

Narada Bhakti Sutra
A summary of Swami Tadatmananda's Discourse
November 21, 2006

With the next sutra, we begin chapter 2 of the five chapters in the Narada Bhakti Sutra text. The transition between chapter 1 and 2 is a bit arbitrary, because it is the continuation of the same subject, i.e., *para-bhakti* is the goal one reaches after pursuing *bhakti* as the *sadhana* (practice). The practice of *bhakti* starts with being separate from the Lord, and when the goal (*para bhakti*) is reached, there is utterly no such separation; this stage then is no different from the non-duality recognized in Vedanta as the goal.

Sutra: 25: *Saa tu karmajnana-yogebhyo'pyadhikataraa*

Translation: But, that (*para-bhakti*) is superior to karma, *jnana*, and yoga.

Commentary: Karma implies karma yoga, which involves doing actions, *jnana* is the pursuit of knowledge with our intellect, and yoga refers to meditation by focusing the mind; thus these activities all involve doing or practicing something. *Bhakti* also starts out as a practice. They are all important means to reach a goal. But Narada holds that *para-bhakti* is better than all the means-because it is the goal!

Sutra 26: *Phalarupatvaat*

Translation: (*para-bhakti*) is the form of the fruit (result).

Commentary: Karma yoga is a practice that leads to the goal of enlightenment. Knowledge is the path of self-inquiry to understand the reality of God, you, and the universe; goal of this path is also the same enlightenment. Similarly, meditation is the practice to focus our mind to discover the divinity within and to gain enlightenment. *Bhakti*, as a spiritual practice has also the same goal. *Para-bhakti* is the result or the fruit of all these spiritual practices. *Para-bhakti* is not something you can practice, much the same way as you cannot practice enlightenment.

We need to bear in mind that the goal we are trying to reach is an infinite goal; to be attained by effort alone, an infinite goal will require infinite effort, which is not possible. Fortunately, the truth is that you really don't need to "reach" that goal, because you are already there; rishis said : "*tat tvam asi*", meaning "you are that". God of the universe that we hope to reach is already here now as the divinity within you. Karma yoga, *jnana*, meditation and *bhakti* are the various means to remove the obstacle, viz., ignorance, and to discover the divinity within.

Sutra 27: *Ishwarasyaapyabhimaana (ni)dveshitvaat dainyapriyatvaat cha*

Translation: *Ishwara* dislikes egoism and likes humility.

Commentary: This sutra has two very different interpretations.

First interpretation: *Ishwara* has a dislike for possession of ego by us; and he likes humility in us. What separates lovers is the individuality and the sense of I-ness that inhibits intimacy. To come together they need to drop their ego. In the practice of *bhakti*, pride and ego are going to interfere in attaining the intimacy with the Lord; meekness and humility are what allows one to come close to God. As long as one recognizes oneself as an individual (ego), one creates a separation.

Second interpretation: The Lord of the cosmos does not have any likes or dislikes. For reaching God, one needs to get rid of the ego and cultivate humility. Ego or *ahamkara*, literally meaning "I-maker" in Sanskrit, is a mental event that masquerades as a thought, which says, "I am a conscious being". We need to remove the mask of the ego; the mask which is ignorance. Remember, less of "me" (ego) means more of Him, and none of "me" means only Him.

Sutra 28: *Tasyaaha jnanam-eva saadhanamityeke*

Translation: For that (goal) some think that knowledge alone is the means.

Commentary: Some people, such as a *Vedantin* like Shankaracharya, think that knowledge alone is the means to reach the ultimate goal of enlightenment. In their view, if the problem is ignorance and non-recognition, then knowledge has to be the solution to remove that ignorance.

Sutra 29: *Anyonya aashrayatvam ityanye*

Translation: Others believe that (there is) mutual dependence

Commentary: Other people think that you need all of the practices and that these practices are mutually dependent; nothing need be excluded. There is no one single practice that is the best. To cook rice, you need all three of these: fire, pot and water; fire is the primary means but without the secondary means of a pot and water you cannot cook rice. Same way, knowledge is the primary means to remove ignorance but you also need secondary means like karma yoga, *bhakti*, and meditation. This is what is referred to as mutual dependence in the sutra.

Sutra 30: *Swayam phalarupateti Brahamakumaraha*

Translation: According to the son of Brahma, (*bhakti*) is in the form of the fruit.

Commentary: Narada, referring to himself as Brahma's son, asserts that *para bhakti* is the goal, and others are means (*sadhanas*) to reach the goal. These means are like a boat, which is simply a way to reach the opposite bank (the goal) and to serve that purpose.

Sutra 31: *Raja-griha-bhojana-aadishu tathaiva drishtatvaat*

Translation: Just as can be seen in the case of a king's home and a meal.

Commentary: Narada gives two examples; one of a king (in a palace) and another of a meal, to make his point that knowledge alone is not enough

Sutra 32: *Tena rajaa paritoshaha kshudhaashaachchhanitarva*

Translation: By that (knowledge) there is no satisfaction derived from the king nor any appeasement of hunger (from that meal).

Commentary: Mere knowledge of the king of your land, and where he lives, will not help you win any favors from the king; nor will the knowledge of a fine meal satiate any one's hunger. Same way, knowledge of God alone is not helpful.

Sutra 33: *Tasmaat saiva graahyaa mumukshubhihi*

Translation: That alone is to be sought by seekers of *moksha* (liberation).

Commentary: Narada concludes by emphasizing that *para bhakti* is the only goal of a spiritual seeker who is seeking *moksha*; and *moksha* is complete freedom from any sense of separation and gaining utter non-separation. In reality we already are non-separate. We have to remove what creates an illusion of separation, which happens when one reaches that goal.
