

**Narada Bhakti Sutra**  
**A summary of Swami Tadatmananda's Discourse**  
**November 14, 2006**

We have seen a variety of practices for pursuing the goal of spiritual growth by way of *bhakti*. These included *puja*, *katha*, and meditation (reveling in the divinity/atma within) described by sages Vyasa, Garga, and Shaandilya, and finally total surrender as advocated by rishi Narada. This surrender is characterized by two aspects: one to surrender all of one's activities to the Lord, and second to have such an intense feeling of devotion that any lack of such intensity creates a feeling of extreme anguish in the devotee.

Surrender based on emotion alone is temporary at best, as exemplified by a worshipper in front of an altar moved by his emotions to tears. So what then is the surrender that is not going to be based on emotion alone? It's the surrender of your body, mind and more-as we shall see.

From a Vedantic perspective, we have some knowledge of the fact that the body is not ours; now we need to ask to whom does it belong? You can look at the trees, the sky, the sun, moon and the planet earth, and ask the same question. They don't belong to any one person; they are part of the nature and as such they belong to *Bhagavan*. Everything belongs to *Bhagavan*-and that includes your body! Same way the mind is not yours; however, to recognize this is a bit more difficult than is the case for the body. Reflect on the fact that when you are happy or sad, the happiness and sadness are states of your mind and that these emotions have a physiological basis related to changes in brain, e.g., secretion of neurotransmitters, etc. Thus, you are not the mind and the mind is not yours. Ultimately, it also belongs to *Bhagavan*!

There is yet one more of aspect of the mind that needs to be considered; and that is free will. Free will is the absolute antithesis of surrender. You cannot achieve the stage of total surrender while you use your free will. To recognize that your power to will is also not yours is even more challenging than recognizing this fact for your mind. But that's what the ultimate surrender requires. How does one surrender the will, if surrendering is a willful process?

Will is an aspect of your mind, just as thoughts, perceptions, emotions, and memory. If you can recognize that happiness and sadness don't belong to you, you will recognize that the power to will also does not belong to you. As a metaphor, imagine that you are a puppet in the hands of a puppeteer, who is pulling all the strings. With that feeling you will realize that your power to will also belongs to God. Recognize will as a separate entity and detach yourself from it. Then everything appears as part of nature, like trees, and the lakes and

the mountains. It is this state of understanding which describes total surrender. This is where *advaita* Vedanta and *bhakti* come together! This is the state of giving up the sense of possession or sense of "I-ness", which characterizes surrender from a Vedantic perspective.

The way the total surrender works, is to start with emotional surrender with a feeling of devotion towards *bhakti* and then with Vedantic teachings, get to total surrender. In sutra 21, Narada gives a vivid example of total surrender

Sutra 20: "*Astyevamevam*".

Translation: Thus and thus, there is.

Commentary: Sutra implies that there are many examples of total surrender, such as the ones that are going to be described.

Sutra 21: "*Yatha vraja-gopikaanaam*"

Translation: For instance, (that) of the *Gopis* of Vraja.

Commentary: Narada is giving the example of *Gopis* whose love for Lord Krishna represented total surrender-one characterized by not only the surrender of body, mind and the will, but also the intensity of devotion such that any separation from the object of love causes extreme torment.

Although, some of the *puranic* stories give the impression that the love of the *Gopis* for Krishna was intense romantic love, these stories have an underlying symbolism as well. For example, when Lord Krishna slays Narakasura to free 16,000 *Gopis* in captivity, the large number of *Gopis* represents all of us, and Narakasura represents ignorance. If taken literally, the *puranic* stories can mislead, by trivializing the love of *Gopis* as emotional earthly love.

Narada, by taking the example of *Gopis* is illustrating what is really a total surrender. *Gopis'* mind was always fixed on Krishna. They risked every thing: their families, marriages and reputation, when they dropped every thing they were doing and ran for Krishna when they heard the sound of his flute! For them not to think of Krishna, even for a moment, was a big torture (*vyaakultaa*, as Narada described it).

Sutra 22: *Tatrapi na mahaatmya-jnana-vismrityapavaadah*

Translation: Even here, the doubt (that) the knowledge of the glory of the Lord was forgotten, does not exist.

Commentary: Narada dispels any doubts about the purity of *Gopis'* love. He asserts that the *Gopis* knew that Krishna was an *avatara* and their love was a total surrender to the Lord.

Sutra 23: *Tadvihinam jaraanaamiva*

Translation: Lack of that (knowledge) makes it like common lovers.

Commentary: Had *Gopis* not recognized the Lordship of Krishna, their love would be at the level of common love like girls passionately chasing after their idolized heroes.

It's commonly asked, which of the two interpretations is right: was *Gopis'* love, love for a person or was it the love for the Lord? There's no right or wrong answer here. *Puranic* stories are extraordinary stories describing extraordinary events. Different interpretations are natural for that reason. For example, Chaitanya Mahabprabhu's interpretation of *Gopis'* love is completely opposite to that of Narada.

According to Chaitanya, *Gopis* were so intimately in love with Krishna that it could not have been love for the Lord; if they thought that Krishna was God, they would have held him in reverence and, because of that lofty position, maintain a certain respectable distance. They were so strongly attracted to him precisely because they did not see him as an *avatara*. A casual observation of relationships among family members demonstrates this point. Often, a father is held in a position of respect, and whereas father-child love certainly exists, there is a lot more intimacy between a mother and a child. Respectable distance is an obstacle to intimacy.

Some feel that having a *murti* of *Bhagavan* on the altar is dragging Him down to our human level and not respecting Him. But in our tradition, we do have the freedom to have that sense of intimacy with the Lord and it's perfectly fine to worship God as a deity of our choice on the altar.

According to Vaishnava tradition of Chaitanya, *bhakti* moves through two phases. First it is *vaidhi* *bhakti*. This means that it is practiced according to the rules, for example, doing *puja* with the *mala* (rosary) of 108 beads for 16 rounds, to focus your mind. This *bhakti* is not the goal in itself but a means to the goal. In the second phase, *vaidhi bhakti* progresses to *raganuga bhakti*, which means *bhakti* in which you follow your passion rather than the rules. You are free to pursue *bhakti* in whatever way your heart desires. And in this Vaishnava tradition, it is the *raganuga bhakti* that describes *Gopis'* love for Lord Krishna. They did not follow the rules; they followed their passion.

What the above discussion so clearly demonstrates is the fact that in the Hindu tradition no one position is right or wrong; there are no dogmas. Different people have different needs and *bhakti* can be practiced in many ways.

Sutra 24: *Nastyeva tasmin tat-sukha-sukhitoam*

Translation: Indeed in that there is no happiness in the happiness of other.

Commentary: Supporting the position that *Gopis'* love was no ordinary romantic love, Narada says that in ordinary love, something is missing. What is missing is happiness derived from the happiness of their beloved, i.e., happiness from pleasing another or having that concern for the beloved. *Gopis* could not possibly have that love. Many a verses in *Bhagavatam* reveal *Gopis'* dedication and selflessness. Even Chaitanya's interpretation of *Gopis'* "romantic love" does not attribute any selfishness in their love.

In respect of selfishness in love, we recognize that our love for *Bhagavan* starts off as love with selfishness, but then as we grow, our relationship and love for God must undergo a process of maturation and not be based on "O! God! Give me this, give me that!"

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