ātmā. As Kṛṣṇa says (Gītā, 6.29-30):

**sarvabhūtastham ātmānaṃ, sarvabhūtāni cātmani  
ikṣate yogayuktātmā, sarvatra samadarśanaḥ  
yo māṃ paśyati sarvatra, sarvaṃ ca mayi paśyati  
tasyāhaṃ na praṇaśyāmi, sac a me na praṇaśyati<sup>209</sup>**

So what is important to note in this sutra? The word **tat** (“it”) in this sutra refers to paramaprema, and paramaprema refers to ātmā. Having attained that paramaprema, which is ātmā, **tad evāvalokayati**—one sees ātmā everywhere. In some places that ātmā is available as sat-rūpam and in other places it is available as cit-rūpam. And when I see sat-rupātmā, paramaprema is also there because ātmā is paramaprema. But what we say is that in that object the conditions are not conducive to the expression of paramaprema. Similarly, in human beings, everyone is the embodiment of paramaprema—even when a person says “I hate you.” he is paramaprema. But it is the type of paramaprema that is not

<sup>208</sup> This is a reference to a story in the Ramāyāna in which Rama was waiting to cross the ocean to reach Lanka. He spent three days on the banks waiting for Samudra Raja, who did not come to meet Rama as requested. Rama became angry and prepared to shoot an arrow that would completely dry up the ocean. Hearing this, Samudra Raja came with his wife and fell at the feet of Lord Rama in surrender. Rama immediately calmed down, and the arrow he was intending to shoot at Samudra Raja was instead directed at the demons on an island that were causing trouble for Samudra Raja.

<sup>209</sup> One whose mind is disciplined through meditation perceives the ātmā in all beings and all beings in the ātmā. He has the same vision everywhere. I am not lost to him who sees Me everywhere and sees everything in Me. He is also not lost to me.

manifest, because I am unable to produce that conducive condition of the mind in him. Therefore, the paramaprema is not expressed. If I give him what he wants, that prema expresses. Everyone has paramaprema in the form of ātmā all the time—unobstructed or obstructed, manifest or unmanifest. A jñānī understands this. For him, all people are nothing but love—but in some it is manifest, whereas in others it is obstructed. And what about me? I am also love. But sometimes I express it and sometimes I don't express it. Expressed or unexpressed, I am also an embodiment of love. This is Vedanta darśanam. So **tad evāvalokayati** means paramaprema rūpa ātmā-āvalokayati (one sees supreme love in the form of the self everywhere). Similarly, **tad eva śṛṇoti**—everything he listens to is love, extending the same principle, as ātmā. **Tad eva bhāṣayati**—everything he speaks about is also ātmā. And **tadeva cintayati**—he thinks about that ātmā alone. Again, we should be clear about what we mean when we say “thinks of that all the time.” If we are thinking of ātmā all the time, how can we perform worldly transactions? What it means is that he maintains that awareness in the background all the time like a tanpura śruti (the background hum of a tanpura)—‘I am ātmā, ānanda rūpa, prema rūpa ātmā’—never loses sight of it. As it says in the Bhagavad Gītā, 3.17:

**yastvātmaratireva syād, ātmatṛptaśca mānavaḥ  
ātmanyeva ca satuṣṭaḥ...**<sup>210</sup>

Therefore, he never loses sight of this paramaprema ātmā.

**Sutra 56. gauṇī tridhā guṇabhedād ārtādibhedād vā**

***Secondary devotional service is of three kinds, according to which of the three material modes predominates, or according to which material motivation—distress, etc.—brings one to bhakti.***

From Sutra 51 to 55, Nārada talked about prema nirvacanam, or bhakti nirvacanam—prema and bhakti being one and the same, and nirvacanam meaning definition. When we say prema nirvacanam, we should add *paramaprema* nirvacanam, or *parābhakti* nirvacanam, and paramaprema is synonymous with ātmā. Ātmā is sat-cit-ānanda, so paraprema is also sat-cit-ānanda it is that prema which a jñānī discovers through jñānam. Having explained the meaning of paramaprema, Nārada turns to the topic of sādhanā bhakti in the 56<sup>th</sup> Sutra—from paramaprema to aparaprema, from primary love to secondary love, from unconditional love to conditional love, from advaita bhakti to dvaita bhakti, from sadhya bhakti to sādhanā bhakti. Thus, all the sutras from 56 onward really belong in the previous chapter, and the Prema Nirvacanam chapter should really be from Sutras 51-55, as we return to the topic of bhakti sādhanāni, which was the focus of the 4<sup>th</sup> Chapter, from Sutra 56 onward.

In Sutra 56, Nārada introduces **gauṇī bhaktiḥ tridhā**—secondary love of the Lord, or aparābhakti, which is conditional bhakti and of three types. This threefold bhakti can be classified on two different bases: one is **guṇabhedād**, the three guṇas, and the other is **ārtādibhedād**, the underlying motive (i.e., ārti), as given in the 7<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the Gītā. In terms of **guṇabhedād bhakti**, when the bhakti is based on sattva guṇa of the mind, this sattvic person's bhakti will be sattvica bhakti; a rajasic person's bhakti will be rajasā bhakti; and a tamasic person's bhakti will be tamasa bhakti. Thus, aparābhakti is sattvica, rajasā, and tamasa.

<sup>210</sup> Suppose there is a person who loves the self alone, who is happy with the self alone, and who is contented with the self alone...

Now the next question is how does one differentiate between them? How do I know which one applies to me? Of course, you will say, “Swamiji, we are all jñānī bhaktas, we don’t come under the lower kind.” OK, understood and appreciated, but if some “other” people ask: “Which category do we come under?” We would reply that sattvica bhakti is that devotion which is used for spiritual growth, or self-knowledge. Through sattvica bhakti, my motive is to attain sādhanā chatuṣṭaya sampatti, to find a guru, to find opportunities for śravaṇa-manana, to assimilate the knowledge, and to become jñānī bhakta. When I use bhakti for spiritual growth alone without demanding anything else from God, this is sattvica bhakti.

Rajasā bhakti is used for anything other than spiritual growth: all worldly benefits, family benefits—in short, ahaṅkāra/mamākāra-centric prayers. If everytime I do namaskāra only family members come to mind, I can be considered a rajasā bhakta. So you can decide for which category you belong to by asking yourself this: To what end is every namaskāra encashed? The rajasā bhakta seeks material and worldly benefit. And tamasa bhakti is that through which a person wants to harm someone, it is the abuse of bhakti for negative purposes. All the rakṣasās (demonic beings) of the Purāṇas are doing tapas with intense bhakti—even Bhasmasura had great bhakti. What is the proof? Bhagavān, in the form of Śiva, appeared in front of him and not in front of us. That means he had greater bhakti. And he asked Śiva to obtain a boon whereby whoever’s head he touches turns into bhasma, or ash. What a bhakti! Lord Śiva happily granted him the boon, getting himself into a bit of trouble.<sup>211</sup> Lord Śiva is called Āśutoṣa (easily pleased) and Bholenātha (innocent or child-like)—he is easily pleased, promising things without seeing the pros and cons, which sometimes causes him suffering. So all the rakṣasās use bhakti to get boons and control humanity. They want power. And that power falls under tamasa bhakti. All of this is care of the 17<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the Bhagavad Gītā, in which Kṛṣṇa differentiates between sattvica yajña, rajasā yajña, and tamasa yajña. These are the three forms of aparābhakti. Parābhakti does not fall under sattvica, rajasā, or tamasa. If you remember Sutra 54, parābhakti is **guṇarahitam**. In the case of a jñānī bhakta, bhakti doesn’t fall under any of these because the jñānī doesn’t even seek spiritual growth: he has already attained fulfillment. Thus, these are the three guṇarūpa bhaktis.

### \*\*\*End of Teaching 20\*\*\*

In this 4<sup>th</sup> Chapter, Nārada wanted to define bhakti or prema, and interestingly, he began by defining prema as that which is undefinable. The reason for this is very clear: according to Vedānta, prema or love in its pure form is nothing but ātmā itself. Just as pure existence is ātmā, pure consciousness is ātmā, pure joy or happiness is ātmā, pure love must also be understood as ātmā. Given that ātmā is not definable, **yato vāco nivartante aprāya manasāsaḥ**—the mind and speech return back from it baffled as they are not able to grasp and describe it (Taittirīya Upaniṣad, 2.9.1). Pure existence, which is ātmā; pure consciousness, which is ātmā; pure happiness, which is ātmā; and pure love, which is ātmā, cannot be defined. So the next question is: if they cannot be defined, can we experience them? This is a sensitive question. The answer is that these four being ātmā, and ātmā being the ever-experiencing subject, they will not be available as an object of experience. Pure love cannot be experienced as an object, but it has to be claimed as the subject. If you are desperate to experience existence, awareness, happiness, and love, Vedānta says you can, only not in their original version, but rather, in the reflected or manifest versions, much like we experience the reflection of our face in a mirror. Our own original face can never be experienced, but if we are willing to compromise, we can experience it in reflected form. Reflected existence is available everywhere. How? When you say the wall *is*, the chair *is*, the table *is*, and so forth, you are experiencing ātmā in the form of reflected existence; the *is*-ness of a table is ātmā’s reflection in table nama-rūpa. So reflected *is*-ness is available in the world. Similarly, reflected consciousness can be experienced in the physical body—what we are experiencing is cidābhāsa, or reflected. Similarly, reflected happiness can be experienced. When?

<sup>211</sup> The asura wants to test the boon on Lord Śiva himself, causing him to run away. Then Lord Viṣṇu has to save him by appearing as Mohini and misleading the asura towards self-demolition.

Whenever I am happy. Whenever I am happy experiencing any blessed thing, even pongal, I am experiencing ātmā-ānanda alone. According to Vedanta, pongal doesn't contain ānanda; it only contains cholesterol. So when you experience pongal ānanda, it is ātmā-ānanda reflected through the pongal. Pratibimba-sat is experienceable, pratibimba-cit is experienceable, pratibimba-ānanda is experienceable, and pratibimba-prema are all experienceable. Whenever anybody loves anything or any person that is the experience of reflected love.

The difference between an ignorant person and a wise person is that when an ignorant person experiences any one of these in its reflected version, he doesn't recognize that they are reflected versions and attributes the ānanda and love to the objects themselves. By contrast, when a wise person enjoys any one of these four, he does not attribute the ānanda to the objects themselves, but rather, understands that he is experiencing brahman's existence, brahman's consciousness, brahman's happiness, and brahman's love alone; a jñanī sees brahman everywhere experienced in the form of reflected sat, reflected cit, reflected ānanda, and reflected prema. Therefore, the jñanī says I am experiencing brahman everywhere: **sarvabhūtaṣṭham ātmānaṃ, sarvabhūtāni**—[he perceives] all beings in ātmā and ātmā in all beings (Gītā, 6.29). And how does he say he is experiencing brahman, or ātmā, or pure love everywhere? By understanding that any love anywhere belongs to ātmā, any ānanda anywhere belongs to ātmā. With this knowledge, wherever he looks he sees ātmā or sat-cit-ānanda-prema everywhere. Thus Nārada says (in Sutra 55): **tad evāvalokayati tad eva cintayati**. You should translate this as sarvatra ātmā darśanam—seeing and experiencing only Bhagavān in the form of pratibimba sat-cit-ānanda-prema. And with this, Nārada concludes with the topic of defining parābhakti or paraprema.

From the 56<sup>th</sup> Sutra onward, Nārada comes down from parābhakti to aparābhakti, advaita bhakti to dvaita bhakti, sadhya bhakti to sādhanā bhakti, mukhya bhakti to gauna bhakti. Dvaita bhakti, sādhanā bhakti, and gauna bhakti are all synonymous, and all refer to secondary love. Even though it is secondary, you should remember that this is also extremely important because this secondary love will eventually lead us to primary love. Without dvaita bhakti, we can never come to advaita bhakti. We always have to note this in block letters: without dvaita bhakti, advaita bhakti is impossible. That is why in advaita, both dvaita bhakti and viśiṣṭādvaita bhakti (qualified non-dualism) are referred to as karma yoga. We never reject them. We accept them as karma yoga, and say that in time you should go beyond dvaita viśiṣṭa and dvaita bhakti and come to jñāna yoga, and ultimately, to advaita bhakti. Nārada divides gauna bhakti into three types, based on two different angles. The first angle is based on the guṇas (sattvica, rajasā, and tamasa bhakti), and the second angle is **ārtādibhedād vā**, meaning in the form of **ārtādi**—meaning 'ārta, etc.' When Nārada says **ārtādi**, he expects us to remember the Bhagavad Gītā because it is not clear what he means by 'etc?' This sutra can only be understood if we refer to the four types of bhaktas described by Kṛṣṇa in the Gītā (7.16):

**caturvidhā bhajante mām, janāḥ sukrīno 'rjuna  
ārto jijñāsurarthārthi, jñānī ca bhartarṣabha**<sup>212</sup>

Now this will create confusion, and if it doesn't create confusion, I will create some for you. In the 7<sup>th</sup> Chapter, Kṛṣṇa talks about **caturvidhā bhajante mām**—four types of bhaktas—and here Nārada says **tridhā**, three types. This is because Nārada does not want to include the fourth type of bhakta on Kṛṣṇa's list, the jñanī bhakti, because the jñanī bhakta has parābhakti, or mukhya bhakti. Given that the jñanī is endowed with parābhakti and Nārada is talking about aparābhakti here, the jñanī should be excluded from the Gītā's list of four. This leaves us with ārta bhakti, arthārthī bhakti, and jijñāsu bhakti as the three types of aparābhakti. Following these three types, we should all become jñanī bhaktas, attaining parābhakti. Hence the **ārta-arthārthi-jijñāsu bhedād tridhā** to which Nārada refers in the next sutra.

<sup>212</sup> Four types of virtuous people surrender to me—the distressed, the seeker of wealth, the seeker of knowledge, and the wise, Oh Arjuna!

**Sutra 57. uttarasmād uttarasmāt pūrvapūrvā śreyāya bhavati**

***Each earlier one is considered superior to the latter one.***

Even though Nārada is basing this threefold bhakti on the 7<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the Bhagavad Gītā, there are certain distinctions between the Gītā and Sutras 55 and 56. The first distinction is that when Kṛṣṇa mentions the three bhaktas in the 7<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the Gītā he doesn't grade them. He only says (7.17): **teṣāṃ jñānī nityayuktaḥ, ekabhaktirviśiṣyate**—among them, the man of wisdom who is always engaged exclusively in devotional service is superior (to the other three—namely, āṛta, arthārthī, jijñāsu). But Kṛṣṇa does not specify who is lowest, intermediate, and highest among these three, whereas Nārada is grading them here. The second distinction is that even though Kṛṣṇa doesn't grade them in the 7<sup>th</sup> Chapter, in various commentaries on this chapter, we have created a gradation that differs from Nārada's. Thus, we have two tasks before us. First, we have to recall what is said about the 7<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the Gītā, and second, we have to reconcile this with Nārada's gradation.

We established that the lowest is the āṛta bhakta, who worships God only when he is in distress. There is a humorous proverb in Malayalam about a person who had never invoked the Lord and suddenly found himself having to cross a narrow, rickety bridge. Gripped by fear, he exclaimed: 'Nārāyaṇa, Nārāyaṇa, Nārāyaṇa!' But the moment he crossed to the other side, he dropped Nārāyaṇa. Therefore they say, before you cross the bridge, it is: 'Nārāyaṇa' and after you cross, it is 'koorayana,' meaning the Lord has been forgotten.<sup>213</sup> This proverb is meant to indicate how āṛta bhaktas pray only when they experience fear and sorrow. Āṛta bhaktas are opportunistic, much like our politicians. Coalitions will do anything and praise any leader before an election. They will scold left and right and when election time comes, they will easily convert this into ninda stuti (satirical praise). Thus, we say that the āṛta bhakta is lowest. The next one is the arthārthī bhakta, who is superior to the āṛta bhakta but still materialistic because he worships the Lord for worldly success. We don't say this is wrong, but we classify it as arthārthī. This bhakta will remember the Lord more than will the āṛta bhakta because before every venture, big or small, that he wants to complete successfully he will invoke the Lord. Nonetheless, the arthārthī's invocation is for ventures of worldly or material benefit—not for spiritual benefit, such as citta śuddhi or Vedanta vicāra. The next one is the jijñāsu bhakta, who wants to attain ātmā jñānam. With that intention to gain knowledge, this bhakta studies the scriptures and can thus be considered a Vedanta vicāra karta (an actor, or doer). We said that he is superior to the āṛta and arthārthī bhaktas because he is closer to mokṣa, which they are not even seeking. Thus, in our study of the Gītā, we graded the three types of bhaktas as: āṛta, arthārthī, jijñāsu.

Here, Nārada grades them differently, and we have to interpret what he is saying in the proper context. Nārada says the arthārthī bhakta is the lowest because he is a bhakta solely for worldly purposes. He is a business bhakta: "You do this Lord and I will do that." At best, he gives Bhagavān a token advance, making it a clean deal. This is our great bhakti. And do you think Bhagavān doesn't know? He knows. But thank God he is a jñānī and is therefore able to put up with us. Otherwise he would have renounced this convenience bhakti long ago. The next one, according to Nārada, is the jijñāsu bhakta, who is the student of the scriptures, the one who wants to know the śāstra and therefore studies Vedanta. But this same Vedanta vicāra karma can be done with two different attitudes. The first is an attitude of academic interest or curiosity. In fact, nowadays people even study the Gītā for management purposes. Many great managers, without knowing a word of Sanskrit, write commentaries on the Gītā. Even though scriptures are originally meant for attaining mokṣa, the underlying motives for studying the scriptures can vary greatly. For example, people study yoga for health even though poor Patanjali wrote

<sup>213</sup> The proverb is: paalam kadakkuvolam Nārāyaṇa paalam kadannal koorayana.

the yoga śāstra for mokṣārtam. Similarly, a person might study Advaita Vedanta in a university philosophy department to earn a PhD, specializing in a particular chapter of the Pañcadasi. Therefore jijñāsa can be there without mumukṣā. Desire to learn out of sheer intellectual curiosity without desire for mokṣa. In fact, one lady openly told me this. She said: “Swamiji, I want to make it very clear that I am not interested in mokṣa, but I find Vedanta highly stimulating and wonderful. I enjoy the study of Vedanta.” Because Vedanta is an intellectually stimulating subject, a person can enjoy studying it without the desire for mokṣa. Thus we can have two types of jijñāsus: with or without mumukṣutva.

The reverse is also true: there are many mumukṣus who want mokṣa, but they don’t want to study Vedanta because they think mokṣa can be attained through other methods. In fact, people in the bhakti schools of philosophy are all mumukṣus who think that nāma-sankīrtana will give them mokṣa. So they desperately sing their bhajans and they desperately pray to God, but they refuse to come to śāstra because they believe mokṣa can be attained through these various shortcut methods. They will say that you only need to shed tears as if mokṣa is a place to which Bhagavān can whisk us away. Thus in bhakti schools they are mumukṣus but they are not jijñāsus and in Vedanta vicāra class there can be many jijñāsus who lack mumukṣutvam. Nārada wants to talk about the jijñāsu bhakta who is also a mumukṣu. Nārada calls this jijñāsu mumukṣu bhakta and ārta. Here the word ‘ārti’ means desperately seeking mokṣa through jñānam. For the jijñāsu without this desperation, Vedanta is an armchair philosophy he discusses while sipping coffee, without being deeply interested in mokṣa. Thus for Nārada, ārta is jijñāsu plus mumukṣu. And not only is this bhakta desperate for mokṣa, he is going to a guru for **adhīḥ bhagavo brahmeti**—teach me about Brahman (as spoken by Bhrigu, to his father and guru, Varuṇa in the Taittirīya Upaniṣad Bhriguvali). In fact, Arjuna himself was ārta and mumukṣu and jijñāsu. In desperation, he said to Kṛṣṇa (Gītā, 2.7): **śiṣyaste ‘haṃ śādhi mām tvāṃ prapannam**—I am your disciple. Teach me who has surrendered to you.

Every sannyāsī who renounces everything and goes to a gurukulam asking for knowledge is two in one: a desperate seeker of mokṣa—that is why he has renounced everything; the desperation has reached such a state that he cannot live in society and decides to leave everything. And when he leaves society as a mumukṣu and finds his guru, he wants nothing other than jñānam, which he knows to be the only route to mokṣa. As it says in the Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad (1.2.12):

**parīksha lokan karma citān brahmano,  
nirvedamāyanāscha kṛtaḥ kṛtena  
tad-vijñānārthaṃ sa gurum evābhigacchet  
samt-pāṇiḥ śrotriyam brahmaniṣṭham**<sup>214</sup>

Therefore, the greatest seeker is one who is both a desperate mumukṣu and a jijñāsu. A desperate mumukṣu is one whose longing is so sincere we give the analogy of a person whose hair has caught fire. Imagine there is a pond nearby. This person won’t check to see if the pond is dirty. He won’t check the temperature and decide when it might be a good day. He will jump into the water urgently. When a spiritual seeker is burning from the spiritual fire inside, he will not even think of worldly duties; he will simply walk away. We hear the story of the Buddha, who was a prince but could not think of anything else. That is the story of several people because of that powerful fire of desire for mokṣa. Such people are called ārta mumukṣus, and they are lucky. But if they don’t know how to get mokṣa, they are in trouble. There are many people who want mokṣa and leave society to go to the Himalayas—we see so many cases like this. And if they have puṇyam, they will discover a guru who tells them that jñānam is the only path. If they don’t have puṇyam and they don’t get a proper guide, they are finished. All these sannyāsīs end up in various other activities. Sometimes harmless activities, such as selling rudrākṣa

<sup>214</sup> When after examining the entirety of his life experience, one realizes that he cannot achieve everlasting happiness through the result of any action, he is advised to humbly approach a proper teacher, who is learned in the Vedas and having made that knowledge his own, revels in it.

beads. Therefore, a desperate mumukṣu who doesn't know that jñānam is the only way, may stray from jñāna mārga (the path of knowledge) and even fall.

There are two different types of risk. The first is a mumukṣu who never learned that studying śāstra under the guidance of an ācārya is the route to mokṣa, and so misses mokṣa even after becoming a sannyāsī. Many sannyāsīs fall this way; it is like the game of Snakes and Ladders. We think Himalayan sannyāsīs are lucky. They are lucky in the sense that they are ready for mokṣa, but the problem is that if the puṇyam is not there, they are finished. Because there are no distractions for them in the Himalayas, not even different types of clothing to choose from. Like in Snakes and Ladders, they get to 94 and need to roll a six on the dice to reach paramapadam (the Supreme abode). But between 94 and 100, there are three snakes. One wrong number and they are back down to 56 and then to one. Therefore, remember that there are many sannyāsī mumukṣus who don't know **jñānādeva tu kaivalyam śāstra vicāra deva jñānam**—knowledge in the form of śāstric study and inquiry alone results in liberation and so they wind up falling. Vedānta has a special name for such people: ārūḍha-patita—the one who has attained and fallen.<sup>215</sup> Thus we have mumukṣus who have not become jijñāsus and fall. Conversely, there are many jijñāsus who study the scriptures very well and are very scholarly people, but they do not want mokṣa and their sincerity is lacking. They wind up as academic scholars, giving seminars and getting awards, but never attaining mokṣa. Therefore, Nārada says, the āṛta bhakta is that rare person who possesses both mumukṣu and jijñāsu—that is; the one who longs for both mokṣa and knowledge.

The arthārthī bhakta is considered lowest by Nārada's classification because he wants neither mokṣa nor jñānam. The jijñāsu bhakta wants jñānam, but is not interested in mokṣa. The āṛta bhakti desperately wants both. As it says in Vivekacūdamani (Verses 36 and 43, respectively):

**durvāra saṃsāra davāgnitaptam dodhūyamānam duradṛṣṭavātaiḥ  
bhītam prapannam paripāhi mṛtyoḥ śaraṇyam anyat yad aham na jāne**<sup>216</sup>

**mā bhaiṣṭa vidvaṃstava nāstyapāyaḥ saṃsārasindhostaraṇe astyupāyaḥ  
yenaiva yātā yatayo asya pāraṃ tameva mārgaṃ tava nirdiśāmi**<sup>217</sup>

The disciple comes to the guru and says: "I am burning all over from the fire of prarabhdā; I want to get out of saṃsāra and for that I want knowledge." And the guru replies: "I will teach you discrimination. So returning to Sutra 57, which says: **uttarasmād uttarasmāt pūrvapūrvā śreyāya bhavati**—each earlier one is considered superior to the latter one. If you take the Gītā śloka (7.16): **ārto jijnāsuarthārthī**, āṛta is the first, jijñāsu is the second, and arthārthī is the third. You must note this order in the Gītā śloka. And in Sutra 57, Nārada is saying: each of the former is superior to the latter. This means the āṛta bhakta, who is understood to be both mumukṣu and jijñāsu, is superior to the jijñāsu bhakta, who has desire for jñānam but not for mokṣa. Here, the jijñāsu bhakta should be understood as kevala jijñāsu (a jijñāsu only) without being a mumukṣu—in short, he is an academic seeker. Still, the jijñāsu bhakta is superior to the arthārthī bhakta, who wants neither jñānam nor mokṣa. Thus, we have the two-fold seeker who wants both freedom and knowledge; the single seeker who wants knowledge only; and the one who seeks neither. This is why Nārada says: **uttarasmād uttarasmāt pūrvapūrvā śreyāya bhavati**—each earlier one is considered superior to the latter. The arthārthī is furthest away because he has two things left to seek; the jijñāsu is less far away because he has one thing left to

<sup>215</sup> Having reached a level where he can stay firm in the bliss of brahman, he wants to settle down for a fraction of human bliss.

<sup>216</sup> I am roasted in the inextinguishable forest fire of saṃsāra; tossed by the winds of misfortunes, I am terrified. Please save me from death, O Lord! You are my refuge; I know of no other refuge.

<sup>217</sup> Fear not, O learned one! There is no danger for you. There is a way to cross over this ocean of Saṃsāra. I shall instruct you the means by which the ancient Seers have gone to the other shore.

seek; and the āṛta is closest because in his desperation for mokṣa his study is anything but casual. He is like a gravely ill person reading a treatment manual for his disease. When a healthy person reads a treatment manual, he does it somewhat casually, with a view to sharing the information with others, but an ill person reading about a treatment program for his illness will be one-pointed and sincere.

**Sutra 58. anyasmāt saulabhyaṃ bhaktau**

***Success is easier to attain by bhakti than by any other process.***

In this sutra, Nārada talks about the glory of bhakti as a great sādhanā, and he says that compared to all other sādhanās, bhakti is the easiest one with which to start. This is something that Kṛṣṇa also says (Gītā, 9.30-31):

**api cet sudurācāraḥ, bhajate mām ananyabhāk  
sādhureva sa mantavyaḥ, samyag vyavasito hi saḥ  
kṣipraṃ bhavati dharmātmā, śaśvacchāntiṃ nigacchati  
kaunteya pratijānīhi, na me bhaktaḥ praṇaśyati<sup>218</sup>**

Of all types of sādhanās, bhakti is the easiest one with which to start. But be careful not to mistake this as saying that bhakti is the easiest means to liberation. That is what bhakti schools of philosophy say, but their view is our pūrvapakṣa. There is only one means to liberation, so one cannot talk about the easiest and most difficult. There is one means and that is jñānam alone. That is Vedānta. But Vedānta says that bhakti alone is the easiest sādhanā with which to start, especially informal bhakti, because one need not even know how to do pūjā and other rituals, which come under formal bhakti. The other day a student told me that he took a red flower to a Viṣṇu temple and they refused to accept it as an offering. So there are even rules regarding which specific type of flowers can be offered to which deities. Formal dvaita bhakti requires some degree of scriptural study and if you want to know how to perform Vedic rituals, you also need to study the Vedas. And if you want to know brahman, you have to do maha-study. Because all formal bhakti requires a lot of study, it is easiest to start with informal bhakti. Therefore Nārada says **anyasmāt**, which means ‘easier than anything else.’ For the sake of facility I am taking this to mean compared to other sādhanās, such as karma yoga, upasana yoga, jñāna yoga, etc., **bhaktau saulabhyaṃ**—love of God is the easiest sādhanā with which to start. But it is never the place to end.

Why is bhakti said to be the easiest? Because the only capital required is love. Bhakti is defined as Īśvara-prema, love directed toward God. Given that bhakti is love and love is our essence, we all have love. That being said, before coming to bhakti our love is not directed toward God, but toward countless other things—even a miserly person loves his money. Therefore every human being and even animals have instinctive love. Therefore self-love is always-already there, as is love for all the things and people connected to us. The raw material is already there, so no raw material needs to be acquired; we only need to redirect or convert this love into bhakti. This can easily be done in our culture because we grow up listening to so many Purāṇic stories that we need not even study the Purāṇas. We have heard the stories of Kṛṣṇa, Rama, and all, so when we hear these descriptions of God it is easy to love God. A mother says to her child: “If you do namaskāram to God, you will pass the exam...and extra namaskāra before a tough exam!” Therefore, not because I know God, not because I love God, not because I

<sup>218</sup> Whoever worships me seeking nothing else should be considered a saint only, even if this person has the worst conduct, for this person has resolved rightly. Soon this person does become a noble soul and certainly attains lasting peace. Oh Arjuna! Declare it to all: my devotee never perishes.

understand sat-cit-ānanda, but simply because there is a Bhagavān out there who will help me pass my exam, I will do namaskāra to him? Bhagavān is presented as lovable and beautiful, with wonderful characteristics and always ready to help—indeed, one of the names of God is **ārta-tranā-parayanah**, which means ready to help anyone who sings. Being steeped in these Purāṇic stories, we easily develop love for one Iṣṭa-devatā or another. And the beauty of it is that once we develop this love, we begin to see results. Even though I don't have a clear idea of what that God is, and even though I have not come across him (I've only seen him in pictures, and I don't really know whether it is fact or fiction), the mind is capable of love. If I develop an association with any character, be it Harry Potter or Tin Tin, I begin to love them, and after some time the character is no longer fictitious for me. And when the author announces that she intends to get rid of the character, we protest: "No, we want him!" We fall in love with so many fictional characters because the mind has that capacity. So even though I have not seen Kṛṣṇa in flesh and blood, I have not seen Rama in flesh and blood, I can start to love an Iṣṭa-devatā and that bhakti produces benefits. As it says in the Gītā (7.21)

**yo yo yāṃ yāṃ tanuṃ bhaktah śraddhayārcitum icchāti  
tasya tasyācalāṃ śraddhāṃ, tāmeva vidadhāmyaham<sup>219</sup>**

The benefit is peace of mind. The intensity of painful experiences is reduced, and this is even true for illiterate people. That is why in all of our temples, people are willing to stand in a queue for nine hours because that 'jarāgandi...jarāgandi' (please move, please move) darśanam provides joy.

**\*\*\*End of Teaching 21\*\*\***

**Sutra 59. pramāṇāntarasyānapekṣatvāt svayaṃ pramāṇatvāt**

***[The reason bhakti is the easiest of all spiritual processes is] it does not depend on any other authority for its validity, being itself the standard of authority.***

In the 7<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the Gītā, Lord Kṛṣṇa talks about four types of bhaktas and four types of bhakti: ārta, arthārthī, jijñāsu, and jñānī. Of these four, Nārada calls the first three 'gauni' bhaktas, which means secondary as opposed to primary or ultimate (mukhya) bhakti. In saying that they are not ultimate, Kṛṣṇa and Nārada are both attempting to convey that these forms of dvaita bhakti are very important as stepping-stones, but that they should never be treated as final. Jñānī bhakti alone is the mukhya bhakti. Without mukhya bhakti, gauni bhakti is incomplete and without gauni bhakti mukhya bhakti is impossible. Put another way, without dvaita bhakti, advaita bhakti is impossible and without advaita bhakti, dvaita bhakti is incomplete. In this view, Vedānta differs from all the bhakti schools of philosophy, which present dvaita bhakti as both a means and an end. Vedānta darśanam does emphasize dvaita bhakti—indeed, Adi Śaṅkarācārya has written several stotras on various deities and such works as Śivānanda Laharī<sup>220</sup> highlight his dvaita bhakti. Advaitans never criticize dvaita bhakti or dvaita bhaktas, our only grievance with the bhakti schools is that they present dvaita bhakti without ever

<sup>219</sup> Whichever devotee desires to worship faithfully any particular form, I stabilize the very faith of that devotee.

<sup>220</sup> A devotional hymn to Śiva comprising 100 stanzas, which was composed by Śaṅkarācārya while he was staying in the pilgrimage town of Srisailam. It literally means *Wave of Auspicious Bliss*.

educating their followers about the need to eventually study scripture, go to a guru, gain self-knowledge, and discover advaita bhakti. In fact, not only are their followers not informed about scriptural study, but Vedantic study and self-knowledge are actually criticized despite the fact that Kṛṣṇa clearly says that jñānī bhakti is the highest form of devotion. These bhakti schools of philosophy never give due respect to advaita jñānam, to Vedanta, to śāstram, or to śravaṇa, manana, nididhyāsana, and thus seriously mislead people. Therefore, we should emphasize that we are not against dvaita bhakti; indeed, Nārada is openly saying that bhakti is the easiest way to start. This is because there are continuous problems arising in life at the personal, family, and professional level, so we already begin as ārtas. Indeed, Bhagavān is called ārtatrāṇaparāyaṇa—one who is committed to rescuing people from the soup. In fact, we have different types of hymns: ārtatrāṇaparāyaṇa Nārāyaṇa aṣṭakam (directed toward Viṣṇu) and artatranaparayana Gangadhara Aṣṭakam (directed toward Śiva); we also have stotras directed toward Rama. For example:

**āpadam apahartāram dātāram sarva sampadām  
lokābhirāmaṃ śrīrāmaṃ bhūyo bhūyo namāmyaham  
ārtānāmārtihantāram bhītānām bhītināśanaṃ  
dviṣatām kāladaṇḍaṃ taṃ rāmachandraṃ namāmyaham**<sup>221</sup>

Such stotras for developing bhakti toward the Lord exist because most people harbor intense feelings of insecurity. Therefore, if you chant the following stotram:

**agrataḥ prushta taschaiva parsvatascha mahabalau  
akarna purna-dhanvanou raksetam rama lakshmanau**<sup>222</sup>

Rama and Lakshmana will be walking around you giving the said security. Just as security guards wield AK-47s, they will hover around you 24/7 with drawn arrows—wherever you go, chant this and nothing will happen to you. So out of sheer fear, bhakti comes.

And in the Gītā, Kṛṣṇa says (7.21):

**yo yo yāṃ yāṃ tanuṃ bhaktaḥ, śraddhayārcitum icchāti  
tasya tasyācalāṃ śraddhāṃ, tāmeva vidadhāmyaham**<sup>223</sup>

I will do everything to nourish that ārta bhakti, and thereafter it should slowly be transformed into arthārthī bhakti, then into jijñāsu bhakti. But at least start with ārta bhakti, which is the easiest. Similarly, Nārada says: **bhaktau saulabhyaṃ**—success is easier to attain by bhakti than by any other process. And as we will see in the next sutra, love is already known to every being because the very nature of ātmā is love. Everybody intrinsically and instinctively has self-love, and it is this self-love alone that later gets directed toward our near and dear ones. The ārta bhakta needs to redirect this already available love toward Īśvara. Bhakti is simply love directed toward Īśvara; therefore, it is **saulabhyaṃ**—easy to attain, and thus a good starting point, but it is not the final destination. As is said in the Kaivalya Upaniṣad (Verse 19), the final destination is the knowledge: **mayy eva sa kālaṃ jātaṃ**—in me alone is everything born.

In Sutra 59, Nārada says: **pramāṇāntarasyānapekṣatvāt**—it (bhakti) does not depend on any other authority for its validity. To perform Vedic rituals, I require a scriptural pramāṇam because rituals can

<sup>221</sup> I prostrate before Sri Rama, who is the healer of the distressed, the remover of all fears, and who spells death unto the foes.

<sup>222</sup> These two warriors of supreme strength, Rama and Lakshman, stand with me, before me, behind me, and always close by. Armed with weapons like the bow, they continually protect me.

<sup>223</sup> Whichever devotee desires to worship faithfully any particular form, I stabilize the faith of that very devotee.

only be learned from the scriptures. I cannot simply do as I please; there are rules and regulations. If I want to do upāsana, there are so many rules and regulations. I cannot invoke the Lord in anything and everything. I may love cricket, but I do not invoke the Lord on the cricket stump. Śaṅkarācārya always writes that upāsana is **yatha śāstram Īśvara sya upāsanaṁ**—where Bhagavān should be invoked is not my choice, but is dictated by scriptural instruction. Therefore, upāsana requires śāstra pramāṇam and karmas require śāstra pramāṇam, whereas love is already known to everyone; it is simply the direction of this love that needs to be understood. Therefore, Nārada says that with regard to love, **pramāṇāntarasyānapekṣatvāt**—no other pramāṇa, or authority, is required. Love is our nature and self-love is universal; it is **svayaṁ pramāṇatvāt**—self-evident in everyone as the very nature of ātmān. Even animals love themselves. We know this to be true because when there is a threat, they will run for their dear lives. We use the word ‘dear’ because even animals have that self-love. Therefore, love is the easiest place from which to start.

**Sutra 60. śāntirūpāt paramānanda rūpācca**

***Furthermore, bhakti is the embodiment of peace and supreme joy.***

Our love toward other people and things is always subject to fluctuation because it is conditional. Before becoming a jñānī, I have conditions for loving others. Even parents’ love seems to come with conditions, sometimes parents even disown their children when they do not toe the line. Our partners’ love is also conditional. As Śaṅkarācārya writes in Bhaja Govindaṁ (Verse 10):

**vayasigate kaḥ kāmavikāraḥ śuśke nīre kaḥ kāsāraḥ kshīnevitte kaḥ parivāraḥ<sup>224</sup>**

When we lose money, the number of people who want to associate with us also decreases. Therefore, all worldly love is conditional. But if we develop love for God, even if it is initially as eka rūpa Īśvara bhakti, that love will be unconditional, both from my perspective and from Bhagavān’s. Therefore, whenever I invoke bhakti toward the Lord, it unfailingly gives **param ānandaḥ** (supreme bliss) because Bhagavān does not place any conditions upon love. Lord Kṛṣṇa promises this in the Gītā (9.30):

**api cet sudurācāraḥ, bhajate mām ananyabhāk  
sādhureva sa mantavyaḥ, samyag vyavasito hi saḥ<sup>225</sup>**

I will not shut the door on even the worst sinner, if he turns toward me. A real friend is one who opens the door when all others shut the door; a friend in need is a friend indeed. Similarly, Bhagavān is one who never shuts the door, even if everyone else shuts it. Therefore, Nārada says **paramānanda rūpatvat**—a supreme source of ānanda. And not only ānanda but **śāntirūpāt**—śanti, or peace, which means duḥkha abhava (the absence of suffering). Thus, when I invoke my relationship with the Lord, All my mental disturbances diminish and there is positive ānanda. I don’t even require Bhagavān in flesh and blood, the mere image of God is enough to give that benefit. Therefore, bhakti is an easy and useful way to start.

<sup>224</sup> When youth departs, what good is lust? What good is the lake, when water denudes? Where are kin, when wealth disappears?

<sup>225</sup> Whoever worships me seeking nothing else should be considered a saint only, even if this person has the worst conduct, for this person has resolved rightly.

**Sutra 61. lokahānau cintā na kāryā niveditātmalokaveda shilatvāt**

***After consigning to the Lord all one's mundane and Vedic duties, one no longer needs to worry about worldly loss.***

Ārta bhakti should gradually lead us to a desire to know more about that Lord. In other words, that Īśvara-jijñāsa must come. Naturally when I like or love someone, I want to learn more about him or her. When I have admiration and appreciation and love for God, it will generate a jijñāsa curiosity and bhakti will lead to scriptural study. It may not lead directly to Vedānta, but at the very least to an understanding of saṅgā Īśvara mahimā (the greatness of the manifest Lord). From eka rūpa bhakti (devotion to a particular God), I will want to know more about the other glories of the Lord. And when I study those, I come to understand Bhagavān as viṣvarūpa Īśvara (God in all forms). In Viṣṇusahasranāma, the first nama of the Lord is viśvam—the one who is himself the whole universe; it is a namaskāra to the all. And when eka rūpa bhakti gets converted to viṣvarūpa bhakti, the byproduct should be ahaṅkāra-mamākara-sannyāsa: renunciation of egoism and ownership, the 'I'-sense and 'my'-sense. True bhakti and true jñānam will inevitably lead to sannyāsa. If one does not develop this attitude of renunciation, bhakti and jñānam have not been understood or applied correctly. Why does jñānam lead to sannyāsa? In jñānam I know I am asaṅga—unaffected by and unattached to anything. When I am absolutely asaṅga-ātmā, where is the question of claiming or owning anything? Therefore mamākara, or ownership, necessarily disappears as a consequence of asaṅga-ātmā jñānam. Bhakti will also lead to sannyāsa because if I understand Bhagavān as the owner of everything, how dare I claim anything as mine while also proclaiming myself to be a bhakta? There would have to be a fundamental misunderstanding. What is the true definition of Bhagavān? *Bhaga* means 'opulence' and *vān* means 'possessor.' The Vedas define Bhagavān as the total possessor of six forms of opulence. As it says in Viṣṇu Purāṇa, 6.5.47:

**aiśvaryasya samagrasya, vīryasya yaśasaḥ śriyaḥ  
jñāna-vairāgyayoś caiva, ṣaṅṅāṃ bhaga itīṅganā**

**Samagrasya aiśvaryasya** means total power. **Vīryasya** means total courage and valor. **Yaśasaḥ** means total fame. I should not claim any fame for myself. If anybody glorifies me and I am a real bhakta, not merely a lip-service bhakta, the glory should immediately be passed onto Bhagavān. **Sriyaḥ** means all forms of wealth. So all those lovely ornaments can be worn but one mustn't develop a sense of ownership of them. **Jñānam** means knowledge. **Vairāgyam** means dispassion. These six total wealths are called *bhaga* and Bhagavān is the one possessor of them all. This means I cannot even claim this physical body. The more I understand and assimilate this, the more sannyāsa will naturally unfold. And if sannyāsa naturally happens, I understand myself as the user. When ups and downs take place in all these areas, I will not entertain any worry or anxiety because both indicate ahaṅkāra and mamākara. How do I know whether I have ahaṅkāra and mamākara? Worry is the sign. Therefore, Nārada says a bhakta should drop anxiety and worry by saying I am only a caretaker. I will contribute my best, but I need not worry. Contribution is the other side of love. Worry is the other side of ownership. So I contribute by helping in whatever way I can help, but I don't harbor anxiety in the mind. Therefore, may your bhakti lead to sannyāsa and may sannyāsa be a CLASP-rejection. What is CLASP? The 'CL' stands for claiming ownership and controllership. The 'A' represents anxiety. The 'SP' represents special prayers. This is the natural consequence of real bhakti. Nārada says this with the word **lokaḥānau—hāniḥ** means setbacks, failures, disturbances, literally loss. **Loka** refers to worldly situations. So when we experience setbacks, failures, losses, insults, and such in our worldly affairs, what should we do? **Cintā na kāryā**—we should not immediately take to newer and newer

requests. It is our tendency to convert distress into āṛta bhakti, but this is not real bhakti. As it says in the Gītā (6.1):

**anāśritaḥ karmaphalaṃ, kāryaṃ karma karoti yaḥ  
sa sannyāsī ca yogī ca na niragnir na cākriyaḥ<sup>226</sup>**

Do what you can do and tell Bhagavān (Mukundu Mālā stotra, Verse 5):

**yad yat bhāvyaṃ bhavatu Bhagavān pūrva-karmānurūpam  
etat prārthyaṃ mama bahu mataṃ janma-janmāntare 'pi  
tvat-pādāmbhoruha-yuga-gatā niścalā bhaktir astu<sup>227</sup>**

Lord, I will do my duty and let the consequences unfold according to the law of karma; I don't expect you to do something special for me. Let us not bribe God; let us simply do our best and what will be will be. Then what is my prayer? May bhakti give me the strength to face any failure or disappointment. So, **lokaḥānau cintā na kāryāḥ**—a bhakta should not worry much about worldly losses. You have to read the work of Kuchelopakyānam. He was a great bhakta and, in the worldly sense, he did not have many favorable circumstances. But he never wanted to use God for worldly purposes. Therefore, **cintā na kāryāḥ**. And why should I not worry? Because **niveditātmalokaveda shilatvāt**—a real bhakta has already handed over all possessions to Bhagavān. **Niveditām** means surrendered—the bhakta has surrendered ahaṅkāra (ego), mamākāra (ownership), and the viṣayas (all sense objects, material enjoyments) to the Lord. Here the word **ātma** refers to sthūla sūkṣma-śarīra (the body-mind)—not sat-cit-ānanda ātmā, but ahaṅkāra (egoism), so ātmā-nivedana bhakti is devotion through self-surrender. Here **ātmaloka** is meant to include all things and beings around: family, possessions, positions, name, and fame. **Veda** refers to all the karmya karmas—actions prescribed in the scriptures (karma kanda) for the explicit purpose of obtaining some desired end; those, too, are given up by the real bhakta. As Kṛṣṇa has criticized in the Gītā (2.42-44):

**yām imāṃ puspitāṃ vācaṃ, pravadyantya vipāścitaḥ  
vedavādaratāḥ pārtha, nānyad astīti vādinaḥ**

**kāmātmānaḥ svargaparāḥ, janmakarmaphalaprādām  
kriyāviśeṣabahulāṃ, bhogaiśvaryagatiṃ prati**

**bhogaiśvaryaprasaktānām tayāpahrtacetāsām  
vyavasāyātmikā buddhiḥ, samādhau na vidhiyate<sup>228</sup>**

Karma karmyas are to be renounced. Therefore, all these three must be surrendered: ātmā (as ahaṅkāra, mamākāra, viṣayas); loka (worldly things, including family, possessions, positions, name and fame); and Veda (performance of rituals or invocation of God for selfish purposes). And the bhakta has

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<sup>226</sup> He who performs action without expecting the result of action, is a sannyāsī, and not a renouncer of rituals. Moreover, he is a yogī and not a renouncer of activities.

<sup>227</sup> For whatever has been decided by you will come to me in accordance with the karma of my past. But I have one soulful prayer to thee, O Lord. In birth after birth, may I show unflinching devotion at your two lotus feet.

<sup>228</sup> The unintelligent ones who are enamoured with ritualistic Vedic statements, who are votaries of heaven, who always argue that there is nothing else, and who are full of desires speak such flowery words that are full of specific rites for attaining pleasure and power, and which lead to further births, the results of actions. Clear understanding does not take place in the mind of those attached to pleasure and power, and whose minds are carried away by those words.

not done this once, but **shilatvāt**—it has become part of his very svabhāva, his natural inclination. Because difficulties always tempt us toward kama karma or parihara karma, resisting the temptation is the toughest part. And we can only resist this tendency if our bhakti is strong. Bhakti must give us the strength to renounce all the kama and parihara karmas. Nārada says: may you practice such a niškāma (desireless) bhakti, which alone will lead you to jijñāsu bhakti. Jijñāsu bhakti can never be reached from sakāma bhakti (devotion for the sake of wish-fulfillment).

**Sutra 62. na tatsiddhau lokavyavahāro heyah kintu phalatyāgaḥ tatsādhanam ca kāryameva**

*In attaining the highest bhakti, one should not abandon responsibilities in this world, but rather, surrender the results of all actions to the Lord.*

As long as one remains in this society as a householder, one should never give up family duties, social duties, religious duties, and scriptural duties, especially the pañca mahāyajñas. Those duties should never be given up in the name of bhakti. Therefore, **lokavyavahāraḥ na heyah**—mundane duties should not be abandoned. And **tatsādhanam ca kāryameva**— may you be involved in all the sādhanas or activities required for the achievement of worldly needs—food, clothing, shelter, money, and so on. Do whatever is required for that, but in parallel, do the sādhanā for **tatsiddhau**—attaining the highest devotion known as parābhakti. And what will be the attitude when performing those activities? **Kintu phalatyāgaḥ**—one of surrendering all results to the Lord. Thus, the actions are performed for citta śuddhi (mental purification), not for name, fame, recognition, reciprocation, or even gratitude. We often expect gratitude from others, but as Kṛṣṇa says (Gītā, 2.47): **mā karmaphalaheturbhūḥ, mā te saṅgo'stvākarmaṇi**—may you not be motivated by the results of actions and may you not have an inclination toward inaction. Do what you have to, but do not expect gratitude. If others are grateful, you are lucky. But gratitude must never be expected or demanded. It is my duty to offer gratitude, but it is never my duty to demand gratitude. When I don't expect worldly rewards, citta śuddhi comes more quickly. I need not even ask Bhagavān for citta śuddhi. If I don't ask for it, it will take place by default. Therefore, do your duties without expecting worldly rewards and citta śuddhi will come. May you continue this lifestyle for **tatsiddhau**—advaita siddhi. There is another reading of **tatsiddhau**: as long as advaita bhakti has not yet been attained, you have to continue to attain it.

**Sutra 63. strīdhana nāstika vairi caritraṃ na śravaṇīyam**

*One should not find entertainment in news of sex, money, atheists, and enemies.*

In this sutra, Nārada is asking the bhakta to take certain precautions to preserve the bhakti and use it wisely for spiritual growth. Remember that throughout the Nārada Bhakti Sutra, the primary aim is mokṣa or spiritual growth. One of these precautions is sense control, or indriya-nigraha, which is also discussed in Tattva Bodha as part of sādhanā chatuṣṭaya sampatti—specifically, as dama or control of the senses. Why is sense control important? Because the sense organs are the gateways linking the

mind and the external world, and the external world is always waiting to gatecrash into the mind through the five doors. If there is no watchman, anything and everything will gatecrash. And once the external world enters the mind, it cannot remain quiet. It is like catching a cold: if I go out with a compromised immune system, I will be the most hospitable host to all kinds of bacteria and viruses. Similarly, if the mind doesn't have immunity through sense control, anything can enter the mind and start working on it. A virus enters at some point and it may have an incubation period, but eventually it starts to operate. Kṛṣṇa talks about this in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Chapter of the Gītā with the example of the tortoise (2.58):

**yadā samharate cāyaṃ, kūrmo'ṅgānīva sarvaśaḥ  
indriyāṅindriyārthebhyaḥ, tasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā**<sup>229</sup>

A tortoise withdraws its limbs into a thick shell whenever it senses a danger. Because it cannot run from danger very quickly, Bhagavān has given it this support. And once the danger is gone, the tortoise will come back out of its shell. Now suppose I don't withdraw my sense organs and instead keep them open for everything to gatecrash. What will happen? Kṛṣṇa addresses this, too (Gītā, 2.62-63):

**dhyāyato viṣayān puṃsaḥ, saṅgasteṣūpajāyate  
saṅgāt sañjāyate kāmaḥ, kāmāt krodho'bhijāyate**

**krodhād bhavati saṃmohaḥ, saṃmohāt smrtivibhramah  
smṛtibhramśād buddhināśaḥ, buddhināśāt praṇaśyati**<sup>230</sup>

Among the sense organs, two powerful ones are the eyes and ears. Therefore, Nārada says: May you filter what you see and hear. And if you don't filter, the world will enter and produce unproductive thoughts, including kama (lust), krodha (anger), lobha (greed), and moha (delusion). Nārada gives four examples of the types of stories that lead to the fourfold mental disturbances and he says: **caritraṃ na śravaṇīyam**—do not listen to stories that promote the four internal enemies.

There are so many stories out there, from people gossiping, to novels, to articles in the popular magazines, to movies and television programs. What are the four specific examples given by Nārada? The first is **strī**, which literally means 'women' but should be taken to refer broadly to the private lives and affairs of others. Nowadays, the media is almost exclusively dedicated to writing such stories, otherwise their magazines won't sell. In the name of marketing, they have to include all kinds of information about the private lives of celebrities. But if those stories are not elevating, one should avoid them. The second is **dhānam**, or money. Money is extremely important. The Veda does not want us to underestimate or overestimate the importance of money. Money has value, but viewing money from either extreme is dangerous. There are so many books these days that talk exclusively about the glory of wealth and how to earn it. The third is **nāstika**, one who does not believe in the dharma and mokṣa puruṣārthas. Nāstikas argue that in today's world one needs to be practical. 'Practical' is a shorthand way of saying: "Don't be too fussy about values. Instead, know how to adjust your values according to kāla (time)." A nāstika's speech is **puspitām vācam** (nice to hear). Therefore, never have close friendships with nāstikas. Finally, there is **vairi**, which refers to our competitors or those who are hostile toward us. So involving oneself in stories of people's private lives (**strī**) can give rise to kama (desire);

<sup>229</sup> Moreover, when one completely withdraws the sense organs from the sense objects, just as a tortoise withdraws its limbs, then his knowledge becomes firm.

<sup>230</sup> For a person who dwells on the sense objects, a fancy toward them arises. From fancy, desire is born. From desire, anger arises. From anger arises delusion; from delusion, the loss of memory; from loss of memory, the loss of discrimination. Because of the loss of discrimination, he perishes.

in stories of enemies (**vairi**) can give rise to krodha (anger); in stories of money (**dhānam**) can give rise to lobha (greed); and in stories of atheists (**nāstika**) can give rise to moha (delusion).

### \*\*\*End of Teaching 22\*\*\*

As I have said earlier, this chapter is titled Prema Nirvacanam—the definition of Prema or bhakti. The first part of this chapter defined mukhya-prema, or primary love or bhakti, and from Sutra 56 onward, gauni bhakti, or secondary bhakti, is being defined. Secondary bhakti is the stepping-stone that takes us to primary bhakti. Per the Bhagavad Gītā, secondary bhakti includes karma yoga and upāsana yoga. Nārada gives some important instructions here. Specifically, he says monitor your lifestyle very carefully because spiritual seeking is not confined to a particular action at a particular time; we need to be aware of our entire lifestyle. In regard to this, certain types of conduct have been enumerated in the Gītā. For example, in Chapter 16, Kṛṣṇa clearly outlines a list of virtues that promote spiritual growth (the 26 daivī-sampat, or divine qualities) and a list of vices that obstruct spiritual growth (āsurī-sampat, or animal-natured qualities), and he says (16.5):

**daivī sampad vimokṣāya, nibandhāyāsurī matā**<sup>231</sup>

These qualities are elaborated upon from 16.7 onward:

**pravṛttiṃ ca nivṛttiṃ ca, janā na vidurāsurāḥ  
na śaucaṃ nāpi cācarāḥ, na satyaṃ teṣu vidyate**<sup>232</sup>

Here, Nārada says make sure that your lifestyle promotes daivī-sampat and gradually weakens āsurī-sampat. This implies that the list must be clear. So if necessary, commit the 16<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the Gītā to memory, or write down the lists of daivī-sampat and āsurī-sampat and paste them everywhere, including on your body. Whatever I see, hear, speak, or do—whatever books I read, movies I watch, TV shows I follow, company I keep—must be sanitized so as not to promote āsurī-sampat because even if we are alert now, we continue to fight with our old vāsanās. If we are going to lead an alert life, we need to stop āsurī-sampat from entering. Even after doing so, however, our fight is not over because the activities in which we have engaged in the past—not only in this life, but in past lives as well—have created vāsanās, and vāsanā kṣaya (decay or destruction of vāsanās) takes time. Thus, Nārada implores us to remain alert. As we saw in Sutra 63, **caritraṃ na śravaṇīyam**—anything that promotes kama, krodha, lobha, or moha should be carefully avoided. We need not hate anyone because everybody has God in him or her. If someone is not favorable to our spirituality, we can smile and ask: “How do you do?” We can converse for a few minutes, but we should avoid having regular intimate association, partnership, or companionship with such people. We have already seen in Sutra 43: **duḥsaṅgaḥ sarvathaiva tyājyaḥ**—forever avoid the company of those who are a bad influence. In Sutra 43, Nārada was referring to the people with whom we spend our time, and in Sutra 63, Nārada is talking about the media that we consume. In fact, one can’t help but wonder whether the newspaper is worth reading or not, because negative news is what sells. Indeed, there are many spiritual seekers who stop reading newspapers and watching TV altogether and many ashrams advise people to do just that. Don’t worry, I am not advising this, the idea is that we either avoid such media altogether, or we are careful to be very choosy about what we consume. Recall Kṛṣṇa’s example in the Gītā (2.58): **yadā samharate cāyaṃ, kūrho’ngānīva**—just as a tortoise withdraws its head and limbs into its shell because it has no other mechanism of defense, so too must we remain alert.

<sup>231</sup> It is known that daivī-sampat leads to liberation and āsurī-sampat leads to bondage.

<sup>232</sup> The asura people do not know what is to be done and what is not to be done. They have neither purity, nor religious discipline. They lack truthfulness also.

**Sutra 64. abhimāna dambhādikaṃ tyājyam**

***One should relinquish false pride, hypocrisy, and other vices.***

After talking about the 16<sup>th</sup> Chapter of Gītā, we now turn to the 13<sup>th</sup> Chapter. All of these sutras are Gītā-based; the language is cast in terms of bhakti, but it is nothing more than karma, upāsana, and values. Here Nārada emphasizes two things: **abhimāna** and **dambha**. **Abhimāna** refers to prideful attachment to the ‘I-sense’ (ahaṅkāra) and ‘my-sense’ (mamākara)—in short, to a sense of hubristic pride or false prestige. As we study scripture and come to know more than do lay people—we can quote the Gītā, we can quote the Upaniṣads—it may unwittingly go to our heads. Vidya garva (hubristic pride regarding knowledge) is the most dangerous variety of garva. Why? Because vidya is the only medicine for garvam and when that medicine itself becomes the cause of disease it is very dangerous. Therefore, never allow a superiority complex, **svātmani pujiyatva bhāvana**—feeling special, superior to, or holier/wiser than others—to develop. This is manitvam, or false pride. Dambhidvaṃ is expressed manitvam—publicizing or showcasing oneself through words, deeds, dress, material possessions, etc. When it is internalized, it is manitvam; when it is externalized, it is dambhitvam, but they are really one and the same. From the standpoint of Brahman, if I claim my greatness it doesn’t come under manitvam, but under jñānītvam, but from the standpoint of the body-mind complex, it is a real problem. Don’t get confused by manitvam and jñānītvam. When I claim ‘Aham Brahmasmi,’ from the standpoint of ātmā, my svarūpam, it is not arrogant: **tasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā bhavati**—it comes from one whose knowledge is firm. But from the standpoint of the body-mind complex, I can never claim greatness because the body, the mind, and the intellect are full of limitations. Here, Nārada is criticizing that sense of superiority that arises from anātma, which is why he calls it **abhimānaḥ**. In Verse 11 of Bhaja Govindam, Śaṅkarācārya says:

**mā kuru dhanajana yauvana garvaṃ  
harati nimeṣāt-kālaḥ sarvaṃ<sup>233</sup>**

Now you are youthful and have an energetic walk, but let’s see your walk when you are past the age of 50—the difference will be evident. It’s the same with dropping the names of important people you know. Thus, may you relinquish egoism, arrogance, and exhibitionism and lead a life of humility and simplicity, developing the 20 virtues (Gītā, 13.8-12):

**amānītvam adambhitvam, ahiṃsā kṣāntirārjavam  
ācāryopāsanaṃ śaucaṃ, sthairyam ātmavinigrahaḥ**

**indriyārtheṣu vairāgyam, anahaṅkāra eva ca  
janmamṛtyujarāvyaḍhi duḥkhadoṣānudarśanam**

**asaktiranabhiṣvaṅgaḥ, putradāragrḥādiṣu  
nityam ca samacittatvam, iṣṭāniṣṭopapattiṣu**

**mayi cānanyayogena, bhaktiravyabhicāriṇī  
viviktadeśasevitvam, aratirjanasaṃsadi**

**adhyātmajñānanityatvaṃ, tatvajñānārthadarśanam**

<sup>233</sup> Do not be proud of wealth, friends, relatives, or youth. Time can kill all these things in a moment.

etajñānam iti proktam, ajñānaṃ yadato'nyathā<sup>234</sup>

These virtues are collectively titled 'jñānam' because in following them, jñānam is sure to be reached. Thus, may you nourish these values and give up unhealthy traits.

**Sutra 65. tadarpitākhilācāraḥ san kāma krodhābhimānādikaṃ tasminneva karaṇīyam**

***Offering all of one's activities to the Lord, one should feel desire, anger, and pride only with regard to Him.***

In spite of our efforts to give up kama, krodha, etc., they may continue to arise in the mind. So Nārada prescribes another method: may you redirect them as they arise. Retain your kama, but let it be directed toward śāstra, or Bhagavān, or mokṣa, or Brahman. In other words, let the kama be jñāna kamo bhava (desire for knowledge), Īśvara kamo bhava (desire for God), advaita niṣṭhā kamo bhava (desire for steadiness in nonduality). If your desire cannot be relinquished, refine it instead. And what is this refinement? As Śaṅkarācārya says in Sādhāna Pañcakam (Verse 1), let the desire express according to the following:

**vedo nityamadhīyatāṃ taduditaṃ karma svanuṣṭhīyatāṃ  
teneśasya vidhīyatāmapacitiḥ kāmye matistyajyatāṃ  
pāpaughāḥ paridhūyatāṃ bhavasukhe doṣo'nusandhīyatāṃ  
ātmecchā vyavasīyatāṃ nijagrāhātturnaṃ vinirgamyatāṃ<sup>235</sup>**

Likewise, if anger comes, close the door and shout at Bhagavān. One consolation is that Bhagavān will not shout back, nor will he hold a grudge or file for divorce because Bhagavān's love is unconditional. Here is a method to follow if you are inclined toward anger. Begin by asking: What is the direction of my anger? We tend to become angry with people or situations that we feel are causing harm or trouble for us. On careful examination, however, we find that the greatest harm to us is our very anger, which harms both ourselves and others. Thus, may we direct our anger toward the anger itself. And thereafter, may we also direct our anger toward God, inquiring: "Why are you giving me this anger?" or "Why are you not removing my anger problem?" It is the same with the vice of lobha, or greed. May we refine this greed by redirecting it toward doing more śravaṇaṃ and developing more of the virtues. Accordingly, Nārada says: **tadarpitākhilācāraḥ**—resolve to dedicate everything to Bhagavān: **kāma krodhābhimānādikaṃ tasminneva karaṇīyam**—all desire, anger, and pride; all traits, tendencies, and conduct to Bhagavān.

Many bhaktas direct all their emotions toward their iṣṭa-devatā. We have to vent our feelings somehow, somewhere. If we suppress our feelings, they will create all manner of psychological problems—we are not supposed to suppress. We should either learn to process them inwardly, or if we are not able to do

<sup>234</sup> This is an enumeration of all 20 values. Humility; simplicity; non-violence; forbearance; uprightness; service to the teacher; purity; steadfastness; self-control; non-attachment to sense objects; absence of egoism; constantly seeing the defect of pain in birth, death, old age, and disease; dispassion; non-identification with son, wife, house, etc.; equanimity in desirable and undesirable situations; unswerving devotion to me with undivided attention; seclusion; non-indulgence in people's company; constant self-enquiry; and not losing sight of the fruit of self-knowledge—all this is said to be jñānam. That which is opposed to this is ajñānam.

<sup>235</sup> Study the Vedas regularly and put their teachings into practice. Worship the Divine in that manner and give up the thought of desires. Wash away the negative habit-energy and examine the defects of worldly excitement. Hold onto the awareness of ātmā and leave at once your own limited identity.

so, we must learn to vent them in ways that do not cause harm to others or to ourselves. This is why psychologists say: If you are angry, go to the beach where nobody is around and shout, or if you feel like hitting someone, hit a punching bag or pillow behind closed doors. Feelings should be expressed and here Nārada is saying express them in a safe and appropriate manner. And what is the best punching bag, available to us all the time? Bhagavān. You can use him or her as a punching bag and you will find yourself coming out of the pūjā room feeling lighter. Nardada is making a very important psychological point here. So **tasminneva karaṇīyam**—toward him only (meaning Īśvara) should all this be directed. These are all instructions for the beginning stages of dvaita bhakti; we are talking about gauni dvaita sādhanā bhakti; Vedanta has not yet come into the picture.

**Sutra 66. trirūpa bhaṅga pūrvākaṃ nityadāsyā nityakāntā bhajanātmakaṃ prema kāryaṃ premaiva kāryam**

*After breaking through these coverings of the three modes of nature [i.e., the gunas: sattva, rajas, and tamas], one should act only from pure love of the Lord, remaining perpetually in the mode of a servant serving his master, or a lover serving her beloved.*

We have said may you refine your prema or kama by redirecting it toward Bhagavān; in other words, may you nourish Īśvara-bhakti. But even after developing Īśvara-bhakti, that Īśvara-bhakti itself should be refined. We know the stages of refinement from the 7<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the Gītā: ārtā bhakti, arthārthī bhakti, jijñāsu bhakti, and jñānī bhakti. Initially Īśvara bhakti is a purely commercial bhakti. It is meant for accomplishing things or getting rid of problems. This sakāma, or desirous, bhakti must be converted into niṣkāma, or desireless, bhakti. Initially for a bhakta, Bhagavān is the means for attaining worldly goals. In this case, worldly things are the sadhyam, or end and I use Bhagavān as a sādhanam, or means, for attaining those ends. Niṣkāma bhakti means reversing sādhanā and sadhya. Bhagavān is not a means for worldly things; on the contrary, worldly things are a means for Bhagavān. Suppose somebody asked: Would you renounce Bhagavān for the sake of family, or family for the sake of Bhagavān? Most people will say that family is the most important thing of all. I love Bhagavān because Bhagavān can help me to improve my family situation. So Bhagavān is useful for university admission, son-in-law hunting, daughter-in-law hunting, and so on. In this scenario, Bhagavān is only a means for nourishing my ahaṅkāra and mamākara. Vedanta asks instead: Can you renounce the family for the sake of Bhagavān? When we see Bhagavān as a means for worldly ends, nitya-anitya viveka (discrimination between the eternal and the ephemeral) is still unclear for us. Niṣkāma bhakti is devotion in which I am mentally willing and ready to renounce everything. In sakāma bhakti, Bhagavān is the means and worldly attainments are the end; in niṣkāma bhakti, the world is the means and Bhagavān is the end. In the following verse from the Gītā (2.45), the world is described as **traiguṇyaviṣayāḥ** (contaminated by the three guṇas):

**traiguṇyaviṣayā vedāḥ, nistraiguṇyo bhavārijuna  
nirvadvando nityasattvasthaḥ, niryogakṣema ātmavān**<sup>236</sup>

We have to transcend saṃsāra, therefore Nārada says: **trirūpa bhaṅga pūrvākaṃ. Trirūpa** is synonymous with **traiguṇyaviṣayāḥ**. **Bhaṅga** means eliminating or transcending triguṇa or sakāma bhakti. In simple language, transcending sakāma bhakti means seeing clearly and living with Bhagavān

<sup>236</sup> The Vedas deal with the world of three guṇas. Be free from desire of the world of three guṇas. Be free from the hold of the pairs of opposites. Be ever established in sattvaguṇa. Be free from the concern for acquisition and preservation. Be mindful.

as the goal as opposed to the means. Enough of keeping Bhagavān as your assistant and errand boy! Why can't you give Bhagavān a promotion already? Poor Bhagavān never gets promoted. It seems I am ready to have every goal on my list, yet I am not yet ready to include Bhagavān as the goal. And it is not enough to include Bhagavān as one among many goals. Many people include him amid a long list of other items. Bhagavān is their 5,374<sup>th</sup> goal, and only after completing 5,373 other things, are we ready to pursue Bhagavān. This is a condescending bhakti. Not only should Bhagavān be included on the list of goals (that is the first promotion), Bhagavān should be put at the very top of this list. Not only should Bhagavān be at the top of the list, eventually he should be the only thing on the list (Gītā, 2.41):

**vyavasāyātmikā buddhiḥ, ekeha kurunandana  
bahuśākhā hyanantāśca, buddhayo'vyavasāyinām**<sup>237</sup>

If on your deathbed Bhagavān were to ask you to choose a single thing, we should be able to name one thing without batting an eyelid; we should say Bhagavān alone. Thus, Nārada says **trirūpa bhaṅga pūrvākam**—having transcended sakāma bhakti and vyabhicāriṇī bhakti (worship of many deities), may you come to **avyabhicāriṇī bhaktiḥ**. As it says in the Bhagavad Gītā (13.11): **mayi cānanyayogena, bhaktiravyabhicāriṇī**—unswerving devotion to me with undivided attention. And this bhakti can be in any form. Bhagavān can be invoked in various ways. Nārada gives some examples. It can be **nityadāsyā bhakti**—perpetual servitude wherein I consider all the Vedic instructions to be Bhagavān's instructions. Many people think of dāsyā bhakti as simply doing pūjā to Bhagavān. Although that is dāsyā bhakti, the primary dāsyā bhakti refers to the instructions given in the scriptures, which I should follow. In one śloka, Bhagavān says: the values prescribed in the scriptures are my commandments. If you are my dāsa (servant), may you follow my commandments. I cannot claim to be a dāsa if I am disobedient. As it says in the Bhagavata (11.20.9):

**śrūti-smṛti mamaivājñe  
yas te ullaṅghya vartate  
ājñā-cchedī mama dveṣī  
mad-bhakto 'pi na vaiṣṇavaḥ**<sup>238</sup>

Bhagavān says: the one who does not follow the values I have given is not my dāsa (servant), but my dveṣi in dāsa robes (enemy in servant's robes). Going to temples and breaking coconuts is not bhakti. Bhakti is committing to following the values outlined by Bhagavān. We may fail in our efforts sometimes—after all, we are human beings with weaknesses. Bhagavān does not expect perfection from us; Bhagavān expects sincere effort. Therefore, may you take to **dāsyā bhakti** or **kāntā bhakti**, which literally means beloved. And this beloved can be taken to mean a beloved spouse, beloved friend, or beloved companion, someone with whom I always move. So whereas in **dāsyā bhāva**, I see myself in a position of servitude, in **kāntā bhāva** there is no question of lowliness or fear: I am a close companion of Bhagavān. Therefore, **kāntā bhajanātmakam**—worship as a lover serving the beloved. And **premaiva kāryam**—may one practice pure love of God alone.

Now we need to be careful because bhakti schools of philosophy are always ready to launch in with their own interpretations. So we need to be crystal clear about how to differentiate between bhakti darśanam and Vedanta darśanam. Sutra 66 is particularly vulnerable to misinterpretation. People from the bhakti schools of philosophy will happily take this sutra and say: “Nārada is not talking about *your* Vedanta. Nārada is talking about *our* bhakti because he has said **nityadāsyah**,” which means eternal servant. They will underline the word ‘nitya,’ and suggest this means we should eternally be saying

<sup>237</sup> There is only one clear understanding in this field. However, the notions of those without clarity are many-branched and endless.

<sup>238</sup> The śrūtis and smṛtis are to be understood as My injunctions, and one who violates such codes is to be understood as violating My will and thus opposing Me. Although such a person may claim to be My devotee, he is not actually a Vaiṣṇava (or Śaiva).

‘dasoham, dasoham’ (I am your servant, I am your servant) implying that we should never get to ‘so ham’ (I am that). Then they will conclude: “Nārada belongs to *our* party, not *yours*. So we need to be very cautious. Whenever we interpret any bhakti grantha, we should never violate śrūti, yukti, and anubhava. **Nityadāsatvam** is never the teaching of the Veda or of Bhagavān. In the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, Bhagavān clearly says: tat tvam asi.

Likewise, the Kaivalya Upaniṣad says:

**anoh ranīyanaḥ meva tadvat mahān aham viṣvam aham vicitram  
purātanoḥam purushoḥam iṣaḥ hiranmāyā yo ham śiva rūpam asmi**<sup>239</sup>

Śivoham or So Ham is the final teaching of the Veda. Therefore, **nityadāsyam** should never be taken literally. Nityadāsyam only applies as long as ajñānam is there. Jñāna yoga kale, karma yoga kale, upāsana yoga kale—may you continuously practice this **dāsa** bhakti and later come to so ham bhāvana. Therefore, the word ‘nitya’ in this context is apekṣitam nityatvam (relative or qualified eternity), like the nityatvam of heaven. When we say heaven is eternal we don’t mean it literally, but relatively speaking heaven is eternal. Similarly, if someone were to say that **nityadāsyā** is the teaching, we would respond that this is our pūrvapakṣa. But if one were to explain that it is apekṣitam nityatvam, qualified eternity, we would be back in Vedānta darśanam. So, **premaiva kāryam**—one should manifest pure love alone. And with this, Chapter 4 comes to a close.

## **Chapter 5: Bhakta Mahimā (The Primary Devotee; Sutras 67-84)**

**Sutra 67. bhaktaḥ ekāntino mukhyaḥ**

***Among the Lord’s devotees, the greatest are those who are dedicated to him solely as his intimate servants.***

This last chapter deals with the glory of mukhya bhakta, which is synonymous with jñānī bhakta and advaita bhakta. This bhakta is described in the three places in the Bhagavad Gītā: in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Chapter as sthita prajña (one who is firmly established in self-knowledge), in the 12<sup>th</sup> Chapter as parabhakta (the ultimate bhakta), and in the 14<sup>th</sup> Chapter as guṇathita (one who is beyond the guṇas). The Chapter 12 description comes closest because Kṛṣṇa uses the word ‘bhakta’ and here we are talking about bhakta mahimā. In the first sutra of this chapter, Nārada says: **bhaktaḥ mukhyaḥ**—the primary bhaktas who have discovered the Lord in themselves—are **ekāntinaḥ** (unalloyed), meaning they have **ekaniścayāḥ**—clear and singular knowledge or resolve. In the 12<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the Gītā, Kṛṣṇa says (12.19):

**tulyanindāstutirmaunī, satuṣṭo yena kenacit  
aniketaḥ sthira matiḥ, bhaktimān me priyo naraḥ**<sup>240</sup>

<sup>239</sup> I am that which is smaller than the smallest particle of matter one can think of. And I am great without qualification, bigger than the biggest one can think of. This entire amazingly variegated universe—that is what I am. I am eternal and I am unborn. I am the whole, all-inclusive, all-pervasive, undivided and indivisible being. I am the Lord of everything. I am the totality of all-knowledge. I am the very manifestation of Śiva, ever-auspicious absolute happiness, the absolute reality behind all existence. That is what I am.

<sup>240</sup> That devotee who is the same towards censure and praise, who is of limited speech, who is contented with anything, who is homeless, and who has firm knowledge of the self is dear to me.

The firm knowledge Kṛṣṇa refers to is: **brahma satyam, jagan-mithya jivo brahmaiva nāparaḥ**

**Ekāntinaḥ** means **dr̥dha-jñānam**, firm or unwavering knowledge. And why is niścayāḥ—firm knowledge, also **ekaḥ**—singular knowledge? Because the ultimate truth is only **ekaḥ**, or one. And through this jñānam, advaita bhaktas have discovered mokṣa and fulfillment. How does one know if a person has attained fulfillment? In the next sutra, Nārada describes how such jñānis talk about their journey and how happy they are. It is like hiking Kedarnath. You are struggling, huffing and puffing, and when you finally reach the top, you have the darśanam of the Lord—how fulfilling it is! So, too, is the fulfillment of these advaita bhaktas, as described in the next sutra.

**Sutra 68. kaṅṭhāvarodha romāñcāśrubhiḥ parasparaṃ lapamānāḥ pāvayanti kulāni pṛthivīm ca**

*Conversing among one another with throats choked, hair standing on end, and tears flowing, the Lord's intimate servants purify their own followers and the whole world.*

Manuṣyatvaṃ (a human birth) is itself very rare. As you may recall from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Verse of Vivekacūdamani:

**jantunām narajanma durlabham atah pumstvam tato vipratā  
tasmad vaidika-dharmamārgaparatā vidvatvam asmāt param  
ātmanātmavivecanam svanubhavo brahmātmanā samsthitih  
muktirno satakotijanmasu kṛtaih puṅyairvinā labhyate**<sup>241</sup>

To cross over so many varieties of janma (births) and be born a human being, and further, to come to the Veda pramāṇam, then to actually become interested in the Vedas when one could have easily gone elsewhere. Then not getting stuck in the Karma Kanda, but at the right time moving to upāsana kanda and eventually becoming interested in the Jñāna Kanda. Then finding a proper guru to serve as a guide. All of this without getting caught in any traps along the way. If we stand at the top of Mount Everest and look down at all the traps we have successfully avoided, it is an overwhelming feeling of fulfillment. We see so many people, but we cannot shout because they won't be able to hear. When a jñānī looks down from the top, it is often lonely because very few others have successfully arrived at the same place. And when a jñānī reflects on his or her accomplishment from this peak—with so many obstacles, so many lanes and bylanes, so many potential traps that were avoided along the way—when a jñānī reflects upon this with the few others who can understand, there is such a sense of fulfillment that tears are shed. These are not tears of sorrow (though there have been plenty of those as well), but now they are tears of joy. Therefore, Nārada says: **āśrubhiḥ**—with tears. As it says in Pañcadasi (7<sup>th</sup> Chapter):

**aho śāstram aho śāstram, aho guruḥ aho guruḥ  
aho puṅyam aho puṅyam, aho sukham aho sukham**<sup>242</sup>

<sup>241</sup> Of all births, that as a human being is rare to obtain. More difficult than that is to be inclined toward the path of dharma declared by the Vedas. Still more difficult is scholarship in the revealed texts, discrimination between ātmān and anātman, perfect experience following profound meditation, the state of being established in brahman and lastly,ukti or liberation. These cannot be obtained without merit acquired in hundreds of thousands of lives.

<sup>242</sup> O how grand are the scriptures, the scriptures, O how grand is my teacher, my teacher! O how grand is this merit, this merit, O how grand is this joy, this joy!

I don't know whether to say Bhagavān is great, śāstram is great, or the guru is great, for they are all mutually interdependent. I can only understand the greatness of śāstram because of the guru, and I can only understand the greatness of the guru because of Bhagavān, who supplied him. Thus, when I feel like glorifying the śāstra, I remember the guru, and when I feel like glorifying the guru, I think of God, who has given me such a guru. And when I feel like thanking God, I want to thank myself for having acquired the puṇyam, without which Bhagavān would not have given me all these things. So ultimately, I feel like patting myself on the back (aho puṇyam! aho puṇyam!) because **aho sukham! aho sukham!**—this knowledge is bliss. Therefore, Nārada says **āśrubhiḥ**—tears of joy running down my face, and **romāñcā**—hairs standing on end, and **kaṅṭhāvarodha**—when I begin to talk about it, I get choked up with emotion. Whenever jñānīs converse with one another, **parasparam lapamānāḥ**—they just share their joy and these few jñānīs alone purify the earth (**pr̥thivīm pāvayanti**). Even though there is so much evil in the world—cheaters, robbers, terrorists in millions—still manuṣya loka remains fantastic because of the few jñānīs alive and moving about, making the earth wonderful. And **kulāni pāvayanti**—they purify their communities, several generations past and future, because there is no difference between a jñānī and Bhagavān. There is a śloka that says:

**dve rūpe vāsudevasya caraṃca achara meva ca  
caraṃ sannyāsīnāṃ rūpam acaraṃ pratimāsuccha**<sup>243</sup>

Bhagavān exists in both stationary and mobile versions, much like our phones. The stationary version of Bhagavān is in the temples; the mobile version of Bhagavān is all the jñānīs and sannyāsīs, who move about the world, purifying it.

### \*\*\*End of Teaching 23\*\*\*

In the 5<sup>th</sup> and final chapter of this text, Nārada is talking about the jñānī bhakta, otherwise known as mukhya bhakta or parabhakta. Nārada began by pointing out in Sutra 67: **bhaktaḥ mukhyaḥ**—only a jñānī bhakta can be called a mukhya bhakta, the primary or chief devotee, because he alone has attained fulfillment. All others can only be considered amukhya or gauna (secondary) bhaktas. All other bhaktas have one expectation or another. The ārta bhakta has a desperate expectation to get out of the problems in which he or she is caught. The arthārthī bhakta wants badly to succeed in whatever venture he or she is attempting. And the jijñāsu bhakta, as the very name suggests, desperately wants jñānam. Thus, in all these bhaktas there is some lack of fulfillment. Thus, there are certain features present in the conventional bhakta that are absent in the case of the jñānī. One feature is a sense of helplessness or desperation, known as ārtatvam. Another feature is demanding, or ārtitvam, a constant seeking of something from the Lord; the very voice of this bhakta is a pleading one. A third feature is alpatvam—a feeling of smallness, inferiority, or insignificance before the Lord who is so vast. Finally, the most important feature is paratantriyam—a sense of dependence; the attitude: “without you, I would fall.” All these are prominent features of conventional bhakti, popular bhakti, or dvaita bhakti. If we were to say there is a bhakti in which all four of these features are absent, many people would wonder: “Where, then, is the bhakti?” This is because many people have a hard time imagining bhakti without these four features, which in their view are the essential components of bhakti. If you take the constituent vegetables of a salad out one by one, what will be left on the plate? This is why people have a hard time understanding jñānī bhakti or advaita bhakti. It seems meaningless or even impossible.

If these four features are absent in the case of the jñānī bhakta, who exactly is a jñānī? A jñānī is a bhakta without ārtatvam because in knowing ‘aham brahmasmi,’ where is the question of desperation or ārtatvam (helplessness or desperation)? Such a bhakta cannot have ārtitvam (seeking) either

<sup>243</sup> Insert translation

because when he or she knows that I, the ātma, includes everything: **idaṃ sarvaṃ yad ayam ātmā**—all this is just the self (Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, 2.4.6); **ātmā purastāt ātmā paschāt ātmā dakṣiṇataḥ** (there is only the self to the east, to the west, and to the south). So what could a jñānī possibly seek when he or she knows **aham purnaḥ** (I am full)? Therefore, no ārtivam pollutes the jñānī's bhakti. And there is no alpatvam (sense of smallness or inadequacy) either, because alpatvam is superimposed by ignorance. As Śaṅkarācārya says in Ātmā Bodha (Verse 4):

**paricchinna ivājñānāt tannāśe sati kevalaḥ  
svayaṃ prakāśate hyātmā meghāpāyem'śumāniva**<sup>244</sup>

Alpatvam is the product of ignorance alone. Once ajñānam is gone, alpatvam goes with it. Finally, there cannot be paratantriyam (a sense of dependence), which is the opposite of svatantriyam (full independence). A jñānī cannot have the paratantriya bhāvana (the attitude: 'I cannot survive without you') because a jñānī knows: I am the very existence that lends existence to everything; everything depends on me. This is the jñānī's wisdom, so how could he ever have paratantriya bhāvana? Thus, none of these four features are present in the jñānī bhakta, and if any of them is present, he is neither a jñānī nor a jñānī bhakta. Let it be clear what the bhakti of a jñānī is. In all bhakti schools of philosophy, the bhakta permanently retains paratantriya bhāvana (dependence) and never entertains 'aham svatantra' (I am fully independent). In fact, the bhakti schools consider independence to be inimical to bhakti. By their view, a bhakta will never say: **aham svatantraḥ**. Vedanta does not accept this. One can be paratantraḥ in ārta bhakti, in arthārthī bhakti, and in jijñāsu bhakti, but after coming to jñānam, paratantriyam is abolished: **aham svatantraḥ asmī**. As it says in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad (7.24.1): **sa bhagavaḥ kasmin pratiṣṭhitaḥ sve mahimni**—the supreme abides in his own grandeur, not depending on anyone.

If all these four features are not there, what *is* there? What is the feeling in a jñānī's love of God? The first thing is a sense of fulfillment, the pūrṇatvam of reaching the Everest of spiritual sādhanā. A jñānī is indebted to Bhagavān for discovering this fulfillment; without Bhagavān's grace it would be impossible to discover ārta abhāva, ārtitva abhāva, alpatva abhāva, and paratantriya abhāva (the absence of desperation, demand, diminishment, and dependence). It is a great achievement to be able to abolish these four things from my bhakti because each of them represents saṃsāra. And if I manage to accomplish this it is because of Bhagavān. Bhagavān has helped me at the karma yoga level, at the upāsana yoga level, and at the jñāna yoga level by giving me the Vedanta śāstram. A jñānī knows that Vedanta comes from Bhagavān. Bhagavān happens to be the Adi Guru and the initiator of the śāstra. It is because of this we say:

**sadāśiva samārambhāṃ śaṅkarācārya madhyamāṃ  
asmadācārya paryantāṃ vande guru paramparāṃ**<sup>245</sup>

If it were not for this Guru paramparā, I could not be claiming **aham svatantraḥ**—I am absolutely free. Therefore, bhakti for a jñānī is an expression of gratitude, and that gratitude is immeasurable because the achievement is so great. The more a jñānī appreciates this achievement, the more grateful he feels toward the Lord. This gratitude and ānanda and fulfillment alone makes him emotional. If his throat gets choked up and there are tears, it is not because of fear or sorrow but because of ānanda. In fact, some people say that the tears coming from a jñānī's eyes have a different composition. It is this **ānanda-visṛta bhakti**—devotion proceeding from fullness—that is the jñānī's bhakti. Therefore, Nārada says,

<sup>244</sup> This self appears to be finite due to ignorance. When ignorance is destroyed, the one self is self-luminous, just as the radiance of the sun is known when the clouds pass away.

<sup>245</sup> Salutations to the entire lineage, beginning with Lord sadāśiva, through Adi Śaṅkarācārya, and continuing with my own immediate teacher.

there is **kaṅṭhāvarodha**—the throat is choked up. You may recall that Arjuna experienced this condition, but his was the kaṅṭhāvarodha of saṃsāra. Therefore, **kaṅṭhāvarodha**—a choked throat; **romāñcā**—hair standing on end; and **aśrubhiḥ**—tears of joy, fulfillment, and gratitude.

As it says in the Kena Upaniṣad (2.5):

**iha ched avedid atha satyam asti  
na ched thaanvedin mahati vinashtiḥ**<sup>246</sup>

And the jñānī also sings the glory of the Lord and Himself, which have become identical. In the Taittirīya Upaniṣad (Part 3, Bhriguvalli, Verse 10) the jñānī's song is recorded:

**hā vū hā vū hā vū  
āhamannamāhamannamāhamannam  
āhamannādo'hamannādo' ahamannādaḥ  
ahaṃ ślokakṛdahaṃ ślokakṛdahaṃ ślokakṛt  
āhamasmi prathamajā ṛtāsya  
pūrvam devebhyo amṛtasya nābhāyī  
yo mā dadāti sa ideva māvāḥ  
āhamannāmannamādantamamādmī  
aham viṣvaṃ bhuvanam abhyabhavam  
suvarna jyotiḥ ya evaṃ veda, ityUpaniṣad  
iti daśamo nuvākaḥ**<sup>247</sup>

'Hāvu, hāvu, hāvu' indicates wonderment and fulfillment. And in the Taittirīya (Śikṣāvalli, Verse 10):

**ahaṃ vṛkṣasya rerivā  
kīrtiḥ pṛṣṭham gireriva  
ūrdhvapavitro vājinīva svamṛtamasmi  
draviṇaṃ savarcasam  
sumedhā amṛtokṣitaḥ  
iti trīṣankorvedānuvacanam**<sup>248</sup>

This is the advaita bhakti of Vedānta darśanam, which is never discussed by the bhakti schools. We are interested in Vedānta darśana bhakti; we are not interested in bhakti darśana bhakti, where permanent paratantriyam (dependence) is written. We want to claim: 'Freedom is my birthright.' Therefore, Nārada says that when these rare jñānīs meet, **parasparaṃ lapamānāḥ**—they casually chatter with each other about how they have won the Mokṣa Cup. They share their joy. Nārada says that the existence of such jñānīs is a blessing to the world. There may be billions of saṃsārīs, but the few jñānīs make the world glorious. Therefore, **pṛthivīm pāvayanti**—they purify the earth; and **pṛthivīm kulāni**—they purify their very paramparā (lineage).

<sup>246</sup> If it is known here, there is truth. If it is unknown here there is great loss.

<sup>247</sup> Bliss (x3)! I am food (3x); I am the eater of food (3x); I am the author of the śloka (who joins these two together); I am the first born (hiraṇyagarbha) of the true (the eternal and immortal). I am the center of immortality, prior to the gods. Whoever gives me away, surely preserves thus. I am the food that eats him who eats food. I am luminous like the sun. He who knows thus attains the aforementioned results. This is the Upaniṣad.

<sup>248</sup> I am the stimulator of the tree of the universe. My reputation is as high as a mountaintop. Elevated to the most Holy, I am the excellent immortal Being as He is in the Sun. I am the power, the wealth refulgent with divine intuition. I have attained true knowledge, I have become imperishable and immutable. This is the sacred recitation of Trisanku.

**Sutra 69. tīrthīkurvanti tīrthāni sukarmīkurvanti karmāṇi sacchāstrī-kurvanti śāstrāṇi**

***Their association makes holy places holy, works auspicious, and the scriptures authoritative.***

When such jñānīs go from place to place, from one tīrtam (holy place) to another, they have a purifying effect. As sādhakas they went to rivers, such as the Ganga or Kaveri seeking purification, but as jñānīs, this is reversed: when they take a dip in the Ganga, they purify it because they are non-different from God. In fact, they say that the Ganga is waiting for such jñānīs' arrival. Not only is the Ganga polluted in the worldly sense of the term, but in the spiritual sense as well. Everybody drops their pāpam into the Ganga, and when it becomes polluted with the pāpam of the masses, it awaits a jñānī's arrival to be purified. Hence, **tīrthīkurvanti**—jñānīs sanctify all the holy sites. Even temples become famous when the jñānīs visit and sing stotrams there. When Śaṅkarācārya writes a stotram on a particular deity, the place becomes famous. The temple had been holy before the mahātmā's arrival, but once a mahātmā visits and sings upon that particular deity, it becomes holier than other places, inviting more visits. Thus, even temples are sanctified by jñānīs. And **sukarmīkurvanti karmāṇi**—whatever actions jñānīs perform become auspicious. Jñānīs do not have to perform any karmas for purification, but any actions they do perform are validated and glorified. When an ajñānī uses a book it becomes a second-hand item of lesser value, but when a jñānī has used, written in, or autographed a book, it becomes even more valuable. Therefore, Nārada says: **sacchāstrīkurvanti śāstrāṇi**—even the śāstram is validated and sanctified by the jñānī who has followed it. Thus, even though śāstras are valid in and of themselves, they gain extra validity for having been employed by a jñānī. And wherever a jñānī lives, that place becomes a temple, a pilgrim center drawing many visitors. The idea is that all of these things, and places, and actions become sanctified by the jñānī's contact with them because there is no difference between a jñānī and Bhagavān. These are all instances of mukhya bhakta mahimā.

**Sutra 70. tanmayāḥ**

***[The supreme bhakta is] fully absorbed in God.***

So why does a jñānī sanctify all places? Here is the logic: Even as an advanced dvaita bhakta, a jñānī remembers the Lord all the time. What is the difference between a bhakta and an abhakta? An abhakta keeps everything in his heart except Bhagavān. All kinds of people come and occupy the non-bhakta's heart. But the bhakta has installed Bhagavān in his heart and he worships the Lord in his heart. So when the bhakta moves from one place to another, it is the Lord who is moving because it is **daharākāśa rūpiṇī**.<sup>249</sup> Thus, wherever the bhakta goes, the physical body is holding Bhagavān inside, making this being sacred. If this is true in the case of a dvaita bhakta, it is truer still in the case of the advaita bhakta, who doesn't say 'God is in me,' but rather claims 'aham brahmasmi.' Previously he, too, was a carrier of Bhagavān and now he is Bhagavān. He has become Bhagavān-mayā, saturated with Godliness. Thus wherever a jñānī goes, that place becomes sanctified.

<sup>249</sup> The luminous "inner" ether, the seat of brahman

**Sutra 71. modante pitaro nṛtyanti devatāḥ sanāthā ceyaṃ bhūrbhavati**

*[The supreme bhaktas'] forefathers become joyful, divine beings dance, and the earth itself feels protected by a good master.*

All who are associated with this jñanī bhakta feel proud to be associated with him. Until a person achieves something, nobody is eager to claim association with this person. But the moment somebody achieves something and becomes popular, everybody jumps to claim association, even old classmates! Of course, parents are proud, schoolteachers are proud, and all those associated with the jñanī in one way or another claim association and are proud. Even devatās are happy. Therefore, Nārada says: **pitarah modante**—parents are extremely happy. Initially, parents are likely to be worried if their children move toward spirituality. Parents rarely want their children to move exclusively toward spirituality. There is always a fear. They will encourage their children to remain in society and have a family. But even though parents may initially discourage their children from following such a course, when they see the child's accomplishment, even worried parents become proud and happy that at least one jñanī was born into their family. And **devatāḥ nṛtyanti**—all the devatās dance because they have presided over the jñanī's jnanendriyas (five perceptive organs: eyes, ears, nose, tongue, skin) and karmendriyas (five active organs: speaking, grasping, moving, reproducing, eliminating). Remember that devatās are associated with a jñanī's sthūla śarīram (gross body) and sūkṣma śarīram (subtle body). And **sanāthā ceyaṃ bhūrbhavati**—even bhūma devi, the goddess who is earth is happy. There are millions of people committing offenses to her and she is feeling the burden of the pāpams of so many people, but a few jñanīs will cleanse the entire earth. Thus bhūma devi feels protected (**nāthāḥ** means 'protector' and **sanāthāḥ** means 'with a protector') because these jñanīs wash the sins from the earth. Thus, a jñanī is a great event, even on the level of the earth.

**Sutra 72. nāsti teṣu jātividyārūpa kuladhanakriyādibhedaḥ**

*There are no distinctions among such pure devotees in terms of social class, education, physical beauty, family, occupation, and so forth.*

Here, Nārada conveys the important idea that jñanīs can never be graded. All jñanīs are equally great and all of them deserve equal and superlative respect, as much respect as Bhagavān deserves. As Śaṅkarācārya sang in Manisha Pañcakam:

...chandālostu sa tu dvijosthu gurur ityaeshā manishā mama<sup>250</sup>

Whether a jñanī is a brahmin (priest class), a kṣatriya (governing class), a vaiśya (merchant class), a śūdra (laboring class), or a pañcama (of mixed caste); male or female, a jñanī can never be graded according to conventional standards. There are so many hierarchies in society. One is always looked upon through the lens of one status or another, whether based on provenance, wealth, education level,

<sup>250</sup> He may be a learned brahmin or an outcast, no matter. The indwelling ātmān that distinctly shines in all three states is the same in one and all, irrespective of caste, creed or kind. It is my firm understanding that the great one who inculcates this knowledge is the real preceptor.

outer appearance, or career. Even friendships are often based on such standards. Society is constantly grading humanity, but among jñānīs there is no gradation based on worldly standards. If a brahmin jñānī meets a non-brahmin jñānī, he doesn't look at him with a different pair of spectacles. On the other hand, if an ajñānī brahmin were to meet a brahmin jñānī and a non-brahmin jñānī, the ajñānī brahmin—who has this problem of seeing himself as part of a superior caste—will always take one to be higher than the other, and will pause before doing namaskāram. Such ajñānī brahmins will not openly ask a sannyāsī about his cast, but we as sannyāsīs experience this implicit judgment in the form of indirect inquiries about purvāśrama<sup>251</sup> to find out whether a sannyāsī falls under the brahmin category. And the moment they learn that a sannyāsī is a non-brahmin, the treatment will be different because there is **jāti abhimāna** (caste conceit), **kula abhimāna** (class conceit), **dhana abhimāna** (wealth conceit), and so forth. Śāstra says we should never grade like this, but rather, do namaskāra the moment we see a sannyāsī. All sannyāsīs should be worshipped equally without inquiring into their background. That is the principle in our culture, but it is very difficult to follow, especially for Brahmins who are plagued by strong caste conceit. Nārada is reminding us never to grade a jñānī based on **jāti**. Indeed, many brahmin sannyāsīs take sannyāsa from a non-brahmin sannyāsī, and some of these classist individuals not only want a sannyāsī to be a brahmin sannyāsī, they also want him to have taken sannyāsa from a brahmin sannyāsī. And if he has taken sannyāsa from a non-brahmin sannyāsī, then again the respect will diminish. All these prejudices exist in society unfortunately. As it says in Gītā (5.18):

**vidyāvinayasampanne, brāhmane gavi hastini  
śuni caiva śvapāke ca, paṇḍitāḥ samadarśinaḥ**<sup>252</sup>

Therefore, Nārada says, among jñānīs (**teṣu** means **jñānīṣu** or **advaita bhakteṣu**), **jātividyārūpa kuladhanakriyādibhedaḥ bhedaḥ nāsti**—all these distinctions are irrelevant. And what are the conventional criteria for discrimination? It is quite interesting to study Nārada's own biography in the Purāṇas because he faced many of these problems himself. The conventional criteria for discrimination are: **jāti**, caste-based discrimination; **vidyā**, education-based discrimination—here vidya does not refer to ātmā-vidya, which is the same in all, but rather, vidya with regard to anya-śāstras (other śāstras) because some jñānīs are more scholarly than others in terms of apara-vidya (knowledge other than Self-knowledge); **rūpa**, appearance-based discrimination; **kula**, lineage or family-based discrimination; **dhana**, wealth-based discrimination—for example, one jñānī may have a huge ashram with several branches, whereas another sleeps under a tree. Society interviews these jñānīs and the media will only approach the rich and famous one, but although society discriminates this way, the jñānīs themselves do not; and **kriyā**—their functions, activities, or professions in society, some jñānīs may be engaged in more service or activities than others: **lokasaṅgraham evāpi, sampasyan kartm arhasi** (Gītā 3.20)<sup>253</sup>—Lord Kṛṣṇa says given that you don't have anything to accomplish in life, you can bless society by one activity or another, based on your disposition because (3.33):

**sadṛśam ceṣṭate svasyāḥ prakṛterjñānavān api  
prakṛtiṃ yānti bhūtāni nigrahaḥ kiṃ kariṣyati**<sup>254</sup>

The lifestyles of different jñānīs will vary. Remember that even though jñānam is the same for all jñānīs, their lifestyles will not be the same because their anātmās are different. The proportions of sattva, rajas, and tamas will vary. Even though sattva is predominant, there can be gradation. Accordingly, one jñānī may be withdrawn and enjoy remaining quiet and still. Such a jñānī doesn't need to be active traveling

<sup>251</sup> The stage of life before initiation into sannyāsa.

<sup>252</sup> The wise see the same (Brahma) in a brahmin who has knowledge and humility, in a cow, in an elephant, in a dog, and in a dog-eater.

<sup>253</sup> At least considering the upliftment of the society, you should act.

<sup>254</sup> Even a man of knowledge acts according to his nature. All beings go by their nature. What use is restraint?

from one place to another or teaching. If some bhaktas come and ask questions, they may answer, but otherwise they will lead a nivṛtti (transcendent) way of life. The Himalayas are full of such great jñānīs—we don't even know they exist because they don't publicize that they are sannyāsīs, giving their website address and such. Then there are other jñānīs, like Śaṅkarācārya who traveled around the globe several times establishing ashrams. There can be active jñānīs and passive jñānīs; don't think that active jñānīs are superior. Jñānīs are all the same. The very existence of a jñānī is a blessing, whether active or passive, whether teaching or not, whether serving society or not; their very existence makes them great. Therefore, **kriyādibhedah na asti**—distinctions in their activities or professions—are irrelevant. I use the word 'profession' because there are also gr̥hastha (householder) jñānīs, who are given to different professions. By jñānī, one should not think of sannyāsīs only, gr̥hastha jñānīs are also possible. You are an example of this.

**Sutra 73. yatastadīyāḥ**

***[Pure devotees are not distinguished by external things because] they belong to the Lord.***

This sutra is almost identical to Sutra 70, in which Nārada said: **tanmayāḥ**—to them is the fullness of the Lord. In this verse, Nārada puts it in a slightly different way. He says: **yataḥ tadīyāḥ**—all jñānīs belong to the Lord in equal measure. You cannot say that a serving jñānī is closer to Bhagavān than is a non-serving jñānī. All jñānīs belong equally to Bhagavān; all are equally 'close' to Bhagavān. Close is not even the right word; they are one with Bhagavān. That is why the tradition says Bhagavad bhakti is as great as bhagavatā bhakti: worshipping a bhagavatā is as great as worshipping Bhagavān. Especially in the Vaiṣṇava sampradaya, in which the Alvars (Vaiṣṇava saints) are respected as much Viṣṇu himself; similarly, in the Śaivaite tradition, the Nyanmars (Śaivite saints) are respected as much as Śiva himself. We don't see any difference in them. Why? **Tadīyāḥ**—they all belong equally to God. And what about ajñānīs? Do ajñānīs belong to God or not? Ajñānīs also belong to God, but unfortunately, ajñānīs do not move any closer because they want to cling to their ahaṅkāra and mamākara. By defining ahaṅkāra and mamākara more and more precisely, I move further and further away from God. For example, they want to claim this or that as their property, and something else as gifted to Bhagavān. In doing so, they draw a line between Bhagavān and themselves, whereas jñānīs do not draw such a line. Where is the question of 'my property' and 'your property' for a jñānī? Jñānīs are closer to Bhagavān because they choose to move closer and ajñānīs are farther because they choose to remain farther. So **yataḥ tadīyāḥ**—all jñānīs belong to God, but the sentence remains incomplete until we combine it with the previous sutra: Because all jñānīs belong equally to God, there is no difference between them in terms of caste, education, appearance, family, wealth, or role in society.

And with Sutra 73, the topic of mukhya bhakta mahimā—the glory of mukhya bhakta, jñānī bhakta, or advaita bhakti—comes to an end. In the sutras that follow, Nārada wants to wrap up the entire teaching. Specifically, he wants to give a few tips to the aparā bhakta, amukhya bhakta, or sādḥaka bhakta (inferior or beginner devotee) that will help them to become mukhya bhaktas. This is not unlike the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Chapter of the Gītā, when Arjuna asked about stithaprajña lakṣaṇani (the traits of the wise), and Lord Kṛṣṇa taught him both these and the stithaprajña sādḥānas (practices of the wise). Similarly, Nārada has been talking about mukhya bhakta lakṣaṇas (the traits of primary bhaktas) and now he wants to give a few sādḥānas for the amukhya bhaktas—namely, āṛta bhaktas, arthārthī bhaktas, or jijñāsu bhaktas—so that they, too, can graduate to become jñānī bhaktas. Nārada's tips are directed toward jijñāsus in particular because they are studying śāstra.

### Sutra 74. vādo nāvalambyaḥ

*One should not resort to argumentative debate.*

The first bit of advice that Nārada gives is: avoid arguments. The more we study, the more we tend to argue or debate. When anyone says anything, the first response we give is: “No.” We start with a ‘no,’ then try to correct others, change others, and advise others. Unless the other person says: “I am your disciple, please correct me,” we should not correct. Such jijñāsus also want to quote and debate. This debating tendency can be harmful because debates lead to arguments and arguments nourish egoism because the goal is always to win. Therefore, Nārada’s advice is be very careful of this trap: **vādo nāvalambyaḥ**—avoid argumentative debate. Intellectual discussions are wonderful, but they may unwittingly get converted into debates, debates into arguments, and ordinary arguments into heated ones.

### \*\*\*End of Teaching 24\*\*\*

In this 5<sup>th</sup> and final chapter, Nārada spends Sutras 67 to 73 dealing with mukhya bhakti mahimā, the glory of primary bhakta, otherwise called advaita bhakta, parabhakta, or jñanī bhakta. He points out that the mere existence of this bhakta is a blessing to society. Still, such mukhya bhaktas may choose to undertake various activities to serve the world, which will vary according to their personalities and prārabdha. But even those jñanīs who do not do anything bless society with their very existence. Not only is their existence glorious to society, even ancestors and devatās are happy to be associated with such a great mahātmā. This was the focus of Chapter 5 up to the 73<sup>rd</sup> Sutra. From the 74<sup>th</sup> Sutra to the end of the text, Nārada concludes the teaching by returning to some instructions for the sādḥaka.

The first instruction Nārada gives in Sutra 74 is **vādo nāvalambyaḥ**—avoid intellectual arguments. This advice is not confined to religion or philosophy, it is best to avoid argument in any field. Healthy and enlightening discussion is possible only when the people involved are extremely mature. Otherwise, what begins as a healthy discussion may inadvertently turn into an unhealthy argument. In the Vedic tradition discussions are broadly classified into three types, two of which are considered unhealthy and one of which is considered healthy. We will begin by discussing the unhealthy types of discussion to insure that they are avoided. The first type is called *jalpa* and the second type is called *vitaṇḍā*. Jalpa is defined as: **parapaksha nirakāraṇa pūrvāka svapaksha sthāpanavati vidigi śukata delvaḥ**—that which is undertaken by someone to win. The aim is not discover or arrive at the truth, but to convince the other person. Each interlocutor enters the discussion convinced that he or she is right and the other person is wrong, and each is motivated by the desire to win or to defeat the opponent. It is almost like a verbal duel or war. That is why this person is called a **vidigi śukata**—one who wants to win. He wants to win by establishing that his views alone are correct and by refuting the views of the other. Even before completely listening to the other person, he has already concluded that the other’s views are wrong simply because they are the other person’s views, and that his own views to be right because they are my views. So before the discussion even starts, this person has concluded: “I am right and you are wrong.” His aim is to establish this conclusion and secure a victory. This is called jalpa. Such a person is not interested in the victory of Truth, but rather, in being a victor himself. Naturally, one who enters into a discussion this way has a lot of ego because his motive is winning. Now imagine the other person enters into the discussion with the same aim—that is, he wants to establish his own view and dismiss the view of the other, fueled by the same fat ego. In this scenario, the discussion may start calmly, but sooner or later, egos inflate, emotions rise, and voices get louder and louder. More heat than light is generated by such discussion. Healthy discussion generates light, whereas egoistic discussion generates a lot of heat and emotion. In such discussions, one never gives the other person

time to talk, and even as the other person is talking, there is repeated interruption. After some time you find that both people are talking simultaneously and neither is listening to the other. This marks the climax of the argument. One never walks away from such discussions feeling happy or comfortable. There is a feeling of bitterness and relationships are often weakened. There is a saying: **ichchyet vipulāṃ maitrīm trīṇi tatra na kārayet vāgvādamārtasambandhaṃ tasyāḥ strīparibhārsanam**—if two people want to preserve and cultivate a friendship, they can do so by avoiding three things: (1) **vāgvādam**, or debate (2) **ārtasambandhaṃ**, or financial transactions, and (3) talking about the other person’s spouse. The most important one here to avoid is **vāgvādam**, or debate because in most of these scenarios the discussion is between two people who have already arrived at their conclusions. Discussion after one has already arrived at a conclusion is useless; only discussion for the sake of arriving at a conclusion is useful. Thus, jalpa is a dangerous ego-booster.

The second type of unhealthy discussion is vitanḍā, which is arguably worse than jalpa. Vitanḍā is defined as: **para paksha nirakāraṇa mātravati vidigishu kata vitanḍāḥ**—that in which my only aim is to refute your view, without seeking to establish or formulate an alternative view. I am not interested in establishing any views of my own; I just enjoy dismissing other people’s views to puff up my own ego and put down others. Given that most discussions unwittingly fall into jalpa or vitanḍā, **vadaḥ** should be avoided. Here **vadaḥ** means **jalparūpa vitanḍārūpa vadaḥ nāvalambyaḥ**—resorting to jalpa- or vitanḍā-style debate.

If one is sincerely interested and careful, vadaḥ, or debate that does not devolve into jalpa or vitanḍā, is possible. Healthy, or constructive discussion, known as vāda, is defined as: **tatva nirnaya phalaḥ tātā viśeṣaḥ**—that in which the aim is not victory. Vāda is undertaken by two people whose aim is to arrive at the Truth. Each is ready to drop his or her views if they are found over the course of the discussion to be defective. In this type of discussion, I am not interested in clinging egoistically to my own view. I am ready to say that I may be wrong. I have the intellectual honesty to admit that I am not omniscient and could be wrong. I am willing to drop my conceptions if they are proved to be misconceptions through discussion. I approach the discussion with humility, mutual respect, intellectual honesty, and an willingness to drop my own views. I engage calmly and unemotionally, giving the other person the opportunity to speak and listening without interruption, or planning what I am going to say next while the other person is talking. Such discussions can be very fruitful. If I am genuinely interested in the Truth, I should listen to the other person. And if I require some time to think, I can say: “I am not ready to pass comments on your views at this time, but I will certainly consider them and we can discuss them later.” Only when this kind of honesty is there will a discussion be meaningful. This type of **vadaḥ** is perfectly okay. The types of **vadaḥ** that Nārada tells us to avoid in Sutra 74 are **jalparūpa vadaḥ** and **vitanḍārūpa vadaḥ**. The moment I see that the other person is in an argumentative mood, I should stop the discussion. And when I stop the discussion, the other person may conclude that he is the winner because he had the last word and I have been silenced. No matter. Let him consider himself the victor. It is better to stop because argument of this sort is a spiritual obstacle as it fattens the ego.

I have told you about my experience with one śāstri who came from North India. He was a follower of the Vallabha Sampradaya, which is a Puṣṭimarga doctrine that believes that Kṛṣṇa, as the personal God, not as formless Brahman, is the ultimate reality. This śāstri had somehow come to learn that I am teaching in the Śaṅkarācārya’s tradition. He was very aggressive and also quite well built physically, and he started the discussion by saying that the Puṣṭimarga view alone is correct and that Śaṅkarācārya’s view is full of misinterpretation. For half an hour, he criticized Śaṅkarācārya left and right, and I was afraid to get into an argument with him because I could lose my nose and teeth—he was so big and strong! So I said: “I don’t want to comment much on Vallabhācārya’s teaching because I have not read his books.” Then he said: “I have not read Śaṅkarācārya either.” So for half an hour he was virulently criticizing Śaṅkarācārya, without having read any of his books. Now suppose that without having read Vallabhācārya, I were to start criticizing him; it would have turned into a full-blown argument. Instead, I took the wind out of his sails by saying there was nothing to discuss. Thus, we should remain very alert: the moment a discussion forays into argument territory, let the other person

consider him or herself victorious and observe maunam, or silence. **Buddha janaiḥ vadaḥ paritya jataṃ**—never argue with anyone, especially wise people. Even with a guru we talk about **samvadaḥ**, the discussion between teacher and student, not **jalpaḥ** or **viṭaṇḍā**. Thus, vāk tapas, speech control, is a very important sādhana.

There are many people who love argument; the only conversation they know is argument. Whatever statement you make, they launch in with contradiction. With such people, the safest thing to talk about is the weather. But even there, if you say: “Chennai is pleasant nowadays,” they will say: “No, it is already too hot.” Don’t make it any hotter by arguing. After all, heat and cold are relative terms. So there are some people who start every discussion with counterpoint, no matter what you say; it is some kind of a gene, I think. When we are with such people we should be extremely alert never to make statements, but instead to ask questions: “What do you think about the weather?” so that we can maintain peace of mind. Therefore Nārada says **vādaḥ na avalambyaḥ**—avoid arguments (and I hope you won’t argue with Nārada on this). In the next sutra, Nārada supplies the rationale for saying this:

**Sutra 75. bāhulyāvakāśatvāda niyatatvāc ca**

*[Such argumentation] leads to excessive entanglement and is never decisive.*

Once we enter into an argument on a particular topic, each person will try to establish his or her view by giving a lot of reasons and examples. These, in turn, become fodder for further disagreement. So we start an argument with the intent to resolve one area of disagreement and the next thing we know, it has led us to another area of disagreement. Then the other person introduces a third area and it becomes like the Second World War, which spread around the globe. Instead of resolving the initial issue, we find that we have entered into hundreds of issues, while having lost sight of the original point of the discussion. In Vedānta, we use the rope-snake metaphor for the sake of understanding the distinction between satya and mithya. But within the philosophical community, the rope-snake issue has turned into: Brahman is gone, the world is gone, jīva is gone, and saṃsāra is gone. There are now so many books and theories out there analyzing and explaining the rope-snake phenomenon, each refuting the others. This is called **khyātivāda**—theories of perceptual error. There is the **ātma-khyātivāda** of the Buddhists; the **asat-khyātivāda** of the Sūnya Vada people; the **anyathā-khyātivāda** of Nyaya-Vaiśeṣika philosophers; the **sat-khyātivāda** of the Viśiṣṭādvaitans; and the **anirvacaniya-khyātivāda** of the Advaitans. And what are all these arguments over? The rope-snake. Thus, we find that from one topic we enter into another and wind up completely lost. Therefore, Nārada says **bāhulya avakāśat**—there is risk of escalation, and **aniyatatvāc ca**—we lose control of ourselves and don’t know how to stop. We want to have the last word and the other person wants to have the last word, and that last word never comes. There is another reading of **aniyatatvāc ca**: because such argumentation is never decisive. One argument leads to another, which leads to another, *ad nauseum*—that is why we say avoid tarka, or dialectics.

**Sutra 76. bhakti śāstrāṇi mananīyāni tadudbodhaka karmāṇi karaṇīyani**

*One should respect the revealed scriptures of bhakti and follow their prescribed exercises.*

Because arguments, which breed arrogance, are obstructions to spiritual growth, and because we want to nourish bhakti, which breeds humility, Nārada advises us to spend more time reading **bhakti śāstrāṇi**—various scriptures dealing with the subject of devotion. We should remember that when we say bhakti śāstram, we are including āṛta bhakti, arthārthī bhakti, and jijñāsu bhakti. A dvaita bhakti śāstram that talks only about āṛta and arthārthī bhakti is incomplete; it should talk about jijñāsu bhakti, wherein Vedānta vicāra is included because jijñāsu means **athāto brahma jigñāsā**—therefore, an enquiry into Brahman (is to be made; this is the first verse of the Brahma Sūtras). So jijñāsu bhakti involving Vedānta vicāra must be there, along with jñānī bhakti, wherein the Lord is discovered to be non-different from myself. May we expose ourselves to the complete bhakti śāstram. The Bhagavad Gītā is one of the ideal bhakti śāstras because it talks about āṛta bhakti and arthārthī bhakti, but also deals with jijñāsu bhakti and jñānī bhakti. The 12<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the Gītā is titled *Bhakti Yoga*, and in discussing that yoga Kṛṣṇa talks about five levels of bhakti: (1) sakāma bhakti—devotion with expectation (of desired worldly things); (2) niṣkāma bhakti—devotion without expectation, which purifies the mind; (3) iṣṭa-devatā upāsanarūpa bhakti—meditating upon and nourishing a relationship with the Lord; (4) viṣvarūpa dhyānarūpa bhakti—seeing the self in everything; and, at the final step, Kṛṣṇa talks about (5) nirguṇa Brahma vicāra—abiding in and as formless awareness, which is beyond the guṇas. Thus, Kṛṣṇa includes Vedānta Vicāra, inquiry into Nirguṇa Brahman, in his bhakti yoga. Can you recall those two important verses? (Gītā 12.3-4):

**ye tvakṣaram anirdeśyam, avyaktam paryupāsate  
sarvatrāgam acintyaṃ ca, kūṭastham acalaṃ dhruvam  
sanniyamyendriyagrāmam, sarvatra samabuddhayaḥ  
te prāpnuvanti mām eva, sarvabhūtahite ratāḥ**<sup>255</sup>

Don't just talk about a Kṛṣṇa with beautiful eyes and ears, even though that bhakti is wonderful. You should understand aparā-prakṛti Kṛṣṇa (spirit identified with matter), and you should also come to parā-prakṛti, which is nirguṇa Brahma (beyond the guṇas). Bhakti is complete only when I understand both saḡuṇa and nirguṇa Kṛṣṇa—saḡuṇa Kṛṣṇa through Veda pūrvabhāga (i.e., the Karma Kanda) and nirguṇa Kṛṣṇa through Veda Anta Bhaga (i.e., the Jñāna Kanda). Therefore, the bhakti śāstra should be read holistically, as opposed to a truncated bhakti śāstra that only deals with duality and saḡuṇa-Īśvara. Thus, Nārada says: **bhakti śāstrāṇi mananīyāni**. You can postpone nirguṇa jñānam if you like, but you should at least know that nirguṇa jñānam is compulsory one day or another. And **tadudbodhaka karmāṇi**—you should perform those religious activities (**tadud** means bhakti and **udbodhaka** means generating, preserving, and nourishing). Such activities will help to generate bhakti if it is not yet there, preserve bhakti if it is already there, and continually nourish that bhakti. If you study all our pūjās, you will find that they all encourage such bhakti. Thus, may you perform such nourishing activities: in short, the pañca mahāyajñas, as well as reading the biographies and listening to the stories of great bhaktas, especially jñānī bhaktas.

**Sutra 77. sukhaduḥkhecchālābhādityakte kāle pratīkṣamāṇe kṣaṇārdham api  
vyārtaṃ na neyam**

***Patiently enduring until one can put aside material happiness, distress, desire,  
and accomplishment, one should not waste even half a moment.***

<sup>255</sup> Having restrained the sense organs, being even-minded towards all, and being interested in the welfare of all beings, some meditate upon the imperishable Brahman, which is indefinable, unmanifest, all-pervading, incomprehensible, immutable, immovable, and eternal. They alone attain me.

In the previous sutra, Nārada had said: **bhakti śāstrāṇi mananīyāni tadudbodha karmāṇi karaṇīyāni**—one should respect the revealed bhakti scriptures and follow their prescribed exercises. Naturally, a reader will be inclined to think: “That is easy for Nārada to say because he has nothing else to do. He doesn’t know what our lives are like. We are so busy with so many activities. Where is the time for all these things? At most, we have time to share a few quick words with Swamiji after Vedanta class before having to run off. How to find the time?” The only answer to this question is one that Nārada has already given: we have to reduce the PORT that guzzles our time: Possessions, Obligatory duties, Relationships, and Transactions. These are the four things that tend to consume our lives, and an increase in any one of them inevitably leads to increases in the other three. Therefore, we should learn to trim our worldly activities intelligently. We cannot wipe out worldly activities altogether. We have to live in the world: we have jobs, we have loved ones, we have families. But we should discover intelligent methods for trimming the PORT. But there is another problem, too. Assuming we have reduced our vyavahāras (formal activities and transactions) to some extent and now have more time, the mind may still be unavailable because of its preoccupation with various worldly things and the emotions generated by them. The transactions themselves may have ended, but the emotions generated by them have not. A 15-minute exchange with someone that is long over may produce a hangover that lingers in the mind throughout the day. So even though I sit down to study the Nārada Bhakti Sutra, I cannot seem to focus. Therefore, we need to learn how to stave off such emotional transactions and the hangovers they produce. Indeed, Kṛṣṇa prescribes karma yoga for precisely this reason (Gītā 2.38):

**sukhaduḥkhe same kṛtvā lābhālābhau jayājayau  
tato yuddhāya yujyasva, naivam pāpam avāpsyasi**<sup>256</sup>

All these ups and downs are part of life—it is all Śvara’s prasāda—but I don’t to waste my time lingering on such thoughts; I need to come back to equanimity (Gītā, 2.48-50):

**yogasthaḥ kuru karmāṇi, saṅgaṃ tyaktvā dhanañjaya  
siddhyasiddhyoḥ samo bhūtvā, samatvaṃ yoga ucyate**

**dūreṇa hyavaraṃ karma, buddhiyogād dhanañjaya  
buddhau śaraṇam anvicchā, kṛpaṇāḥ phalahetavaḥ**

**buddhiyukto jahātīha, ubhe sukṛaduṣkṛte  
tasmād yogāya yujyasya, yogaḥ karmasu kauśalam**<sup>257</sup>

A karma yogī is one who is able to avoid the emotional hangovers. It requires great skill. If I can both clear more time and avoid these emotional hangovers, the mind will become more available for higher pursuits. Nārada refers to these emotional hangovers in Sutra 77: **sukha-duḥkhecchā-lābhādi-tyakte**. One is **sukham**—you experience a very happy event that lingers in the mind. Another is **duḥkam**—an unhappy event that lingers in the mind. Both sukha and duḥka share the same capacity to preoccupy the mind. Then **icchā**—various unfulfilled desires occupy the mind in the form of future planning. Life is meant for living, but lifelong I plan to live and so I die without living. And **lābha**—various achievements and attainments. For example, somebody praises you and that nice feeling of praise lingers. Finally **ādi**—et cetera. All these emotional hangovers preoccupy the mind. Intelligence means releasing ourselves from such preoccupation. Therefore, **tyakte sati**—I need to intelligently release my mind from the clutches of emotional preoccupation brought on by sukha, duḥka, icchā, labha, etc. in order

<sup>256</sup> Regarding happiness and sorrow, gain and loss, victory and defeat alike, prepare for war. In this manner, you will not incur sin.

<sup>257</sup> Abiding in yoga, giving up attachment, and remaining the same in success and failure, perform actions. Equanimity is called yoga. Action with motive is indeed far inferior to karma yoga. Take refuge in karma yoga. Those who are motivated by results are unfortunate. A karma yogī gets rid of both punyam and pāpam. Therefore, prepare for yoga. Skill in works is yoga.

to free up more quality time. If I manage to do this, **kāle pratīkṣamāṇe**—time enthusiastically awaits. Time becomes my intelligent servant saying: “I am at your beck and call.” So Nārada says: **kṣaṇārdham api vyārtaṃ na neyam**—don’t even waste half a moment. When you release yourself emotionally and more time becomes available, use this time intelligently. If I don’t give the mind an intelligent occupation, it will start cooking up all sorts of things. An idle mind is the devil’s workshop, as the saying goes. So be intelligently and constructively occupied with (Sutra 76): **bhakti śāstrāṇi mananīyāni tadudbodhaka karmāṇi karaṇīyāni**—the revealed bhakti scriptures and the actions prescribed therein.

**Sutra 78. ahiṃsāsatya śaucadayāstikyādi cāritryāṇi paripālanīyāni**

*One should cultivate such virtues as nonviolence, truthfulness, cleanliness, compassion, and faith in the spiritual teachings.*

Here Nārada says that being a bhakta does not mean mechanically chanting: “Om Namah Śivaya, Om Namah Śivaya.” This is not bhakti. In parallel, one must develop the various virtues mentioned in the bhakti śāstram: **cāritryāṇi**—healthy traits must be developed. Mechanical nāma-japa doesn’t take one very far. I cannot claim myself to be a bhakta just because I mechanically chant: “Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Rama Rama.” Intelligence must be used, values must be developed, śāstras must be inquired into, knowledge must be gained—there are so many elements involved. Many people think that mechanical nāma-kīrtana will safely land them into Vaikuṅṭha.<sup>258</sup> There are many misconceptions in the name of doctrine. Nārada says watch your character and develop the following virtues. Kṛṣṇa enumerates 20 virtues in the 13<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the Gītā and 26 virtues in the 16<sup>th</sup> Chapter. I should regularly monitor whether I am adhering to them. **Ahiṃsā**—non-violence at all levels. Watch your words, are you using hurtful words loosely? **Satya**—truthfulness at all levels. **Śauca**—purity at all levels. **Dayā**—compassion or consideration for others, remembering the fundamental rule: I should not do to others what I would not want them to do to me. **Āstikyām**—śraddhā, or faith, in the śāstra, especially the Veda pramāṇa from which we should not stray. I am stressing this because most of the bhakti schools of philosophy have gradually and unwittingly strayed from Veda pramāṇam. The Veda outlines a complete and specific educational program. Nāma may purify the mind, but as it says in the Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad (1.2.12), to understand these things properly: **tad-vijñānārthaṃ sa gurum evābhigacchet samit-pāṇiḥ śrotriyam brahmaniṣṭham**—one must humbly approach a proper teacher who is learned in the Vedas and having made the knowledge his own, revels in it. Thereafter we have to come to **aham vicāraḥ** (self-inquiry), **srṣṭi vicāraḥ** (inquiry into the creation), **avasthathraya vicāraḥ** (inquiry into the three states of experience), and so on. All of this is compulsory; this is Vedanta darśanam. Have faith in the Veda pramāṇa and if any bhakti school of philosophy violates Veda pramāṇa, don’t reject the Vedas; hold onto the Veda and reject the opposing view. In Sādhāna Pañcakam, the first words Śaṅkarācārya writes are vedo nityam adhīyatām—let the scriptures be studied daily. He does not say: “What I say is correct because I am saying it;” but rather: “I am trying to extract the teaching of the Vedas.” The Veda is our umpire and our supreme court. Therefore, **āstikyām**—faith in spiritual teachings, or Vedica śraddhā. In fact, when they say a guru must be śrotriyam and brahmaniṣṭham, the word **śrotriya** means the one who teaches based on **śrūti**, or scriptural authority. All these are **cāritryām**—character traits or values. And Nārada says that all these values should be **paripālanīyāni**, developed and maintained.

<sup>258</sup> Also known as Vaikuṅṭha-loka or paramdhama, it is the abode of Brahman where liberated souls dwell for eternity enjoying pure bliss and happiness.

**Sutra 79. sarvadā sarvabhāvena niścintaiḥ Bhagavāneva bhajanīyaḥ**

***Those who are free of doubts should constantly and wholeheartedly worship the Supreme Lord.***

**Sarvadā** means all the time and **sarvabhāvena** means whole-heartedly. **Niścintaiḥ bhagavāneva bhajanīyaḥ**—may you worship Bhagavān only, without any other worldly worries or preoccupations. Naturally, this raises the question: “Shouldn’t I eat my breakfast? Shouldn’t I eat my lunch? Shouldn’t I go to work? Shouldn’t I go to the bathroom? Who can afford to worship God all the time?” On the surface, Nārada seems to be giving impractical advice. The answer to this question is supplied in the Bhagavad Gītā, wherein two types of worship are described: One is specific worship and the other is general. Viśeṣa puja (i.e., ṣoḍaśa-upacāra-pūjā, worship with 16 kinds of paraphernalia) is specific type of ritualistic worship that I do exclusively in the morning according to my knowledge. Even if I don’t have such formal pūjā knowledge, I may offer flower or chant a few nāmas and do namaskāra—that is viśeṣa pūjā, which is done every day at a circumscribed time. But there is another type of worship, which involves converting every activity I perform into a pūjā. As said in the following invocation to the divine:

**ātma tvam girijā matiḥ saharāḥ prāṇāḥ śarīraṃ gr̥ham  
pūjā te viśayopabhoga-racanā nidrā samādhi-sthitiḥ  
sañcāraḥ padayoḥ pradakṣiṇa-vidhiḥ stotrāṇi sarvā girāḥ  
yad-yat karma karomi tat-tad akhilaṃ Śambho tavārādhanaṃ**<sup>259</sup>

The final line is crucial: **yad-yat karma karomi tat-tad akhilaṃ**—whatever actions I perform they are all in worship of you. So we convert all actions into acts of worship. My bath becomes an abhiṣekam. I imagine the body as a temple and the heart as the garbhagriha (innermost sanctum), with Bhagavān there in the form of ātma tvam (myself, my core, my inner essence). And when I eat (Gītā, 4.24):

**brahmārpaṇaṃ brahma haviḥ, brahmāgnau brahmaṇā hutam  
brahmaiva tena gantavyaṃ, brahmakarmasamādhinā**<sup>260</sup>

and (Gītā 15.14):

**ahaṃ vaiśvānaro bhūtvā, prāṇināṃ deham āsritaḥ  
prāṇāpānasamāyuktaḥ, pacāmyannaṃ caturvidham**<sup>261</sup>

**Vaiśvānaraḥ** refers to the digestive fire—Bhagavān is there. Thus, whenever I am putting food into that digestive fire, I am performing a homa. Therefore, with that invocation I turn every action I perform into a puja. As Kṛṣṇa says (Gītā, 3.9):

**yajñārthāt karmaṇo’nyatra, loko’yaṃ karmabandhanaḥ  
tadārtaṃ karma kaunteya, muktasaṅgaḥ samācara**<sup>262</sup>

<sup>259</sup> You are my self, my core, my essence. The goddess is my mind. My prāṇas (vital airs) are your attendants. My body is your temple. Enjoying the objects of the senses is my worship of you. My sleep is your samadhi. Wherever I walk, I am performing pradakṣiṇa (circumambulation) of you. Whatever actions I perform, they are all worship of You, O benevolent One!

<sup>260</sup> The ladle is brahman. The offering is brahman. It is offered into the fire of brahman by brahman. Brahman alone is to be reached by him who sees brahman in every action.

<sup>261</sup> Residing in the body of beings as the digestive fire, and supported by exhalation and inhalation, I digest the fourfold food.

With this attitude, the karma phalam will become prasāda, making my whole day nothing but a continuous pūjā. Therefore, **sarvadā sarvabhāvena**—even studying the Nārada Bhakti Sutra becomes jñāna yajñah.

### \*\*\*End of Teaching 25\*\*\*

In this 5<sup>th</sup> and final chapter, titled Mukhya Bhakta Mahimā, Nārada talked about the glory of jñānī bhakta up to Sutra 73. From Sutra 74 onward, Nārada wraps up his entire teaching by returning once again to sādhanā bhakti, or amukhya bhakti, discussing a variety of disciplines, including the avoidance of argument. Then in the 79<sup>th</sup> Sutra, Nārada said: **sarvadā sarvabhāvena Bhagavān eva bhajanīyah**—the Lord alone should be worshipped and sought after, constantly and wholeheartedly. Thus, bhakti needs to be there all the time. The sādhanā bhakta should look for progress of his bhakti in three different directions or areas: One is the area of knowledge: my understanding of God must gradually evolve. Initially as children we are introduced to a simple God, but we have not yet systematically studied the scriptures, or tried to understand who that God is. The second area is in my expression of bhakti toward the Lord. The third area is the motive underlying my bhakti: when I am expressing my bhakti in pujas and so forth, what do I hope to get out of this bhakti? What is motivating me to run to a temple, to perform a pūjā or abhiṣekam? The motive driving me must also be examined and refined. Thus, knowledge, expression, and motive must all progress.

In the area of knowledge, my understanding of God should be refined. Initially, God is seen as a person existing somewhere with beautiful human features. An extraordinarily featured human God situated in some unknown place, perhaps Vaikuṅṭha kailasa, whose job is to regularly visit the earth for the sake of devotees. Bhagavan appears regularly, either because of devotees' desire, or to save them during crisis, and then returns to his abode. This type of God, called 'parokṣa-Īśvara' meaning 'indirect' or 'remote,' is my initial concept of God. Unfortunately, most bhakti schools of philosophy deal exclusively with such a God with attractive human qualities who comes and goes. This is where the bhakti schools stop. Vedānta appreciates this bhakti, it is a wonderful place to start, but from parokṣa-Īśvara (a remote God), we need to come to pratyakṣa-Īśvara (a vivid and directly-experienced God), which means that whatever I am experiencing is God. In the Uddhava Gītā, while talking about various avatāras of God, the first avatāra is the universe itself. All the avatāras later come and go, but the first and most powerful avatāra is Viśvam Viśvasmin Namaḥ: One who is the whole universe. I needn't close my eyes for everything I see is Bhagavān—this is pratyakṣa-Īśvara. I need not invite God, nor send him off, this is an unavoidable and unsendoffable God. And I needn't stand in a 7-hour queue because I have darśanam anywhere and everywhere I stand. Vedānta emphasizes that we have to progress to pratyakṣa-Īśvara as soon as possible. Even in the Taittirīya Śikṣāvalli, the section on samhita upāsana describes devatās in the form of all the lokas: lightning, fire, sun, etc. Therefore, our knowledge should progress from parokṣa-Īśvara to pratyakṣa-Īśvara (from a remote and indirect God to a vivid and directly-experienced God); from ekarūpa to anekarūpa (from God in a single form to God in many forms). Then from pratyakṣa-Īśvara, I come to aparokṣa-Īśvara (an imperceptible but immediately known God); from viśvarūpa to arūpa (God in many forms to God beyond form). As said in the Kena Upaniṣad (1.5-1.9), the real Bhagavān is *nedam yad idam upasate* (not what this world reveres). An object of meditation can never be the real God; the ultimate God is the meditator, the observer.

**yad vācānabhyuditaṃ  
yena vāg abhyudyate  
tad eva brahma tvam viddhi**

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<sup>262</sup> This world is bound by actions in the case of any action other than that meant for yajña. Perform action for that sake and without attachment, Oh Arjuna!

**nedaṃ yad idam upāsate**

**yan manasā na manute  
yenāhur mano matam  
tad eva brahma tvaṃ viddhi  
nedaṃ yad idam upāsate**

**yac cakṣuṣā na paśyati  
yena cakṣūṃṣi paśyati  
tad eva brahma tvaṃ viddhi  
nedaṃ yad idam upāsate**

**yac chrotreṇa na śṛṇoti  
yena śrotam idaṃ śrutam  
tad eva brahma tvaṃ viddhi  
nedaṃ yad idam upāsate**

**yat prāṇena na prāṇiti  
yena pāṇaḥ praṇīyate  
tad eva brahma tvaṃ viddhi  
nedaṃ yad idam upāsate<sup>263</sup>**

And in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, (3.7.23):

**adr̥ṣṭo draṣṭā, aśrutaḥ śrotā, amato mantā, avijñato vijñātā; nānyo'to'sti draṣṭā, nānyo'to'sti  
śrotā, nānyo'to'sti mantā, nānyo'to'sti vijñāta, eṣa ta ātmāntaryāmyamṛtaḥ, ato'nyadārtam; tato  
hoddālaka āruṇirūpararāma<sup>264</sup>**

Bhagavān is the observer, not the observable. Thus, knowledge should grow from parokṣa to pratyakṣa to aparokṣa; from ekarūpa to anekarūpa to arūpa.

The expression of bhakti should also evolve gradually. Initially, I may strike up a personal relationship with God, waking him, bathing him, dressing him, decorating him, feeding him, and putting him to sleep. This informal dvaita bhakti is what is most strongly emphasized by the bhakti schools of philosophy. Vedānta is never against this, but simply tells us that we need to progress toward formal dvaita bhakti (i.e., karma yoga; Bhagavad Gītā, 9.27):

**yat karoṣi yad aśnāsi, yajjuhoṣi dadāsi yat  
yat tapasyasi kaunteya, tat kuruṣva madarpaṇam<sup>265</sup>**

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<sup>263</sup> That which speech cannot express, but by which speech is spoken—know this to be the supreme and not what this world reveres. That which the mind cannot know, but by which the mind is considered known—know this to be the Supreme and not what this world reveres. That which the eye cannot see, but which sees every eye—know this to be the supreme and not what this world reveres. That which the ear cannot hear, but by which the ear is made to hear—know this to be the supreme and not what this world reveres. That which the living breath does not inspire, but which inspires the living breath—know this to be the supreme and not what this world reveres.

<sup>264</sup> That which is never seen, but is the witness; that which is never heard, but is the hearer; that which is never thought, but is the thinker; that which is never known, but is the knower. There is no other witness, no other hearer, no other thinker, no other knower. That which is the inner ruler is your own immortal self. Everything else but this is mortal.

<sup>265</sup> Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer as oblation, whatever you give in charity, whatever austerity you undertake, dedicate it as an offering to me.

Convert every action to an act of worshipping viṣvarūpa Īśvara and receive every experience as Īśvara prasāda, then come to upāsana yoga. And the final expression of bhakti should be jñāna yajña rūpa bhakti (devotion in the form of contemplating wisdom). In the Bhagavad Gītā Kṛṣṇa says: whoever studies my real nature is expressing his bhakti through jñāna yajña. Vedantic study is also an expression of bhakti; indeed, Kṛṣṇa says that jñāna yajña is the highest expression of bhakti (Gītā, 4.33).

**śreyān dravyamayād yajñād, jñānayajñaḥ parantapa  
sarvaṃ karmākhilaṃ pārtha, jñāne parisampāyate<sup>266</sup>**

Indeed, Vedanta insists on jñāna yoga rūpa bhakti as the highest expression. So the sequence goes from informal bhakti, to karma yoga bhakti, to upāsana yoga bhakti, to jñāna yoga bhakti, which Kṛṣṇa himself presents in the Gītā (12.3) as:

**ye tvakṣaram anirdeśyam, avyaktam paryupāsate  
sarvatrāgam acintyaṃ ca, kūṭastham acalaṃ dhruvam<sup>267</sup>**

Thus, in terms of the expression of bhakti, one should progress through three levels: from informal dvaita bhakti, to formal dvaita bhakti, to jñānī bhakti. The third aspect of bhakti in which progress is required pertains to motive. Initially, I use Bhagavān as a multi-purpose agent to whom I give varieties of tasks. When I've got problems, he has to solve them; and if required, he should perform miracles as well. I remember all the Purāṇic stories of Bhagavān's problem-solving miracles, so I want to worship Bhagavān so he can bring about miraculous solutions to my own problems. Using Bhagavān to solve my problems or get things done, otherwise known as āṛta-arthārthī bhakti, is my initial motive. In this bhakti, Bhagavān is not a goal or end for me, he is merely a multi-purpose agent; a means for accomplishing my worldly aspirations. Vedanta is not against this but says: āṛta bhakti and arthārthī bhakti are fine in the beginning, but one must get out of this miracle-mongering bhakti soon because Vedanta transcends miracles and mysticism. The greatest miracle that Vedanta has to offer is the knowledge that I am the one who is the adhiṣṭhānam (authority) of everything. What better miracle do you want than this? It is a miracle that is a fact.

As we come to Vedanta, we move away from miracles and mysticism, and we aim to discover the Lord as a goal instead of as a means for worldly ends. Jijñāsu bhakti means seeing Bhagavān as an end. I don't want miracles from Bhagavān; I want Bhagavān. My valuation of miracles is gone because miracles are māyā, mithya, anityam: they may happen sometimes, but most times they won't (if miracles happened all the time, would they be called miracles)? Therefore, I don't lean or depend upon Bhagavān for such unstable ends. I want what is stable and permanent. I want Bhagavān as an end; that is the motive. And eventually, Bhagavān is neither a means nor an end—neither sādhanam nor sadhyam—Bhagavān is siddha vastu; it happens to be me, the very seeker. Once I have reached this highest level, my motive for bhakti is not for getting anything, not even Bhagavān, because I have discovered him to be the very ātmā. Therefore, the motive of the highest level of bhakti is only one thing: to give thanks. Whenever a jñānī "meets" Bhagavān (for example, if Bhagavān comes in the form of an iṣṭa-devatā), a jñānī will only use one phrase: Thank you. I have everything I want. I thank Bhagavān because I got knowledge from the śāstram, which comes from Bhagavān. Thus, a bhakta must progress in terms of understanding, expression, and motive, and Nārada says: **bhajanīyaḥ**—may your worship progress gradually

<sup>266</sup> Jñānayajna, the contemplation of wisdom, is superior to other yajnas rituals involving materials. Every action without exception culminates in knowledge.

<sup>267</sup> Meditating on the imperishable Brahman, which is indefinable, unmanifest, all-pervading, incomprehensible, immutable, immovable, and eternal.

**Sutra 80. saḥ kīrtyamānaḥ śīghram evāvīrbhavaty anubhāvayati bhaktān**

***When He is glorified, the Lord swiftly reveals himself to his devotees and allows them to know him as he is.***

**Saḥ**, that Lord; **kīrtyamānaḥ**, who is continuously worshipped by the bhakta (who is gradually progressing from arta to arthārthī to jijñāsu through an increasingly refined bhakti); **śīghram evāvīrbhavaty**, swiftly reveals himself to that bhakta; **bhaktān anubhāvayati**, so that the bhakta can enjoy Īśvara-darśanam. In light of what we have discussed, how should this sutra be understood? For bhaktas in the initial stages of bhakti this sutra has one meaning. For example, among the Nyanars and Alvars who are steeped in dvaita bhakti, Bhagavān’s darśanam is taken to mean that Bhagavān will appear in the personified form as Lord Śiva or Viṣṇu. And nowadays if we talk about Bhagavān revealing himself, many will have some revered celebrity’s face in mind. Thus, for the bhakti schools of philosophy, this sutra is taken to refer to the darśanam of an iṣṭa-devatā. Vedanta accepts this possibility; after all, Bhagavān has māyā śakti. If Bhagavān can create the entire universe, surely Bhagavān can take the form of an iṣṭa-devatā for the sake of the bhakta or upāsaka. Therefore, Vedanta accepts all the Purāṇic stories as possible, but Vedanta also says don’t get lost or carried away by this limited notion of bhakti or darśanam, which is not particularly useful for spiritual progress. We have the iṣṭa-devatā form for the sake of pūjā only; our aim is not to settle on darśanam in that form. I have given examples of rakṣasās (demons) having darśanam through tapas and after having Īśvara-darśanam what do those demons do? They ask for all kinds of boons to be used for destructive purposes. This means they have not matured as a result of such devatā darśanam. Therefore, iṣṭa-devatā darśanam is not central in Vedantic teaching. Bhakti schools of philosophy glorify this too much; Vedanta is not enamoured with this. Instead, Vedanta talks about two other stages of **āvīrbhāva**, or manifestation. First, Bhagavān should appear in the form of viṣvarūpa Īśvara, which, of course, is already there, but through mental purity I come to see the world as Bhagavān. This kind of darśanam is found in the Gītā (11.8):

**na tu māṃ śakyase draṣṭum, anenaiva svacakṣuṣā  
divyaṃ dadāmi te cakṣuḥ, paśya me yogam aiśvaram**<sup>268</sup>

Oh Lord, give me an **ahaṅkāra mamakāra rahita antaḥkaraṇam**—pure mind, free of egoism and ownership, so that I will have viṣvarūpa darśanam, the steady vision of God in all things. And thereafter, the next higher āvīrbhāva (appearance) is nothing but aham brahmāsmi jñānam (the knowledge that I am Brahman, I am the Divine (Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, 1.4.10). **Jivātmanaḥ paramātmatvena jñānam eva āvīrbhāvaḥ**—the knowledge that jivātmān and paramātmān are identical is Bhagavān “appearing” as aham eva brahmasmi. After this knowledge, when does the jñānī bhakta enjoys Īśvara darśanam? (Gītā 15.10 and 15.7, respectively):

**utkrāmantam sthitam vāpi, bhuñjānam vā guṇānvitam  
vimūḍhā nānupaśyanti, paśyanti jñānacakṣuṣaḥ  
...mamaivāṃśo jīvaloke jīvabhūtaḥ sanātanaḥ...**<sup>269</sup>

<sup>268</sup> However, you cannot see me with this ordinary eye of yours. I shall give you a divine eye. See my divine power.

<sup>269</sup> The deluded ones do not recognize me who leaves the body, who resides in the body, who experiences objects, who has guṇas, but those who have the eye of wisdom recognize me...Only a “part” of myself is in the form of the eternal jīva in the world of beings...

Sutra 80 must therefore be interpreted in two ways. Initially in dvaita bhakti, Bhagavān gives darśanam to the bhakta, but later at the advaita bhakti level, Bhagavān giving darśana amounts to the firm knowledge 'aham brahma asmi' (I am awareness).

**Sutra 81. trisatyasya bhaktireva garīyasī bhaktireva garīyasī**

***Devotion is the most precious possession of a person who honestly uses his mind, body, and words.***

Of these three levels of bhakti—parokṣa-Īśvara bhakti (devotion to a remote, indirectly-experienced God), pratyakṣa-Īśvara bhakti (devotion to a vivid and directly-experienced God), and aparokṣa-Īśvara bhakti (devotion to an imperceptible God that known to be non-different from me)—which is the greatest? Parokṣa-Īśvara bhakti is a great stepping-stone to pratyakṣa-Īśvara bhakti, but parokṣa-Īśvara bhakti itself does not lead to liberation. Likewise, pratyakṣa-Īśvara bhakti is better than parokṣa-Īśvara bhakti, but again, it does not lead to liberation but is only a stepping-stone to aparokṣa-Īśvara bhakti. Aparokṣa-Īśvara bhakti is the greatest bhakti because it alone liberates. As it says in the Kaivalya Upaniṣad, X.1.10:

**sarva bhūtastham ātmānan sarva bhūtāni cātmani  
sampashyan brahma paramam yāti nānyena hetunā<sup>270</sup>**

Mokṣa is only possible through this jñānam and therefore Nārada says: **trisatyasya bhaktiḥ**. **Trisatyam** means the absolute reality. And what is this absolute reality? Neither ekarūpa-Īśvara nor anekarūpa-Īśvara are absolute because both are subject to arrival and departure. The absolute reality is nirguṇam brahman alone; satyam jñānam anantam Brahma; that is called trisatyā (threefold) Īśvara. To use the 7<sup>th</sup> Chapter language of the Gītā: **parābhakti rūpa Īśvaraḥ**. And to use the language of the 15<sup>th</sup> Chapter (Gītā, 15.17)

**uttamaḥ puruṣastvanyaḥ, paramātmetyudāhṛtaḥ  
yo lokatrayam āviśya, bibhartavyaya īśvaraḥ<sup>271</sup>**

Here, *uttamaḥ puruṣaḥ* means *puruṣottamaḥ* (the greatest among all puruṣas, or spirits), referring to nirguṇam brahman. Therefore, Nārada says: **trisatyasya bhaktiḥ**—devotion to trisatyā-Īśvara (satyam jñānam anantam brahma), **bhaktireva garīyasī**—alone is the ultimate bhakti, the culminating bhakti: jñānī bhakti, advaita bhakti, mukhya bhakti, parābhakti, the only liberating bhakti. Nārada wants to underscore this point, which is why he repeats the words **bhaktireva garīyasī**.

**Sutra 82. guṇamāhātmyāsaktim rūpāsaktim pūjāsaktim smaraṇāsaktim  
dāsyāsaktim sakhyāsaktim vātsalyāsaktim kāntāsaktim ātma-nivedanāsaktim  
tanmāyātāsaktim paramavirahāsaktim rūpām ekadhā api ekādaśadhā bhavati**

<sup>270</sup> Discovering that ātmā which exists in all beings and in which all beings exist, one reaches the supreme brahman. There is no other means.

<sup>271</sup> Different from these is the supreme spirit, said to be the supreme self, which pervades and sustains the three worlds. It is the imperishable Lord.

**Although love of God is one, it manifests in eleven forms: reflecting on God's glory, appreciating God's beauty, worshipping God, remembering God, serving God, communing with God as a friend, caring for God in a parental way, interacting with God as a lover, surrendering everything to God, absorption in contemplation of God, and experiencing separation from God.**

**Bhaktiḥ ekadhā api. Ekadhā**—love of God is one only, but it can be expressed in different forms according to the temperament of the devotee. Nārada gives 11 options for expressing love of God, and one can start by choosing any one of them. These expressions of love are: (1) **Guṇamāhātmyāsakti**—reflecting on the glories of the Lord as revealed through various stories. All the Purāṇic stories talk about the glory of Bhagavān, the love of Bhagavān, the compassion of Bhagavān, the power of Bhagavān. The omnipotence of the Lord is conveyed in all these stories, thus one may enjoy Bhagavān's glories or virtues by reading the Purāṇas or listening to such stories, even stories of bhaktas deal indirectly with the glories of Bhagavān. (2) **Rūpāsakti**—appreciating the beautiful form of God. We have so many stotras describing the beauty of the Lord from head to toe. There are the stotras of the Nyanars and Alvars, even the initial śloka of Lalitha Sahasranāma describe God's beauty. All these are available and you can take any one of them and use it to appreciate God's beautiful form. (3) **Pūjāsakti**—doing pūjā. (4) **Smaraṇāsakti**—remembering the Lord in various ways. (5) **Dāsyāsakti**—service to the Lord. Some people choose to clean the temples, but if you clean the roads it is nothing other dāsyam because our roads are also viṣvarūpa Īśvara. (6) **Sakhyāsakti**—friendliness toward God and putting a hand on his shoulder. (7) **Vātsalyāsakti**—treating Bhagavān as one's own baby. (8) **Kāntāsakti**—this is otherwise known as bridal bhakti. The bhakta imagines himself as the bride and Bhagavān as the groom. (9) **Ātmanivedanāsakti**—surrendering everything to Bhagavān, with the ultimate surrender being (10) **Tanmāyātāsakti**—surrendering the very ahaṅkāra (egoism) and claiming oneness with Bhagavān, the infinite brahman. (11) **Paramavirahāsakti**—cherishing separation from God. This is the same as when a person is separated from an object of love; separation leads to more fond memories than does proximity. When our family members are around, we are always quarrelling with them, but when we are apart, we begin to miss them. For this reason, some bhaktas deliberately entertain the idea of separation, as in the Gopika Viraha Gītām of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. But why is it called **paramavirahasāsakti**? Because the separation here is not from local individuals, the separation is from paraman. A local viraha (sense of separation) is saṃsāra, but this type of viraha leads to spiritual growth. Thus, bhakti can begin with any of these 11 forms, but thereafter one should come to **trisatyasya bhaktiḥ** (Sutra 81), otherwise known as jñāna bhakti—that is the ultimate destination. And now Nārada concludes with the final two sutras.

**Sutra 83. ityevaṃ vadanti janajalpanirbhayāḥ eka matāḥ kumara-vyāsa-śuka-śāṇḍilya-garga-viṣṇu-kaunḍinya-śeṣa-uddhava-aruṇi-bali-hanūmad-vibhīṣaṇa-ādayaḥ bhaktyācāryāḥ**

**Thus say the founding authorities of devotional service: the Kumāras, Vyāsa, Śuka, Śāṇḍilya, Garga, Viṣṇu, Kaunḍilya, Śeṣa, Uddhava, Aruṇi, Bali, Hanumān, Vibhīṣaṇa, and others—speaking without fear of worldly gossip and sharing among themselves one and the same opinion.**

All of the ācāryas in our tradition, regardless of the teaching they are giving, make it very clear that it is not their own personal teaching. If any ācārya gives his or her own teaching, it is vulnerable to becoming a puruṣāya grantha (a human literary work). Anything coming from a jīva can never be

perfect, no matter how great that jīva may be. That is why we had āstika darśanam<sup>272</sup> coming from ṛṣis like Kapila Ṛṣi (Samkhya), Kanada Ṛṣi, (Vaiśeṣika), Gautama Ṛṣi (Nyāya), Patañjali (Yoga), Jaimini Ṛṣi (Mīmāṃsā), etc. All those ṛṣis shared their darśanam as jīvas, and all those darśanas had inherent problems. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> Chapter of the Brahma Sūtras, Śaṅkarācārya refutes them all. Even though they were ṛṣis, tapasris, and bhaktas, they disseminated their own teachings. Any philosophy coming from a jīva will be contaminated with doṣas (defects) and problems. This is precisely why traditional Vedānta ācāryas say: “I am not giving my darśanam. This darśanam comes from the Vedas.” The Āgamas—whether Śaiva Āgamas, Śakta Āgamas, or Vaiśanava Āgamas—are also unsound because they fall under puruṣāya granthas; Śaṅkarācārya has refuted the Āgama-based bhakti schools of philosophy as well. We may take selected ideas from them, but our teaching must be based on the Veda: Pūrva and Vedānta. In Sūtra 83, Nārada is effectively saying: I also come under the Vedic tradition. You will recall that Nārada learned Vedānta from Sanatkumara, whose instructions on bhūma-vidya appear as the 7<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, making it a Vedic teaching. Follow the Veda rather than Āgama-based bhakti schools of philosophy, which confine themselves to dvaita bhakti and only deal with a personal God, never coming to advaitam. Follow the tradition of great Vedic ācāryas. And who are these great ācāryas? Nārada provides a list in Sūtra 83:

**Kumārah**—referring to Sanatkumara, Nārada’s own guru; **Vyāsa**; **Śuka**; **Śaṅḍilya**—author of the Śaṅḍilya Bhakti Sūtra, which comprises 100-odd sūtras; **Garga**—who authored the Garga Samhita; **Viṣṇu**, **Kauṇḍinya**; **Seṣa**; **Uddhava**—whose discourse with Kṛṣṇa is featured in the Uddhava Gītā (also known as the Hamsa Gītā); **Aruṇi**—the sage Uddalaka Aruṇi whose teachings are recorded in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka and Chāndogya Upaniṣads; **Bali**—Mahabali Chakravārti; **Hanūmad**; and finally, **Vibhīṣaṇa**. Nārada says: **ādayaḥ bhaktyācāryāḥ**—all these great bhakti ācāryas, **evaṃ vadanti**—teach in this manner. What manner? **Eka matāḥ**—consistently and without contradicting themselves: karma yoga plus upāsana yoga plus jñāna yoga is equal to advaita bhakti. This is *cakkani rāja mārgamu*, the beautiful, royal path known as Vedānta. All these great ācāryas have taught with this consensus. They don’t have differences of opinion. Samanvaya (coordination) is there. Nārada also says: **janajalpanirbhayāḥ**—they teach the Vedas without bothering with the opinions of worldly people. There may be nāstikas who reject the teaching and āstikas who stray from the Veda. As I said earlier, even Samkhyas, Nyayas, and Vaiśeṣikas are āstikas who accept Veda pramāṇam, but when they got into tarka (speculation), they deviated from the Veda. Similarly, Āgama-based bhakti schools all deviated from the Veda and sometimes even reject the Veda. But Vedic ācāryas do not bother with the prattling of others. One cannot force others to stop talking, therefore **evaṃ vadanti**—their teachings are harmonized on the basis of śrūti-yukti-anubhava pramāṇam. Nārada concludes with the final sūtra, an appeal to bhaktas to study the Nārada Bhakti Sūtra.

**Sūtra 84. ya idaṃ nāradaproktaṃ śivānuśāsanam viśvasiti śraddhatte sa bhaktimān bhavati saḥ preṣṭhaṃ labhate saḥ preṣṭhaṃ labhate iti**

**Anyone who has faith in these auspicious teachings decreed by Nārada will be endowed with devotion and attain the dearest beloved. Yes, he will attain the dearest beloved.**

**Yaḥ idaṃ**—suppose there is a person, a bhakta, **viśvasiti śraddhatte**—who has śraddhā, or faith, **nāradaproktaṃ śivānuśāsanam**—in this auspicious teaching decreed by Nārada. Śraddhā in both the pramāṇam, the means of knowledge in terms of words, and the prameyam, the ultimate goal of this knowledge in terms of its deep meaning. The upadeśa, or teaching, is **śivānuśāsanam**. The word **śiva**

<sup>272</sup> Refers to the six orthodox schools of Hindu philosophy

here means maṅgalam, sacred, holy, or auspicious, but it can also be taken to refer to Lord Śiva who is the Adi Guru. Thus, one can take this as **sada śivānuśāsanam**—the teaching given by Nārada and initiated by Lord Dakṣiṇāmūrti. Either way, we are talking about a sacred ānuśāsanam (instruction) because it is based on the Vedas. As said in the preliminary portion of Viṣṇu Sahasranāma:

**pavitrānām pavitam yaḥ  
mangalānām ca maṅgalam  
daivatam daivatānām ca  
bhūtanam yo'vyayaḥ pita**<sup>273</sup>

And **saḥ bhaktimān bhavati**—such a person will become **bhaktimān**—endowed with devotion, as he moves through all four stages: initially ārta bhaktimān, then arthārthī bhaktimān, then jijñāsu bhaktimān, then jñānī bhaktimān bhavati. And when he becomes a jñānī bhakta, **saḥ preṣṭhaḥ labhate**—he will attain that which is dearest to him. **Preṣṭhaḥ** is a superlative degree of priyam (priyaḥ = dear, preyān = dearer, and preṣṭhaḥ = dearest). So on Valentine's Day, if he wants to write a letter to the one who is dearest, to whom will he write this letter? To Bhagavān. And how does one attain this? By learning and understanding that Bhagavān is non-different from me. And is there any doubt? Nārada says: No. It is guaranteed: **saḥ preṣṭhaḥ labhate**—that dearest Beloved will be attained. And this is repeated to indicate the end of the Nārada Bhakti Sūtrāṇi.

\*\*\*End of Teaching 26\*\*\*

## Summary

We will now summarize the Nārada Bhakti Sūtrāṇi. As mentioned in the introduction, the topic of bhakti can be approached from two different perspectives. One is bhakti as approached by Vedānta darśanam, which is Vedica mārga (the Vedic path); the other is bhakti as approached by several bhakti darśanani, collectively termed the bhakti schools of philosophy. In the Brahma Sutras both Vyasācārya and Śaṅkarācārya carefully analyze the latter approach and point out its various deficiencies. The bhakti schools of philosophy focus primarily on dvaita bhakti centering on a personal deity in the form of Kṛṣṇa or Rama, and consider this informal dvaita bhakti to be the central or primary type. Vedānta darśanam, by contrast, says that such dvaita bhakti can never in itself lead to mokṣa or liberation; we say that mokṣa is never possible without jñānam. When Vedānta insists upon jñānam as a prerequisite for mokṣa, the bhakti schools say that dvaita bhakti can also give jñānam. But we maintain that jñānam is possible only through Vedānta vicāra (self-inquiry). The bhakti schools of philosophy have no respect for Vedānta vicāra; indeed, they actively discourage it. At most, they will say that vicāra is one of many available methods for attaining jñānam, and they will add that their bhakti method involves getting jñānam and mokṣa through the easier dvaita bhakti route. If we repeatedly insist that jñānam and mokṣa are impossible without Vedānta vicāra, they will respond: "We don't want jñānam and mokṣa. You may value jñānam and mokṣa in your Vedānta darśanam, but we don't consider Vedānta vicāra, jñānam, and mokṣa to be such great things. We are quite happy with dvaita bhakti itself." So when cornered, the bhakti schools of philosophy reject Vedānta vicāra, jñānam, and mokṣa. They will then quote various ślokas from the Bhāgavata Purāṇa in which a bhakta has said: "I am not even interested in mokṣa, I want to enjoy bhakti of you, Lord, as my Iṣṭa-devatā." This is the tack the bhakti schools of philosophy take: either they say that jñānam and mokṣa are possible through dvaita bhakti, or they go a step further to say they have no interest in these things.

Vedānta darśanam rejects the bhakti schools' approach as misguided because it is not in keeping with śrūti, yukti, and anubhava. Nor is it in keeping with the teachings of the prasthanatrayam. The only bhakti we want to study is that which is in harmony with Vedānta darśanam. This is why we read and

<sup>273</sup>He is the sanctifier of even what is most sacred. He is the most auspicious among auspicious beings. He is the Lord of all divinities. He, the undecaying, is the father of all beings.

interpreted the Nārada Bhakti Sutras in a manner that is consistent with Vedānta darśanam rather than the bhakti schools of philosophy. In doing so, we find that we are able to accept the Nārada Bhakti Sutras because Nārada himself, being a disciple of Sanatkumara, happens to be one of the advaita ācāryas who respects the Upaniṣadic tradition. In the 7<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the Chāndogya Upaniṣad (Sanatkumara’s instructions to sage Nārada on bhūma-vidya), Nārada is one of the advaitic paramparā ācāryas, so we can be sure that he will not be propounding a bhakti school of philosophy. Not only that, we find out through the Nārada Bhakti Sutras that Nārada’s teaching is very much aligned with the Bhagavad Gītā, one of the three pillar texts of the prasthanatrayam. If you want to learn everything about bhakti in a manner that stays true to the Vedic tradition, the Bhagavad Gītā is the ideal work because it discusses bhakti at length without violating the Vedic teachings. We have seen that throughout the Nārada Bhakti Sutras the Bhagavad Gītā has served as the foundation: specifically, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Chapter, the 13<sup>th</sup> Chapter, the 16<sup>th</sup> Chapter, and most important, the 12<sup>th</sup> Chapter, which forms almost the entire basis of the Nārada Bhakti Sutras. In fact, the Nārada Bhakti Sutras might be viewed as a commentary on the 12<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the Gītā and therefore must be interpreted with the Gītā in mind.

These Nārada Bhakti Sutras, consisting of 84 sutras, have been divided into five chapters in this particular edition published by the Ramakrishna Math, so we will summarize the text accordingly. The 1<sup>st</sup> Chapter, spanning from Sutra 1 to 24, is titled Parābhakti Svarūpam. In analyzing these 24 sutras, we find that Nārada is talking about parābhakti, the highest or supreme bhakti, as advaita jñānī bhakti or undivided love of the Lord. If we have undivided love of God, God must also be undivided. Therefore, parābhakti is advaita bhakti in which jīvātmā, paramātmā, and anātmā have been reduced to eka-ātmā (one ātmā alone). This advaita can only be discovered through jñānam; therefore, parābhakti and advaita bhakti are synonymous with jñānī bhakti. This is how Nārada begins the first chapter. If, on the other hand, there was division in bhakti, there would also be division in love, and divided love is subject to taratamya, comparison or gradation. One will be dear, another will be dearer, and still another will be dearest. In this case, Bhagavān would become only one among the many objects of love. If a mother is asked: “Do you want Bhagavān or your child?” The mother will experience conflict. As one mother openly said to me: “Swamiji, if you say I should be detached from my only son for mokṣa, I don’t want mokṣa. Everything I want in this life, I want for the sake of this child. I love God because God can make my child better. If you give me an option between God and one of the dearest ones, then I will have to wonder.” Such problems arise wherever there is division because division leads to fluctuation. Pūrṇatvam is possible only when there is no division. Wherever there is division, there is apūrṇatvam. Therefore, only advaita bhakti, or jñānī bhakti, is called parābhakti. And this advaita bhakti is expressed in the form of the love of undivided ātmā. That is why one of the definitions of parābhakti that Nārada gives (Sutra 6) is: **ātmāramaḥ bhavati**—[such a bhakta] becomes self-content. As said in the Bhagavad Gītā, this parabhakta: **ātmanyeva ātmanā tuṣṭaḥ**—is satisfied in himself, by himself (2.55), and **yastvātmaratireva syād, ātmatrptaśca mānavaḥ**—loves the self alone and is contented with the self alone (3.17). So Nārada’s definition is in keeping with the prasthanatrayam. If we have to identify that parābhakti in a person, Nārada says this person is **sthitaprajñāḥ**—firmly established in wisdom. So the parabhakta is one who is **ātmanyevātmanā tuṣṭaḥ**—full in himself by himself, and **vītarāgabhayakrodhāḥ**—free of passion, fear, and anger (Gītā, 2.56). Thus, Chapter 1 of the Nārada Bhakti Sutra amounts to a characterization of parābhakti, advaita bhakti, or jñānī bhakti, which is simply an elaboration of the definitions of sthitaprajñā in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Chapter of the Gītā, parabhakta in the 12<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the Gītā, and guṇatitha in the 14<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the Gītā.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Chapter is titled Parābhakti Mahatvam, the greatness or glory of parābhakti. Here, Nārada says parābhakti is even superior to karma yoga and jñāna yoga, which may give rise to some confusion. When Nārada says parābhakti is superior to karma yoga and jñāna yoga, he is not saying that bhakti yoga is superior. He uses the word *parābhaktiḥ*, which refers to the ultimate destination. Advaita bhakti is the destination and the destination is always more valuable than the path we take to get there. The end is always superior to the means. When we purchase something with money, money is the means and the purchased object is the end, and is superior to the means. The very fact that we have given up

money for the sake of the object testifies to this fact. Therefore, **sādhāna sadhyayor madhye sadhyam eva gariyah**—between the means and the end, the end is better. Parābhakti is superior because it is the destination. Then what about karma yoga and jñāna yoga? Nārada says both are means, or sādhānas, so parābhakti, which is the sadhyam or end, is superior to both. Nārada’s point is thus perfectly logical. And what corollary are we to derive from this? To reach the sadhyam, we need to employ a sādhānam. There is no doubt that parābhakti is superior, but to arrive at parābhakti we must employ karma yoga and jñāna yoga. Some people may be inclined to argue that if parābhakti is superior to karma yoga and jñāna yoga, there is no reason to go through these yogas. To this we say that although parābhakti is superior, one who wants parābhakti must necessarily go through karma yoga and jñāna yoga. And what is jñāna yoga? Vedānta śravaṇa, manana, nididhyāsana. Therefore, may you follow karma yoga, may you follow jñāna yoga, and may you attain parābhakti—the ultimate destination.

In talking about parābhakti, Nārada wants to give some concrete examples, so he discusses the Gopikas. In Sutra 21 he says: **Yatha vraja-gopikanam**—this is best illustrated by the devotion of the Gopis of Gokula. And how should we interpret this example in a manner consistent with the prasthanatrayam? We should understand that all of the gopikas were jñānī bhaktas or advaita bhaktas. As I often quote (Bhagavata Purāṇa, 10.31.4, Gopika Gītām, The Gopis’ Songs of Separation):

**na khalu gopikā nandano bhavan  
akhila dehinam antarātmā dr̥k  
vikhanasārtito visva-guptaye  
sakha udeyivan satvatam kule**<sup>274</sup>

If you are not Mr. Kṛṣṇa, then who are you? You have appeared in this form because all the bhaktas prayed for you to take avatāra, but your śarīram is only **māyā mānuṣa veṣam**—a human disguise. The real Kṛṣṇa is **akhila dehinam antarātmā dr̥k**—the inner consciousness of all embodied entities. Therefore, in looking to the Gopis do not evade jñānam; rather, use the example of the Gopis to come to jñānam. The second idea we should derive is that the Gopis initially followed informal dvaita bhakti. As I have said, dvaita bhakti is the stepping-stone to advaita bhakti. Informal dvaita bhakti can be optionally followed, but there is also formal dvaita bhakti, which is required. Informal dvaita bhakti involves personifying and regularly interacting with God: getting up in the morning and going to the Pūjā room to interact with the Lord, talking with the Lord, bathing the Lord, dressing the Lord, feeding the Lord, even scolding the Lord every now and then. This kind of personal interaction is known as informal bhakti and is useful for citta śuddhi; Vedānta śāstra approves of it, but does not require it. By quoting the Gopikas, Nārada conveys his approval for informal dvaita bhakti, but in discussing sādhāna, Nārada draws heavily on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Chapter of the Gītā—namely, the karma yoga portion (Gītā, 2.45):

**traiguṇyavisayā vedāḥ, nistraiguṇyo bhavārjuna  
nirdvando nityasattvasthah, niryogakṣema ātmavān**<sup>275</sup>

In doing so, Nārada is indicating that we must not confine ourselves to informal dvaita bhakti, but follow traditional karma yoga and upāsana yoga, including the pañca mahāyajñas. Like the gopis, you can practice informal dvaita bhakti, but you need to include formal dvaita bhakti in the form of karma yoga and upāsana, which Nārada mentions several times. Thus, when Nārada says that parābhakti is superior to karma yoga and jñāna yoga, he is not telling us to replace karma yoga and jñāna yoga, but to go through them as a means of coming to advaita bhakti. This is the topic of Sutras 25 through 33.

<sup>274</sup> You are not actually the son of the gopi Yasoda, O friend, but the indwelling witness in the hearts of all embodied souls. Because Lord Brahma prayed for you to come and protect the universe, you have now appeared in the Satvata dynasty.

<sup>275</sup> Oh Arjuna! The Vedas deal with the world of three guṇas. Be free from the desire for the world of three guṇas. Be free from the hold of the pairs of opposites. Be ever established in sattva guṇa. Be free from the concern for acquisition and preservation. Be mindful.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Chapter, composed of Sutras 34 to 50, is titled Parābhakti Sādhānani. Here, Nārada introduces all the formal dvaita bhakti sādhanas taught in the Bhagavad Gītā. So in citing the Gopis, Nārada validated informal dvaita bhakti and in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Chapter he validates formal dvaita bhakti in the form of karma yoga, performing the pañca mahāyajñas with Īśvara arpaṇa-bhāvana (an attitude of offering), and receiving all results with prasāda-bhāvana (the understanding that they are based on the laws of karma). In this portion, Nārada draws heavily from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Chapter of the Gītā, asserting that along with karma yoga sādhanā, one must follow all the values (Gītā, 2.62):

**dhyāyato viṣayān puṃsaḥ saṅgasteṣūpajāyate  
saṅgāt sañjāyate kāmaḥ kāmāt krodho' bijayāte  
krodhād bhavati saṃmohāḥ, saṃmohāt smṛtīvibhramah  
smṛtibhramśād buddhināśaḥ, buddhināśāt praṇaśyati<sup>276</sup>**

Nārada advises us to carefully avoid **saṅga** (attachment/craving), **kama** (lust), **krodha** (anger), **moha** (delusion), etc., and highlights some of the values mentioned in the 13<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the Gītā: **amānitvam** (humility), **adambhitvam** (pridelessness), **ahiṃsā** (non-violence) **kṣāntiḥ** (tolerance), etc. The idea that simple nāma-sankīrtana will give mokṣa is incorrect. Nāma-sankīrtana is wonderful, but we need to watch our day-to-day lifestyles as well: we need to follow a karma yoga way of life and follow values. Nārada also draws heavily from the 16<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the Gītā, in which the āsurī-sampats (vices) are enumerated, and advises us to avoid these and replace them with daivī-sampat (virtue). Thus, the Gītā-based sādhanas are the focus of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Chapter of the Nārada Bhakti Sutra, which requires intimate familiarity with the Bhagavad Gītā in order to be properly interpreted and understood.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Chapter is titled Prema Nirvācanam, which could also be called Bhakti Nirvācanam because prema and bhakti are synonymous and refer to love of God. Nārada begins the chapter by saying in Sutra 51: **anirvacanīyaṃ premasvarūpam**—the nature of love cannot be defined. How are we to understand this? Just as sat, cit, and ānanda are the nature of ātmā, prema or love is also the nature of everyone. That is why we needn't generate love; we need only to remove the obstacles to it. Therefore, prema svarūpam (the embodiment of original or pure love) is ātmā svarūpam (the nature of the self) and because ātmā is anirvacanīyaṃ (inexpressible), original prema is also anirvacanīyaṃ. Very few people discover this premasvarūpa ātmā. As Nārada says in Sutra 53: **prakāśyate kvāpi pātre**—[in rare cases], love is revealed to a qualified person. If we have to discover original love or absolute love, which is identical with ātmā, we must first discover ātmā. Without ātmā jñānam we can never discover original, absolute love. And because jñānam is so rare, very few people have original and unconditional love. All other forms of love are not original love, which means they are all conditional love. Conditional love of another is not original love. Conditional love is love of a condition, not of a person. Saying: "I love you as long as you give me money" is the same as saying: "I love your money." Saying: "I love you as long as we have compatibility" is the same as saying: "I only love a particular type of behavior or characteristic in you, and I will love you only as long as it doesn't change." That is why in our tradition we don't accept compatibility-based marriage: 100 percent compatibility will never be there, not even between Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī. If you ask Pārvatī, she will say that Śiva doesn't know how to dress properly: "How can I take him to a party?" she will say. Even the Trimūrti wives have their complaints, so compatibility-based marriage are bound to end up on the rocks. And even if there is initial compatibility, it is subject to change. Therefore, we believe in prārabdha-based marriage only. Thus, without ātmā jñānam any form of love will be conditional. Only a jñānī's love is unconditional because he loves the ātmā in everyone, which is always perfect. As it says in the Bhagavad Gītā (5.18):

**vidyāvinayasampanne, brāhmaṇe gavi hastini  
śuni caiva śvapāke ca, paṇḍitāḥ samadarśinaḥ<sup>277</sup>**

<sup>276</sup> For a person who dwells on the sense objects, a fancy toward them arises. From fancy, desire is born. From desire, anger arises. From anger arises delusion. From delusion, the loss of memory. From the loss of memory, the loss of discrimination. Because of the loss of discrimination, he perishes.

For a jñanī, love is universal. Therefore, jñanī bhakti is the highest bhakti, or mukhya bhakti, and comes by discovering that the very nature of ātmā is unconditional love. Nārada discusses this in the first part of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Chapter, and later points out that this mukhya bhakti, this primary bhakti of unconditional love, can only be discovered by following gauni, or secondary, bhakti. To make his point, Nārada draws on the 7<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the Gītā with his use of the term **ārtādibhedāt**, which means ‘ārta etc.’ Nārada does not do much explaining here. He presupposes we have knowledge of the Gītā, otherwise how could we make sense of the meaning of ‘etc.’? To which 7<sup>th</sup> Chapter Gītā śloka does the term ‘etc.’ refer? Śloka 16 to 18:

**caturvidhā bhajante mām, janāḥ sukr̥tino’rjuna  
ārto jijñāsurarthārthī, jñānī ca bharatarṣabha**

**teṣāṃ jñānī nityayuktaḥ, ekabhaktirviśiṣyate  
priyo hi jñānino’tyārtam, ahaṃ sac a mama priyaḥ**

**udārāḥ sarva evaite, jñānī tvātmaiva me matam  
āsthitaḥ sa hi yuktātmā, mām evānuttamāṃ gatim**<sup>278</sup>

**Ekabhaktir** means advaita bhakti. The most important line here is: **udārāḥ sarva evaite, jñānī tvātmaiva me matam**. Kṛṣṇa is saying: the jñanī is not my bhakta, the jñanī is me. From there, Nārada talks about threefold secondary bhakti: ārta bhakti, arthārthī bhakti, and jijñāsu bhakti. First we go to God to solve our problems, then we go to God for success in our ventures, and then we go to God asking for God himself: “I want you alone as my goal.” That is the spirit of jijñāsu bhakti. Having gone through these three stages and kept Bhagavān as an end in itself, Bhagavān brings us a Guru and the śāstram. As Kṛṣṇa says (Gītā, 10.10-11):

**teṣāṃ satatayuktānāṃ, bhajatāṃ priti-pūrvakam  
dadāmi buddhiyogaṃ taṃ, yena mām upayānti te**

**teṣāṃ evānukampārtham, ahaṃ jñānajaṃ tamaḥ  
nāśayāmyātmabhāvasthaḥ, jñānadīpena bhāsvatā**<sup>279</sup>

Out of compassion for these jijñāsu bhaktas, Bhagavān, who has a guru agency, arranges for Vedānta vicāra and creates all the conditions for them to attain jñānam. Thus, may you go through ārta, arthārthī, jijñāsu gauni bhakti, and then become a jñanī bhakta attaining mukhya bhakti. You will recall that Nārada also presented the three forms of gauni bhakti as sattvica, rajasā, and tamasa, and mukhya bhakti as guṇatitha bhakti, beyond the three guṇas. With this, the 4<sup>th</sup> Chapter, spanning from Sūtras 51 to 66, is over.

The 5<sup>th</sup> and final chapter is titled Bhakta Mahimā. Previously Nārada had talked about the glory of advaita bhakti, and here he is talks about the glory of the advaita bhakta. Nārada says that jñanī bhaktas are those who have become one with Bhagavān, and therefore there is no difference between a jñanī and Bhagavān. That is why we chant (Guru Stotram, Verse 3):

<sup>277</sup> The wise see the same brahman in a brahmin who has knowledge and humility, in a cow, in an elephant, in a dog, and in a dog-eater.

<sup>278</sup> Oh Arjuna! Four types of virtuous people surrender to me—the distressed, the seeker of wealth, the seeker of knowledge, and the wise. Among them, the wise man who is ever steadfast and who has undivided devotion is superior, for I am very dear to the wise man and he is very dear to me. All these devotees are certainly noble. However, the wise man is myself—this is my teaching. Because with a steadfast mind he has resorted to me alone who is the highest goal.

<sup>279</sup> To them who are ever steadfast and worship me with devotion, I give that yoga of wisdom by which they reach me. Out of compassion, I, remaining in their intellect, destroy the darkness born of ignorance by the brilliant light of knowledge.

**gurur brahmā gurur viṣṇuḥ gururdevo maheśvaraḥ  
guruḥ sākṣāt parabrahma tasmai śrī gurave namaḥ<sup>280</sup>**

As I have said before, there are two versions of Bhagavān: a mobile version and a stationary version. The mobile version of Bhagavān is **caraṃ sannyāsinām**—the jñānī sannyāsī (**caraṃ vāsudeva rūpam**) and **acaraṃ pratimāsuccha**. One may be tempted to ask: “Of these two versions, which one is better?” The stationary version cannot teach, whereas the mobile version can move about and bless the world and society. Therefore, Nārada says these jñānī bhaktas, who are non-different from Bhagavān, move about the world and instead of seeking purification, they travel to various places, purifying them with their very presence. If they take a bath in the Ganga, they do not get purified, for they are already pure, so they purify the Ganga. If they go to the temple, they purify the temple. So they are a blessing and an asset to society, even if they don’t actively serve; their very existence in the world is a blessing. And not only that, all the pūrva (previous) ācāryas are happy because their teachings have fructified in this jñānī. All the scriptures are happy because they have done their job. Even the devatās are happy because they love to be associated with such a jñānī. And of course, the parents of a jñānī bhakta are happy (Skanda Purāṇa, Maheśvara Khaṇḍa, Kumārikā Khaṇḍa section, 45.140):

**kulaṃ pavitraṃ janānī kṛtārthā  
vasundharā puṇyavatī ca tena  
apāra samvit sukha sāgare asmin  
līnam parabrahmaṇi yasya cetaḥ**

**Kulaṃ pavitraṃ janānī kṛtārthā**—the family is purified, mother feels fulfilled; **vasundharā puṇyavatī ca tena**—mother earth herself feels puṇyavatī (auspicious) to have carried him. And who is this person? **Apāra samvit sukha sāgare asmin līnam parabrahmaṇi yasya ceta**—that limitless, happy jñānī bhakti whose mind is immersed in parabrahman; this bhakta is celebrated by all. And with this, Nārada ends his discussion of the glory of the jñānī bhakta from Sutras 63 to 74. In the final 11 sutras, 74 to 84, Nārada returns to the topic of sādhanā bhakti because of its crucial importance. So even though Nārada has discussed bhakti sādhanā in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Chapter, he returns to the topic again at the end of the text. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> Chapter, Nārada highlighted the value of satsaṅga and the importance of avoiding duhsaṅga. Choose your friends carefully, he said, because friends can influence your outlook. In this section, Nārada highlights the importance of avoiding arguments (Sutra 74): **vādaḥ nāvalambyaḥ**. In Sādhanā Pañcakam, Śaṅkarācārya offers similar advice, telling us to avoid argument with the wise, the elderly, and the learned people in particular. But Nārada says avoid argument with anyone. You can present your view once or twice, at maximum a third time, but thereafter allow others to have their views. If it is your own family members, pray for them. Other than that, arguments spoil relationships. If you would like your relationships to remain healthy and strong, one value you should follow is to avoid argument. Avoid them in terms of frequency, intensity, voice level, and drawn out recovery periods. In short, Nārada says: **vāda tyagaḥ**, renounce disputes. After this, he highlights many other sādhanās based on the 16<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the Gītā, including **āsuri-sampat tyagaḥ**—renouncing vices (i.e., rajasic and tamasic traits). And with this, the 5<sup>th</sup> Chapter comes to a close. In conclusion, Nārada says: the highest form of bhakti is not dvaita bhakti. Only advaita bhakti is **garīyasi** (glorious). And he adds: this bhakti śāstram teaching is not my own, I have the backing of several great ācāryas, the most immediate being my own guru, Sanatkumara, who among many other teachings gave us the 7<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the Chāndogya Upaniṣad. Nārada also briefly mentions a list of informal bhakti practices, 11 relationship configurations with Bhagavān that one can initially choose from before progressing to advaita bhakti, which alone will lead to mokṣa.

**Hari Om Tat Sat**

<sup>280</sup> Guru is Brahma. Guru is Viṣṇu. Guru is the Supreme Lord Śiva. Guru is both manifest reality and the absolute. Salutations to that glorious Guru.