

Narada Bhakti Sutra
A summary of Swami Tadatmananda's Discourse
December 12, 2006

Sutra 46: *Kastarati kastarati mayaam? Yaha sangam tyajati, yo mahaanubhaavam sevate, nirmamo bhavati*

Translation: Who crosses, who crosses the *maayaa*? He who gives up attachment, he who resorts to a great soul, becomes free from the sense of "mine-ness" (sense of possession).

Commentary: The one who crosses *maayaa* refers to the one who gets freedom from the struggle of life and suffering. This sutra then describes the three steps necessary to attain that goal. These three steps in fact include all that is necessary to reach that goal, and if fully understood, cover all of the teaching necessary for one's spiritual journey.

First, one needs to give up attachment. It's quite obvious that if one is attached to worldly objects, one will have little value for spiritual growth. Throughout the course of one's life and various stages of life one develops attachments to worldly objects. The objects of attachment continually change with time as one grows. Whatever we do in life, whatever it is that we are attached to, reflects our values. A child has value for parents and as he grows his attachment continually shifts from parents to friends, to profession, to one's own family, etc. What was of value yesterday is no longer valuable today. Sage Narada tells us that we must give up these attachments.

But how is one to give up the attachments? It's not helpful to be simply being told "give up your attachments". The answer is, you give up attachments to worldly objects by cultivating a value for spiritual growth. It's the same principle as giving up attachment to childhood toys and developing attachments to new "toys" for grown-ups. Otherwise, giving up attachment is not possible because it means giving up desires and that is not under one's willful control. One cannot stand in the cold waters of Ganges, take the vows of *sanyaasa* and expect that desires will melt away. Giving up desires requires a shift from one set of values to another. There is an interesting metaphor in one of Shankara Acharya's text to illustrate this point. When a worm on a blade of grass wants to give up that blade and move on to the next one, it does not jump from one to the other-it cannot. Instead it crawls up to the tip of the blade causing it to bend over and come in contact with the next blade; and then it crawls over to that blade. Similarly, one makes a shift from worldly activities to spiritual activities. Attachment to spiritual growth helps you give up worldly attachments.

The second step as described in the sutra is to resort to a great person, a person of wisdom. It means to get help from a guru who can guide you. If one asks, "Is it possible to become enlightened on my own?" The answer is perhaps yes. But one needs to be practical and not be maniacal about toughing it out on one's own. If a car mechanic can fix your car's problem, let him do it. Sure, you can fix it yourself if you teach yourself enough auto mechanics, but is that really necessary? Learning from one's own mistakes is all right, but we can learn from others' mistakes as well. After all one who makes the most mistakes is not the one who is the most learned!

The third step in the sutra, *nirmama*, is gaining freedom from the sense of possession. You possess an awful lot of things in your life that fill you with a sense of "my-ness"-my car, my house, my family, etc, etc. To gain that *nirmama*, even if you give up all such possessions you still will be left with "my-ness". Because, you are still left with "my body", "my mind", "my intellect". Every thing you possess is a source of pleasure, and at the same time, a source of suffering. A nice house is normally a pleasure, but a pain when the gas furnace breaks down one day in winter. Same goes for your body and mind. You cannot divest yourself of all the possessions. The only way to do is to destroy that sense of "I"! And that is what distinguishes an enlightened person; sure, he will say outwardly, my car, my family, etc. but he has given up the sense of I called *ahamkara* in Sanskrit, meaning literally "I-maker". That "I" is "false I"; it is the one that is the doer, exercises free will, and creates a sense of individuality.

The "real I" is *sat-chit-ananda atma*. The one that is uncreated, limitless, and that by which all mental events (thoughts, perceptions, emotions) are known. But, normally we identify ourselves with the "false I"; the "false I" that gives the illusion of I am the body, I am the mind and I am the doer. Body, mind and the sense of doership all belong to you just as a car belongs to you. The "false I" is due to the power of *maayaa*, which covers up the knowledge of our true nature and superimposes false identity on what we are not.

It is interesting to see how this sutra covers the whole spiritual journey in three steps:

1. *Sangam tyajati* Free yourself from attachment to worldly objects by developing a value for spiritual growth.
2. *Mahaanubhaavam sevate*: Seek guidance from a spiritual teacher.
3. *Nirmamo bhavati*: Destroy the sense of "my-ness", i.e., "false I"

Thus, the first step is to start the journey; second, the journey itself and the third, reaching the goal by destroying the "false I". The last step i.e., destroying the *ahamkara* (ego), is the true surrender that was mentioned earlier in the text to reach the goal of *para-bhakti*.

It is worth comparing the corresponding goals of bhakti, *advaita* Vedanta and yoga *darshana* of sage Patanjali and to realize that all three pursuits lead to the same goal.

Pursuit	Sadhana	Sadhya
<i>Advaita</i> Vedanta	<i>Jnana</i> (knowledge)	<i>Ahamkara naasha</i> (Get rid of ego)
Yoga <i>Darshana</i>	Meditation to attain Samadhi (<i>para-vairaagya</i>)	<i>Kaivalya</i>
<i>Bhakti</i>	<i>Anuraaga</i> (love)	<i>Para bhakti</i>

According to Vedanta, the problem is ignorance, which causes suffering. Ignorance is non-recognition of the true self, which is limitless, lacks nothing and is utterly free from suffering. Therefore, if the problem is ignorance, the only solution is knowledge. It's not that vedantic knowledge (*brahma vidya*) allows you to gain anything; it lets you get rid of ignorance. You already are what you want to become; there is nothing to be gained as such.

Attaining the state of *para-vairaagya* through the pursuit of yoga is attaining that level of *samadhi* where you not only have dispassion to your body and mind but also the dispassion for the "false I" that was explained above. Here the goal is *kaivalya*, which means the condition of being "only"; there is only the true you and nothing else. True you is *sat-chit-ananda atma*.

In *bhakti*, love is the *sadhana* (means) to attain the goal of *para-bhakti*. Psychologically speaking, love between two people is when the boundaries of their individual egos become fuzzy; they feel merged in each other. When the same sense of merging of the ego happens in relation to God through *bhakti*, you feel intimately related to the God of the cosmos. When this love is cultivated over time, the boundaries between you and God get more and more fuzzy until finally they are not distinguishable and you are utterly non-separate from God. At that stage there can be no "false I"! And that is what defines the surrender that leads to *para-bhakti*. "False I" makes you feel separate and surrender of that "I" reveals what is already there, i.e., utter non-separation! *Bhakti marga* is a narrow path. To the extent the "false I" is absent from that path to that extent *Bhagavan* is there!

It is clear that the final stage one reaches through these three sadhanas is the same. All of them talk about destroying “false I”, referred to as *ahamkara naasha* in Vedanta, *kaivalya* in yoga *darshana*, and *prapatti* (surrender) in *bhakti*.

The next couple of sutras are self-commentary on sutra 46.

Sutra 47: *Yo vivikta-sthaanam sevate, yo lokabandham unmulayati nistraigunyo bhavati, yogakshemam tyajati*

Translation: One who resorts to a lonely and a quiet place, roots out his attachment and gains freedom from the three *gunas*, and gives up acquiring and preserving.

Commentary: This and the next two sutras enumerate the prerequisites of an aspirant of spiritual growth.

- An aspirant is one who seeks a quiet place all by himself for contemplation. A quiet place does not have to be a cave in the Himalayan Mountains; it can be a *puja* room at home or a temple hall. Quietude is a state of mind.
- Next, the aspirant must root out his attachment to worldly activities. Rooting out the attachment is like pulling the weeds out by their roots to stop them from growing back. Attachments can be similarly rooted out only by getting rid of the root cause, that “false I”.
- Another prerequisite is freedom from the three qualities of body and mind, namely. *tamas*, *rajas* and *sattva*. And that freedom comes with the recognition that I am not the body and the mind.
- The aspirant needs to give up collecting and preserving worldly objects.

Sutra 48: *Yaha karmaphalam tyajati, karmaani sannasyati, tato nirdvindo bhavati*

Translation: One who gives up fruits of actions, one who renounces actions and thereby becomes free from pairs.

Commentary: Continuing with the qualities of an aspirant, they are:

- One who gives up karma *phala* (fruits of actions) that result from desire prompted actions.
- One who gives up the vedic rituals meant for attaining worldly goals.

The infinite goal of spiritual growth (*moksha*) cannot be attained through finite number of *karma* and their *phala*. But we can do finite karma to remove the finite ignorance, which will enable us to see the true self that we already are.

Having done so, you thereby become free from *dvandva* (pair) of likes and dislikes.

Sutra 49: *Vedaanapi sannyasyati; kevalam-avichhinna-anuraagam labhate.*

Translation: Who gives up even the Vedas; attains the only unbroken love.

Commentary: The Vedas here imply the major portion of the Vedas that deal with rituals (*karma kaanda*). A minor portion of Vedas is the *upanishads* that deal with *advaita* philosophy, commonly referred to as Vedanta.

- The final prerequisite is giving up rituals for the sake of worldly goals.

The second part of the sutra will continue in the next lecture

Question-Answer Session

Q: In the last lecture, birth as a human being was recognized as one the three rare privileges. Given the present circumstances when so many people are responsible for causing so much suffering in the world (killing for pleasure, mass killings as in Iraq, etc.) how can we see human birth as a privilege? Secondly, what can we do about it?

A: Consider that animals are generally harmless but will attack when they feel threatened. People, who engage in mindless acts of killing innocent people and commit various atrocities, must also feel threatened-threatened about the loss of their culture, religion, their life-style and their values; all what they consider sacred. Their ruthless behavior cannot be condoned but it can be understood- humans are animals and may behave like them when cornered.

What can we do? We can set an example by behaving responsibly; by developing sensitivity to others: to humans and animals alike, as well as to environment, causing the least possible harm. We can be more understanding and compassionate towards others. Our own goodness can become contagious. That way, we can at least make our corner of the world a better place to live in.
