

Reflections on bhakti-tattva



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1. Our situation (sambandha-tattva)

Everyone is looking for love. Everyone is looking for peace. Everyone is looking for happiness. But we only get glimpses of these basic human necessities.

Why? Because this world is not our real home.

We are actually spiritual beings, living in a material world.

We are like a fish thrown out of the water.

Since thousands of years, mankind always asked one very important question.

“Who am I?”

Am I this body? Am I German? Am I American? Am I a man? Am I a professor? Am I rich? All these answers can be changed any moment.

All these answers are based on a temporary nature.

When we come to the point of asking that there must be more to this, then actually spiritual life begins.

Who am I? What is my duty? Where do I come from? Where will I go?

The Vedic literature deals exactly with all these questions.

In fact they state that if we do NOT ask these questions, our human life is wasted.

So, who am I?

I am NOT this body. I am NOT my thoughts. I am NOT my profession. I am NOT my gender. I am a spiritual being. I am a spiritual soul. I HAVE a body, but I AM a soul. So, what is the nature of this “soul”?

Who am I truly?

The Vedic literature, called the Vedas, tell us that we are parts and parcels of a Supreme Being.

This Supreme Being has many names of which Krishna reigns supreme.

We are His parts like the rays are parts of the sun, like sparks are parts of a fire.

We are simultaneously one with God (Krishna) and different from Him.

We are one in QUALITY in that we are, like Him, ETERNAL.

We are different from Him in that we are parts and He is the Whole.

So we are all thirsty to feel happiness. To make experiences which go beyond this daily bodily “affairs”. We want feel happy constantly, all the time, not just for some short moments of time which we hanker after when they passed.

We want to live in the present, but we are more concerned with the past and the future.

Secretly we know that actually real happiness must come from within. We know that this material happiness is certainly fine to a point, but we long for everlasting love, everlasting bliss.

When we truly start out to inquire about who we really are, we begin our journey of self-realization.

The knowledge about knowing who we are and what our relationship to Krishna is, the Vedas call “sambandha-jnana”. Sambandha-tattva is the knowledge of the relationships between Krishna, the soul(s), and the material world.

All souls (jivas) are eternally connected with Krishna, Who is the true object of all relations.

The eternal relationship between Krishna and all jivas is the relationship of a loving servant. By bhakti-yoga the souls can be freed from illusion and they can awaken in their heart their loving attachment to Krishna.

In the Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition, **Srila Sanatana Goswami** is considered to be the acharya (great teacher) of sambandha-tattva.

When he met Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, he humbly asked the Lord the most important questions

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a human being can ask. In the Caitanya Caritamrita of Sripad Krishna das Kaviraja Goswami we can read about this beautiful encounter. Srila Sanatana Goswami asked this question for the benefit of all souls and afterwards, Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu instructs him on this very important topic.

‘ke ami’, ‘kene amaya jare tapa-traya’ iha nahi jani
‘kemanee hita haya’
- CC Madhya-lila 20.102

“Who am I? Why do the threefold miseries always give me trouble?”

So Mahaprabhu told Sripad Sanatana Goswami:

jivera ‘svarupa’ haya - krishnera ‘nitya-dasa’
krishnera ‘tatastha sakti’ ‘bhedabheda-prakasa’
- CC Madhya-lila, 20.108

“The jiva’s constitutional nature is to be an eternal servant of Sri Krishna. The jiva is the marginal potency of Krishna and a manifestation simultaneously one with and different from the Lord.”

As long as we are in harmony with our nature, as long as we are conscious of our spiritual nature, we can live a happy life, even in this material world.

As long as we always recognize our true purpose, to live in harmony as a servant of the Supreme Being, Sri Krishna, we will reach the goal of life.

Love is the way, love is the answer. Everything we do should be done in and with love.
This love should be directed to Sri Sri Radha Krishna and to all the creation, living and non-living.
Suffering only comes from misbehaving. We think we are the enjoyer and we think we are the controller.

mamaivamso jiva-loke jiva-bhutah sanatanah
manah-shashthanindriyani prakriti-sthani karshati
- Sri Krishna to Arjuna in the Bhagavad-Gita, ch. 15.7

“O Arjuna! I am ‘Sarvesvara (the Lord of all)’. All jivas are My parts and they are all eternal. Due to being conditioned and opposed to Me, they are struggling intensely with the mind and the senses in this material world.”

Krishna has three energies:

- **Cit-sakti:** This is His inner energy. His Own spiritual world pure cit-sakti. This cit-sakti again consists of three energies:
 1. Sandhini-sakti = eternal existence (I am)
 2. Samvit-sakti = eternal knowledge (I know)
 3. Hladini-sakti = eternal happiness (I am happy)
- **Bahiranga-sakti:** This is His “outer” energy. The material world is made of this energy.
- **Tatastha-sakti:** The energy “inbetween” the spiritual and the material world.

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We as living entities belong to Krishna's tatastha-sakti.

cit-kana - jiva, krishna - cinmaya bhaskara
nitya krishne dekhi - krishne karena adara
- Prema-vivarta 6.1

“The jiva (the spiritual soul) is an infinitesimal particle of spiritual consciousness, like an atomic particle of light emanating from the sun. Sri Krishna is the complete spiritual consciousness, the transcendental sun. When the jivas focus their attention on Krishna, they go to Him.”

Naturally, the parts serve the Whole. The car will never move when the wheels do not obey. So naturally, the spiritual soul should serve the Supreme Soul. The spiritual soul is said to be like a tiny spiritual “drop of consciousness” (cit-kana). So like mentioned above, the drop of consciousness is belonging to the tatastha-sakti of Krishna. We are, so to speak, inbetween worlds...

As a jiva-soul, our symptom of life is consciousness. When the soul leaves a body, the consciousness is gone. Every soul is unique. Every soul has a unique consciousness and a unique relationship with the Supreme Soul, Krishna. But since we are a tiny drop of consciousness inbetween two worlds, we are prone to be attracted by one of them. Since time immemorial, we have turned away from our real nature and from our real Source. We are no longer inbetween the worlds, we are now fully sworn to our false nature. 'Through the so-called false ego, this drop of consciousness chose to identify itself with matter.' So we think we are this body with this name, home, profession, relatives, etc. But this drop of spiritual consciousness is not forever lost. When the living entity starts turning toward God, Krishna, self-realization is about to begin.

So, we already know what our dilemma is: We don't belong here. We don't want to die. We don't want to suffer. We want to be happy. Our real nature is the same as the nature of Krishna. Krishna is sat-cit-ananda. We as parts of him share this nature to our most possible extent. He is eternal, we are eternal. He is forever blissful, we want to be forever blissful. He is forever in knowledge, we want to be forever knowledgeable. But we encounter obstacle after obstacle in this world, thanks to our false ego. By freeing ourselves from this false ego and by becoming conscious of our eternal self we can reach this wonderful goal.

Now there are two different kinds of jiva-souls.

sei vibhinnamsa jiva-dui ta' prakara
eka-'nitya-mukta', eka-'nitya-samsara'
- CC Mad 22.1

“The jivas are divided into two categories. One is situated in eternal freedom in the spiritual world, the other is situated in material bondage within the samsara cycle of birth and death.”

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Jiva Gosvami defines this even further:

tad evam ananta eva jivakhyas tatastah saktayah tatra tasam varga-dvayam
eko vargo' nadita eva bhagavad-unmukhah anyas tv anadita eva bhagavatparanmukhah
svabhavaatas tadiya-jnana-bhavaat tadiya-jnanabhavaat ca
- Paramatma Sandarbha 47

“The number of jivas is unlimited. They are divided into two classes. One class is favourable to the Lord from a time without beginning. The other class is averse to the Lord from a time without beginning. The first class is favourable to the Lord because of knowledge of relationship with the Lord. The second class is averse to the Lord because of lack of that knowledge.”

So there are now those who are eternally liberated and always together with Krishna and there are those who are since eternal time conditioned by material nature.

If we can't accept this fact and if we find this “unfair” and if we see this as our misfortune, it is due to our wrong perspective.

It is not “unfair”. It is the sweet will of Krishna. Everything is for His pleasure. There is no “fair” and “unfair”.

These conceptions arise from our mind, in love with our false ego.

Krishna is lila-maya. He is the Lord of “plays”, lilas. He can do whatever He likes.

It is His lila to get what He doesn't have: our love.

By our free will, we can turn away from Krishna, but by turning towards Him, we can make Him so happy. He is thirsty for this love. It must be pure and unconditional.

By performing love-in-action, we can direct all our love from our soul to Him.

Also we should understand that these “ever-free” souls are very helpful for us.

They are our “role-models”. We will later on come back to those “role-models”.

We can approach Krishna with different attitudes. We can approach Him in a very respectful mood in awe and reverence (aishvarya) or we can approach Him in a very sweet and loving way (madhurya).

We are very lucky conditioned souls, because just recently, Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu came to bestow upon us the sweetest and loving mood, the mood of the gopis of Vrindavana.

Srila Sanatana Goswami brilliantly elaborates on this “sambandha-tattva” in his fantastic masterpiece “**Sri Brihad Bhagavatamrita**”.

Everyone should read this book and learn about the journeys of the main characters Narada Muni and Gopa Kumara and thereby learn about the different relationships (sambandha-tattva).

Narada Muni was looking for the devotee who has the greatest love for Krishna and the respected reader learns about the different relationships pure devotees have with Krishna, finally coming to Uddhava who speaks about the highest love for Krishna which Uddhava found in the heart of the gopis of Vrindavana.

Gopa Kumara received mantra-initiation from an inhabitant of Vraja and starts to travel through all spheres of consciousness, through the heavenly planets, Brahma's realm, Shiva's planet, Vaikuntha and finally finding his beloved destination, Goloka Vrindavana.

There he realizes that the inhabitants of Goloka Vrindavana have the most wonderful relationship with Krishna, a relationship full of the purest and selfless love.

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By following them, we can develop the same love they have for the Divine Couple.
By following them, we can achieve perfection.

When we read about the pastimes of Sri Sri Radha and Krishna, our hearts will fill up with the desire to always be with them. The jiva-soul can achieve this marvellous goal.
This is the most wonderful gift of Caitanya Mahaprabhu. By His mercy, the jiva-souls can experience a love so pure and blissful, that only Srimati Radharani can surpass in quantity and quality.

anarpita-carim cirat karunayavatirnah kalau
samarpayitum unnatojjvala-rasam sva-bhakti-sriyam
harī purata-sundara-dyuti-kadamba-sandipitah
sada hridaya-kandare sphuratu vah saci-nandanah

“May the Supreme Lord, who is known as the son of Srimati Saci-devi be transcendently situated
in the innermost chambers of your heart. Resplendent with the radiance of molten gold,
He has appeared in the Age of Kali by His causeless mercy to bestow what no incarnation has ever offered before:
the most sublime and radiant mellow of devotional service, the mellow of conjugal love.”

This most divine gift is so extraordinary and rare, but openly accessible at the same time.
To find a teacher, a true Gurudeva, who can impart this marvellous gift into our hearts is the beginning of this beautiful transformation of this “drop of consciousness”.
A marriage between tatastha-sakti and both hladini- and samvit-sakti (bhakti) takes place and the jiva-soul is on its way to eternal freedom in pure love of Godhead.

2. The “way out” - bhakti yoga (abhidheya-tattva)

Like mentioned before, Srila Sanatana Goswami asked this question for the welfare of all souls and afterwards, Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu instructs him on this very important topic.

“Who am I? Why do the threefold miseries always give me trouble?”

If I do not know this, how can I be benefited?

Everybody should understand who we really are. We all have forgotten our relationship with God. That is our greatest mistake. It is our duty to realize our true selves. To do this, we need to know about our relationship which we have with Krishna.

It is all about relationship. A son is related to his father, a mother is related to her daughter. Without relationship there can be no love. When we know our relationship with Krishna, we can truly start to love Him.

We are here in this world to practice this through LOVE IN ACTION.

All our relationships here in this world help us to be fixed in our eternal relationship with Sri Sri Radha Krishna. We can start with loving relationships right here in this world, in our daily life, because Krishna dwells in every living entity.

Unfortunately, the living entity has forgotten his relationship with Krishna:

krishna bhuli’ sei jiva anadi-bahirmukha
ataeva maya tare deya samsara-duhkha
- CC Madhya 20.117

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“Forgetting Krishna, the living entity has been attracted by the external feature from time immemorial. Therefore the illusory energy gives him all kinds of misery in his material existence.”

Although we are here in this material world since beginningless time, by the mercy of Krishna, the living entity, the soul, can experience five different kinds of relationships with Him.

- 1) Neutral relationship (santa-rasa)
- 2) Servitude relationship (dasya-rasa)
- 3) Friendly relationship (sakhya-rasa)
- 4) Parental relationship (vatsalya-rasa)
- 5) Amorous relationship (madhurya-rasa)

When by the grace of Krishna we encounter holy people (sadhus) and when they teach us the answers to all our questions, we can start **PRACTICING** spiritual life. This is called **bhakti-yoga**, serving Krishna with love and devotion.

What is bhakti?

When Rishis such as Sanaka Muni asked this question, the Gopal-Tapani Shruti answered – “bhaktirasya bhajanam tadibham-utra-upadhi-nairasyena amusmin manah kalpanam- etad-eava hi naishkarmyam.”

Meaning -

"Bhakti means 'to serve Sri Bhagavan'. When we are free of all material desires and engage our mind and all the senses in serving Sri Bhagavan, we call it 'bhajan' and this bhajan alone is 'naishkarmya'."

These words of the Shruti prove that bhajan and naishkarmya are synonymous. It expresses the truth that when we begin bhajan all our material desires are destroyed and our heart becomes immaculate. We simply get drowned in relishing the seva-ras of Sri Bhagavan.

The Tapani Shruti has defined bhakti and how bhakti subjugates Sri Krishna.

It says – “vigyanaghana anandaghana sachchidanandaika-rase bhakti-yoge tisbhati.”

Meaning -

"Sri Krishna is intense special knowledge personified. He is revealed through bhakti-yoga that is eternal, conscious and blissful rasa."

From the above statement we learn three things –

- What is bhakti – it is eternal, conscious and blissful rasa
- What does bhakti do – it reveals Sri Krishna, which means that He is under the control of bhakti
- Sri Bhagavan's original form – intense special knowledge

Sri Narada-Pancha-Ratra says –

“surarshe vibhita shastre harim-uddishya ya kriya, saiva bhaktir-iti prokta taya bhakti para bhavet.”

Meaning -

"Bhakti comprises all the activities we perform to serve Sri Krishna. By performing these activities we gain supreme bhakti called prem."

Here, 'all the activities we perform to serve Sri Krishna' means the actions that please Him such as, hearing, glorifying etc. Bhakti' originates from the root word 'bhaj'.

- bhaj ityesha vai dhatuh sevayam parikirtitah-

Meaning -

"The root word 'bhaj' means 'seva'." – (Garuda Purana)

However we should note that, if we perform bhajan with any desire other than pleasing Sri Bhagavan, we shall not gain eternal love.

(Srila Ananta das Babaji – Bhakti tattva vijñana)

In the Srimad Bhagavatam we find the following verse:

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sa vai pumsām paro dharmo
yato bhaktir adhokṣaje
ahaituky apratihātā
yayātmā suprasīdati

The supreme occupation (dharma) for all humanity is that by which men can attain to loving devotional service unto the transcendent Lord. Such devotional service must be unmotivated and uninterrupted to completely satisfy the self.

Sri Prahlada Maharaja informs us:

śravaṇam kīrtanam viṣṇoḥ
smaraṇam pāda-sevanam
arcanam vandanam dāsyam
sakhyam ātma-nivedanam
iti pumsārpitā viṣṇau
bhaktiś cen nava-lakṣaṇā
kriyeta bhagavaty addhā
tan manye 'dhītam uttamam

“Hearing and chanting about the transcendental holy name, form, qualities, paraphernalia and pastimes of Lord Viṣṇu, remembering them, serving the lotus feet of the Lord, offering the Lord respectful worship with sixteen types of paraphernalia, offering prayers to the Lord, becoming His servant, considering the Lord one's best friend, and surrendering everything unto Him (in other words, serving Him with the body, mind and words) — these nine processes are accepted as pure devotional service. One who has dedicated his life to the service of Kṛṣṇa through these nine methods should be understood to be the most learned person, for he has acquired complete knowledge.”

- Srimad Bhagavatam (7.5.23-24)

So here we find nine processes – nine items on the “to-do-list”.

This “what-we-have-to-do” is called “abhidheya-jnana”. The knowledge of “abhidheya” helps us to come “out” of our bodily conception of life.

We all identify with our material bodies and therefore we suffer.

Sri Caitanya Mahāprabhu instructed **Srila Rupa Goswami** to write books about and elaborate on the subject of “abhidheya-tattva”, the knowledge of the way to achieve our goal, prema-bhakti.

Our goal is to come out of our body-life and to start a loving relationship with Sri Sri Radha Krishna with all our heart and soul.

Sri Caitanya Mahāprabhu came to give us this highest love and to take us by the hand to lead us in this direction.

He did this through Srila Rupa Goswami.

Srila Sanātana Goswami told us about who we are and what our relationship to Sri Sri Radha Krishna is and now we can follow Srila Rupa Goswami and be on our path to pure love, prema-bhakti.

Srila Rupa Goswami surrendered wholeheartedly to this task and honestly, without him, we would not be able to know about our highest goal and more importantly HOW to achieve it. Without Srila Rupa Goswami, bhakti-yoga (LOVE IN ACTION) would not have been accessible for us living entities in such a wonderful and astonishing way. He wrote many books, but two works stand out:

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- **Bhakti-rasamrita-sindhu (The nectarocean of divine devotion)**
- **Sri Ujjvala nilamani (The splendid sapphire of the highest love)**

In Bhakti-rasamrita-sindhu, Srila Rupa Goswami writes about all there is to know in bhakti-yoga and how we can achieve our highest goal, pure love to Sri Sri Radha Krishna (prema-bhakti). When we read his words our spiritual lives are enriched by the knowledge about the definition of bhakti.

Srila Rupa Goswami lists in this masterpiece 64 items of bhakti-yoga. He starts the list with the most important items:

guru-padaashrayas tasmāt
krishna-dikshadi-shikshanam
vishrambhena guroh seva
sadhu vartanuvartamanam
- Bhakti-rasamrita-sindhu (1.2.74)

"Accepting the shelter of the lotus feet of a bona fide spiritual master, becoming initiated by the spiritual master and learning how to discharge devotional service from him, obeying the orders of the spiritual master with faith and devotion, and following in the footsteps of great acaryas [teachers] under the direction of the spiritual master".

Now, this bhakti is a very mysterious energy.

It is a combination of two energies of Krishna.

Bhakti is "made of" samvit-sakti (knowledge/realization) and hladini-sakti (bliss).

Ultimately bhakti rests in the heart of the personification of Krishna's innermost energy, Srimati Radharani.

This bhakti is not originally in the "heart" of the living entity. Bhakti is "originating" from Krishna's innermost energy and the spiritual soul is from the marginal energy. So by definition, bhakti cannot be "already" in the heart of the spiritual soul.

BUT: The spiritual soul has the "potency" to love. We can love through our false ego and we can love through our real ego, the drop of spiritual consciousness.

When this spiritual drop of consciousness (the spiritual soul) comes into contact with the bhakti-energy, the soul will be on the path to realize where it really belongs to.

Bhakti can only be received from someone who has already received bhakti. It is said that bhakti flows down from the spiritual world (Krishna's inner energy) to the material realm through the riverbed of an unbroken Guru-parampara.

Now Guru-tattva comes into play.

When the devotee finds his or her Gurudeva and the devotee matures more and more and his/her inner bhajan becomes more and more intense and the heart purer and purer, then the "ability" to "pass on" this pure bhakti awakens in him/her and so he/she too can give this loving energy to his/her students/disciples.

brahmanda bhramite kona bhagyavan jiva
guru krsna prasade paya bhakti-lata-bija
- CC

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"By the causeless mercy of guru and Kṛṣṇa, the devotee can receive the seed of bhakti by the mercy of Gurudeva."

This means PLANTING the seed and it takes place at the moment of initiation.

divyam jñānam hy atra mantre bhagavat-svarūpa-jñānam,
tena bhagavatā sambandha-viśesa-jñānañ ca
- Bhakti-sandarbha, Anuccheda 283

"Divya-jñāna is transcendental knowledge contained within a mantra which reveals the form and identity of the Supreme Lord (bhagavat-svarūpa) as well as knowledge of the sādḥaka-jīva's particular relationship with the Lord."

dīksā-kāle bhakta kare ātma-samarpana
sei-kāle krishna tāre kare ātma-sama
sei deha kare tāra cid-ānanda maya
aprākṛita-dehe tanra carana bhajaya
- CC Antya-līla 4.192-3

"At the time of initiation, when a sādḥaka fully surrenders to Śrī Guru, Kṛṣṇa makes him like Himself. He transforms the devotee's body into a spiritual one; the sādḥaka then worships the Lord in that spiritualized body."

Here we see that at the time of initiation (diksha), the spiritual drop of consciousness, the atma, will start to transform "into a spiritual body".

Therefore the concept of an unbroken diksha-parampara, one Gurudeva after the other, is very much important. This will be analysed in a separate chapter later on.

So planting the seed is an activity, not a process.

Srila Gurudeva plants the seed of BHAKTI in our heart, so that the drop of spiritual consciousness will be able to IDENTIFY and finally REALIZE its eternal, Krishna-given form, which is already THERE, in the spiritual world.

This is the final goal which will be dealt with in the last chapter.

Everything happens only by the mercy of our beloved Gurudeva (Guru-kṛpā) and by our greed to reach that most wonderful goal.

yasya prasadaḥ bhagavat-prasado
yasya prasadaḥ na gatiḥ kuto 'pi
dhyāya stuvāṁsa tasya yashas trisandhyāḥ
vande guroḥ śrī-charanaravindam
- Śrī Gurvastakam

"By the mercy of the spiritual master one receives the benediction of Kṛṣṇa. Without the grace of the spiritual master, one cannot make any advancement. Therefore, I should always remember and praise the spiritual master. At least three times a day I should offer my respectful obeisances unto the lotus feet of my spiritual master."

Srila Rupa Goswami gives us a most wonderful definition of bhakti:

anyabhīlāsita-sūnyam
jñāna-karmādy-anavṛitam

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anukulyena krishnanu-
silanam bhaktir uttama

“One should render transcendental loving service to the Supreme Lord Kṛṣṇa favourably and without desire for material profit or gain through fruitive activities or philosophical speculation. That is called pure devotional service.”

In this verse Srila Rupa Goswami clearly says what actually pure bhakti means. Srila Jiva Goswami comments on this verse and he especially puts emphasis on the main characteristics which define pure bhakti:

- Anusilanam

“Anusilanam” means “continous, uninterrupted loving service”.

When we start our bhakti-life, we practice “sadhana-bhakti”. We do actions to serve Krishna. Out of love and out of free will we carefully observe regulations which bring us closer to the Lord.

These actions we do by body, mind and words. This kind of bhakti is called ceta-rupa-bhakti (performing all kinds of loving actions for Krishna). When our consciousness becomes more pure, we will experience wonderful emotions and feelings (moods) during our bhakti-life. We progress onwards to bhava-rupa-bhakti. What in the beginning have been actions in a kind of “mechanical” way now turn into loving service with deeply felt emotions (anubhavas). Srila Rupa Goswami adds the word Krishna to “anusilanam”.

So we then have the word “Krishnanusilanam”.

All our continous, loving service throughout the stages of bhakti should be directed to Krishna and His loved ones.

- Anukulyena

These loving actions should be performed with a behaviour FAVOURABLE to Krishna. We should please Him in a very friendly mood towards Him. This is called the MAIN CHARACTERISTIC of pure bhakti. We should do everything with a most loving attitude towards Krishna.

- Anyabhilasita-sunyam and jñana-karmady-anavṛtam

Our efforts to please Sri Krishna in a favourable and friendly mood should be free of other desires, dwelling in the back of our minds, than LOVE FOR GOD.

And our loving service should be free of the desire for knowledge about the impersonal form of God and free of the desire for knowledge about karma-yoga (like: How to do good things to enter the heavenly planets?).

We should only be concerned about the knowledge which helps us to love Krishna and about the actions which bring us nearer to Him. These are the SECONDARY CHARACTERISTICS. In this way, Srila Rupa Goswami’s famous verse about the definition of pure bhakti is explained by Srila Jiva Goswami.

Srila Rupa Goswami writes about mainly five extremely wonderful characteristics of bhakti-yoga. When we perform bhakti-yoga and when we progress on the path these unique characteristics will be experienced in our soul:

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- **Our suffering in this material world will come to an end.**

What kind of suffering will come to an end?

1. Reactions to our bad deeds (in this life or in previous lives)
2. The seed of these bad deeds (unwanted and extremely selfish, material ego-desires)
3. Our ignorance about our true self.

- **The path of bhakti will bring auspiciousness into our lives.**

Namely of four types:

1. Deep affection for all living beings
2. Being loved by all living beings
3. Possession of good qualities
4. Happiness on the platform of the soul

- **Disregard for liberation**

When we progress on our way in bhakti-yoga, the four goals of human life (pleasure, wealth, liberation, religious profit) will become completely insignificant because the real wealth is the fifth goal of human life: our goal, prema-bhakti.

- **Bhakti is rarely attained**

We should always try to perform bhakti-yoga with loving attachment to Sri Krishna. And we should always be conscious of our dependency on His mercy.

- **Concentrated bliss**

When we progress further and further in bhakti-yoga, we will go through the stages of firm steadiness (nistha) and we will reach the stages of affection and taste (ruci). From ruci we will develop extremely deep attraction to Sri Sri Radha Krishna (asakti), so much so that our true self will be bathed in the nectar of love at every further step and we will feel concentrated bliss.

There are different stages on the path of bhakti:

1. Sraddha

Sraddha, or faith, is the first step of the aspirant of bhakti on his or her journey.

Sraddha means to have firm faith in the revealed scriptures, which deal with the subject of bhakti.

Sraddha also means the joyful endeavour to very carefully and attentively follow the process of bhakti like it is documented in the scriptures. Sraddha can be caused by natural and spontaneous attraction or by forceful imposition of the written word. Sraddha of the spontaneous and natural kind is born in the association of sadhus. Forcefully imposed faith is caused by blindly following and imitating.

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2. Sadhu-Sanga:

‘Sanga’ means serving the sadhus, hearing Sri Krishna-katha from them, behaving as they behave, glorifying them – and be engrossed in serving them with body, speech and mind – this is sadhusanga.

Then amongst these sadhus we may meet someone whose shelter we sincerely;he becomes our Sri Gurudeva.

We should take diksha (mantra-initiation) and shiksha (spiritual advices)from him.

3. Bhajana-kriya:

Now we start hearing, glorifying, arcanam, vandandam etc.

Bhajan-kriya is of two types

1. - **not firm**
2. - **firm**

In the beginning stages our bhajan (worship) is not firm. We have to cross a few hurdles before our bhajan becomes firm. When a devotee who has sraddha takes initiation from a real Sri Gurudeva, and by his mercy starts bhajan, he is highly enthusiastic.

He is always eager to practice devotional actions. So we call this stage as **utsahamayi or ‘enthusiastic’**. However this state does not remain long.

Within a short time we find our eagerness webbing. We feel bored and our worship suffers a ‘low tide’. Sometimes our bhakti is intense and at other times it is slack. Therefore the wise call this state an **‘intense-slack’** period.

During this time we get many ideas, such as – I shall leave my family and practice bhakti in seclusion or I will practice bhakti as a householder or out of hearing, glorifying etc.

I will practice only one item of bhakti or I will practice all of them etc. etc. Therefore we also call this state as **vyudha-vikalpa or ‘alternate ideas’**. In this stage we have to literally fight with our materialistic tendencies.

Sometimes we win and at other times material desires get the better of us. Since this continues, we call it the **vishay-sangara or ‘material association’** state.

Devotional practice should force our material desires to wane and increase our love. However if it does not happen we should realize that it is because we are not following the advices of bhakti properly (as given by Srila Rupa Goswami).

Therefore we also call this state as **niyamakshama – ‘unable to follow rules’**. When we practice bhakti, sometimes people are drawn to us; then temptations such as monetary gain, power and position appear on our path. These are the parasitic creepers growing on the Bhaktikalpa-lata (bhakti is like a divine creeper that can fulfil all the wishes of a devotee).

Therefore it is our duty to sever them first and become steady in our loving service.

4. Anartha-nivritti:

Anartha-nivritti means „getting rid of bad qualities“.

When we are not firm in bhajan, our anarthas (unwanted material obstacles) force us to slip down the ladder of bhakti. Unwanted things are of four types –

1. Those arising from bad actions – these unfavourable things arise from past and recent bad activities.

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2. Those arising of pious actions – the pious activities we have performed in the past grant us a rich lifestyle. This absorbs us in sense-gratification and causes anarthas.
3. Those arising from aparadhas – Offenses against the Holy Name and against spiritual souls
4. Those arising from bhakti – When we advance in bhakti we may get money, fame and power. This gives rise to anarthas. Thus bhakti too can cause bad qualities if we are not careful.

What are the external symptoms that tell us we have got rid of all unwanted things?

When we lack the following –

1. **Laya** – we feel sleepy while chanting the Mahamantra, while hearing and while meditating.
2. **Vikshepa** – when we conduct worldly matters during hearing, glorifying etc. we call it ‘vikshepa’.
3. **Apratipatti** – even though we may lack laya and vikshepa, sometimes we do not feel like hearing or glorifying – this is ‘apratipatti’.
4. **Kashaya** – While doing bhakti such as hearing etc. if we get negative feelings such as anger, greed, pride – it is called ‘kashaya’.
5. **Rasaswada** – if we are unable to concentrate on hearing etc. because our mind is dwelling on material pleasures or attachments, it is called ‘rasaswada’.

5. Nistha:

This is the stage of firm bhajan. “How do we decide whether our bhajan is ‘not firm’ or ‘firm’?”

1. When we are lax in hearing, glorifying etc. we are not firm, and when we are strong in these activities we are ‘firm’.”
2. When we become devoid of the five symptoms of anarthas as mentioned above, then we can say we have become ‘firm in bhajan’ or we have gained ‘nishtha’.

6. Ruci:

When we relish the sweetness of Sri Krishna’s name, beauty, qualities, pastimes and associates we have reached the state of ‘ruci’.

7. Asakti:

“When our ruci (interest) in bhakti-actions becomes extremely intense and our thoughts keep roaming around Sri Krishna alone, then this stage is called ‘asakti’. The process of bhakti-yoga is like a gracious wish-fulfilling creeper on which asakti blooms like a cluster of buds that burst into the colorful flowers of bhava (asakti gives rise to bhava) that finally turns into prema (the fruit).” (Madhurya Kadambini, 6th shower)

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8. Bhava or rati:

We have glimpses into the Divine Play and we are filled with Divine Love. Srila Rupa Goswami describes nine symptoms of this stage –

1. We are not disturbed by anything.
2. No second we want to live without bhakti.
3. No interest in things not related to Krishna.
4. Free from the false ego.
5. Unshakable firm faith in the mercy of Krishna.
6. Great longing to be with Krishna.
7. Always eager to chant the Holy Name.
8. Always eager to glorify Krishna.
9. Extremely eager to live in Vrindavana.

9. Prema:

Pure love to the Divine Couple, Sri Sri Radha Krishna; this pure love has the power to conquer Their hearts. It is like gold molten a million times.

“If Srila Rupa Goswami had not appeared in Kali-yuga, who would have opened the great store-house of Vraja-prema and distributed its contents freely? Just as a swan separates milk from water, who else could have separated the rasas to taste them? Abandoning everything, he performed bhajana in Vrindavan and wrote his rasika literatures. He lived like a bee taking the nectar of lotuses. Who could have understood the nectar he was collecting? Who could have understood Krishna’s pastimes in Mathura and Vrindavan? How could we have known the sweet vraja-lilas and the love between Radha and Madhava (another name of Sri Krishna, meaning the husband or beloved of the supreme goddess of fortune)? By the mercy of his lotus feet, all can sing about and attain such divine bliss. The surrendered Madhava Das is always praying to embrace Sri Rupa’s glories.”

- (Yadi kali rupa sarira na dharata, by Madhava Das)

3. The concept of a line of teachers (guru-parampara)

Earlier it was mentioned -

“Bhakti can only be received from someone who has already received bhakti. It is said that bhakti flows down from the spiritual world (Krishna’s inner energy) to the material realm through the riverbed of an unbroken Guru-parampara.”

To receive the seed of bhakti, the bhakti-lata-bija, we need to be properly initiated in a lineage of Gurudevas who received their seed of bhakti from their Gurudevas.

Krishna again tells us in the Gita what we can do to speed up that process of inquiry:

tad viddhi pranipatena
pariprasnena sevaya
upadeksyanti te jnanam
jnaninas tattva-darsinah

“Just try to learn the truth by approaching a spiritual master. Inquire from him submissively and render service unto him. The self-realized soul can impart knowledge unto you because he has

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seen the truth.”

So a true spiritual master will impart this knowledge to us.

Inherent in the jiva is the potency to receive the ability to love Radha and Krishna in the highest way possible (by Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhus mercy).

Krishna loves nothing more than when we wake up and start to look for Him.

brahmanda bhramite kona bhagyavan jiva
guru-krishna-prasade paya bhakti-lata-bija

"According to their karma, all living entities are wandering throughout the entire universe. Some of them are being elevated to the upper planetary systems, and some are going down into the lower planetary systems. Out of many millions of wandering living entities, one who is very fortunate gets an opportunity to associate with a bona fide spiritual master by the grace of Krishna. By the mercy of both Krishna and the spiritual master, such a person receives the seed of the creeper of devotional service."

All is depending on our will to search for Krishna, but mostly on the mercy of Him.
By His mercy, we will find a true Gurudeva.

Like mentioned earlier, this bhakti-lata-bija, the seed of bhakti, is not in our hearts. The jiva only has the capacity to receive this seed.

So Srila Gurudeva is planting that seed in our heart.

How is he doing that?

This is arranged by the process of diksha-initiation by Sri Gurudeva, who received his own diksha-initiation from his Gurudeva, who received his own diksha-initiation from his Gurudeva and so on.

We will soon come to that very important "transaction of divine knowledge".

First it is important to know who a true Gurudeva is.

Krishna says: "a self-realized soul."

When the Guru-potency awakens within a saint he becomes known as a bona fide Guru. This Guru-potency awakens within a saint in the following way :

those who have removed the dirt from their hearts through their practice of sadhana- bhajana and in whose hearts bhakti has awakened and who have become ornamented by saintly qualities such as compassion and kindness - their hearts melt when they see the misery the conditioned souls go through in the material world of maya.

By instructing the conditioned souls in the practice of bhajana, they destroy their miserable condition and they are eager to bless them by giving them the relish of bhakti-rasa.

By the Lord's wish, the Guru-potency emanates from Him and appears within the hearts of such bhakti-siddha-mahapurushas (His pure devotees).

A person who covets devotion to the Supreme Lord is blessed by taking shelter of such a qualified and bona fide Guru. The characteristics of such a bona fide Guru have been described in Srimad Bhagavata (11.3.21) —

*tasmad gurum prapadyeta jijnasuh sreyah uttamam
sabde pare ca nishnatam brahmanyupasamasrayam*

"Therefore a person who inquires about the highest welfare should take shelter of the lotus feet of a bona fide Guru, who is sabda-brahma and para-brahma-nishnata and upasamasraya or free from lust and greed."

Sridhara Svami writes in his commentary on this verse:

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sabde brahmani vedakhye nyayato nishnatam tattvajnam. anyatha samsaya nirasakatvayogat. pare ca brahmani aparokshanubhavana nishnatam. anyatha bodha sancarayogat. para brahma nishnatatva dyotakam abha upasamasrayam iti

"That the bona fide Guru is sabda brahma nishnata means that he is a knower of the Vedic literature and a knower of the truth. If he is not, then he cannot remove the doubts of the disciples that take shelter of him. Then again he is para-brahma-nishnata, which means that He is a devotee, or that He is endowed with transcendental realisations about Sri Krishna. If he is not, then he cannot infuse realisations on bhajana within the heart of his disciple."

- (Srila Ananta das Babaji, Sri Guru-tattva-vijnana)

Here we learn a lot about how a highly elevated soul becomes Sri Gurudeva.

Such a true Gurudeva, in whose heart the light of pure bhakti shines, can give this pure bhakti to a disciple.

It is important to note that we also learn how bhakti comes to this world.

Bhakti only come from bhakti. This means: only someone who HAS bhakti in his heart can give bhakti to someone else.

According to the srutis, the self-satisfied Lord cannot be attracted by any material object, nor can one consider bhakti as the svarupananda, or the bliss existing in the eternal form of the Lord, as accepted by the non-personalists. The Lord enjoys the bliss derived from bhakti (bhaktyananda) more than the bliss arising from his own svarupa (svarupananda). Nor can one consider bhakti as the bliss existing in the eternal form of the jiva since the bliss of jivananda is extremely minute. It is thus unable to overwhelm the Lord.

The Vishnu Purana (1.12.69) says, "The three eternal energies, namely, hladini, sandhini and samvit exist in the svarupa of Bhagavan, the possessor of all energies. O Lord! Being completely free from the three modes of nature, the material modes namely, happiness (sattviki), misery (tamasi), and the mixture of both (rajasi) do not exist in Your svarupa." This text clearly suggests that bhakti is neither svarupananda nor jivananda.

The only bliss which thus remains is that arising from the hladini-sakti of the Lord (svarupa-saktyananda). It is this hladini-sakti only that overwhelms the Lord with ecstasy. By this sakti the Lord Himself attains bliss and bestows bliss to his devotees.

The supremely blissful state of hladini that eternally exists in the devotees is known as bhagavat-priti, or divine prema. The Lord can also experience this within His devotees and thus the Lord and His devotees become attached to each other.

Bhakti is called the svarupa-sakti of the Lord. The Lord's svarupa is sat cit ananda, so His cit-sakti has also three features, sandhini, samvit, and hladini.

Sandhini is the energy related to existence. By this energy the Lord maintains His own existence and that of others. Samvit is the energy related to knowledge. Through this energy the Lord knows about Himself and causes others to know Him. Hladini is the energy related to bliss. By this energy the Lord Himself experiences bliss and gives bliss to others.

Existing within the svarupa of the Lord, eternity (sat), knowledge (cit), and bliss (ananda) cannot be separated from each other.

Sandhini, samvit, and hladini are similarly inseparable. In any manifestation of svarupa-sakti, one of these three states is predominant, while the other two are also present in lesser quantity.

As cit-sakti is self-manifested, its three states are also self-manifesting. They make their appearance by themselves and cause the appearance of others.

By the specific self-manifesting state of cit-sakti consisting of hladini, sandhini, and samvit, the Lord appears in His original eternal form along with His associates and transcendental abode.

This specific state of svarupa-sakti is known as visuddha-sattva. When sandhini-sakti predominates in visuddha-sattva it is known as adbhara-sakti, the energy holding all existence. The abode of the Lord and the Lord's associates appear by this energy.

When samvit-sakti predominates, it is known as atmavidya, spiritual knowledge. When hladini predominates, it

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is known as guhya-vidya, secret knowledge. By this energy bhakti, or bhagavat-priya, love for the Lord, is manifest. One can thus understand from this description, that bhakti is self-manifesting by nature like the Lord. There is no other cause for her appearance.

Bhakti manifests herself in the devotee by her own independent will. sadhana-bhajana is performed to make the heart suitable for her appearance.

The author gives further evidence from the Bhagavata to establish the independent appearance of bhakti. In the beginning of Srimad-Bhagavata (1.2.6) while establishing the ultimate welfare of the living entities, Sripada Suta Muni says to the sages headed by Saunaka Rishi,

*- sa vai pumsam paro dharmo yato bhaktir adhokshaje
ahaituky apratihata yayatma suprasidati*

"The supreme religion of all living beings is that by which they can attain causeless and uninterrupted bhakti to the Lord, who is beyond the reach of the material senses."

The word ahaituki means that bhakti is causeless. This means bhakti is self-blissful; it does not seek any other fruit except the Lord and His service. This explanation shows the causeless appearance of bhakti.

- (Srila Ananta das Babaji, commentary on Madhurya-kadambini).

So Srila Gurudeva can impart this bhakti into our hearts.

How? By the process of giving us the diksha-mantras, which is called "diksha-initiation".

He received those mantras from his line of gurus (parampara) and he will never add nor subtract anything. The disciple gets the "original".

Here we find a wonderful explanation of the process of diksha-initiation:

What is meant with diksha, or initiation?

*In his Bhakti Sandarbha (283) Srimat Jiva Gosvamipada quotes the sastras to describe the glories of initiation -
divyam jnanam yato dadyat kuryat papasya sankshayam
tasmad diksheti sa prokta desikais tattva kovidaib*

*"That which bestows divine knowledge and destroys all sins is called diksha by the acaryas who know the truth."
Sri Jivapada adds: divyam jnanam hyatra srimati mantre bhagavat svarupa jnanam tena bhagavata sambandha
visesha jnanam ca — "Here divine knowledge means the knowledge about the Lord's intrinsic identity which lies
within the mantra, along with specific knowledge of the living being's relationship with the Lord."*

*jivera svarupa hoy — krishnera nitya dasa
krishnera tatastha sakti — bhedabheda prakasa
(C.C.)*

"The intrinsic identity of the living entity is that he is Krishna's eternal servant. Being Krishna's marginal potency he is both different and non-different from Him."

Although the living being is Krishna's eternal servant, he has been averse to the Lord since beginningless time. Hence he has been swallowed by ignorance and illusion, and being under such illusion, he identifies with his false body, senses and mind. Forgetting his own intrinsic identity he calls his false body "I" and forgetting his eternal relationship with Sri Hari, he becomes bound to his wife, children and money.

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*krishna nitya dasa jiva taba bhuli gelo;
sei doshe maya tara golaya bandhilo
(C.C.)*

"The living being has forgotten that he is Krishna's eternal servant, and due to that fault maya has bound him around the neck."

In this way, although the living being is intrinsically a transcendental entity, he is bound by maya and wanders around in the miserable material world, reincarnating from one painful species of life to the other. That, through which Sri Guru mercifully slackens the bondage of maya and infuses transcendental energy into the disciple's heart, thus awakening his awareness of his eternal or special relationship with Sri Hari — is called diksha.

Then again the mantra is the intrinsic form of the Lord, and by the grace of the sadhus and the Guru, who are Sri Hari's karunya ghana vigraha, the embodiments of His deep mercy, the Lord enters into the disciple's heart in the form of the mantra to make his body, mind and life-air transcendently suitable for serving the Lord. Sriman Mahaprabhu Himself said —

*diksha kale bhakta kore atma samarpana;
sei kale krishna tate kore atma sama
sei deha korena tara cid anandamoy;
aprakrita debe tara carana bhajoy
(C.C.)*

*"At the time of initiation the devotee surrenders himself and at that time Krishna makes the practising devotee equal to Himself. The Lord then makes the devotee's body transcendental and in this transcendental body the devotee can worship the Lord's lotus feet."
(Srila Ananta das Babaji, Sri Guru-tattva-vijnana)*

So, confirmed by Sriman Mahaprabhu, we see why it is of utter importance to take diksha-initiation. Everything is in these diksha-mantras, especially in the Krishna-mantra and the Kama-gayatri.

Sri Krishna Himself took diksha from Sandipani Muni.

Sriman Mahaprabhu took diksha from Ishvara Puri. Nityananda Prabhu from Laksmipathi Tirtha, Sri Advaita Acarya from Madhavendra Puri and Gadadhara Pandit took diksha from Pundarik Vidyanidhi. All these eternal personalities are considered "Krishna-tattva" (one form of Krishna and Krishna Himself). So if all these persons took diksha-initiation, we should understand that is absolutely necessary to do it for ourselves.

Sriman Mahaprabhu instructed His closest followers to initiate disciples and to start disciplic successions (paramparas). Sriman Nityananda Prabhu ordered his wife Srimati Jahnava Ma to start initiating disciples. Advaita Acarya started, Gadadhara Pandit and many many more and even up to this day, still all of these paramparas are "intact" and completely unbroken. The divine gift of pure bhakti can still flow through these wonderful "channels".

By this we see, how much Sri Krishna wants and facilitates the system of a parampara where divine knowledge is imparted through diksha-initiation.

Srila Rupa Goswami tells us the 64 "limbs (angas)" of bhakti:

guru-padashrayas tasmāt kṛṣṇa-dīkṣādi-sikṣaṇam
viśrambhena guroḥ sevā sadhu-vartmanuvartanam 74

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(1) Submission to the Feet of the Guru (Spiritual Master); (2) Receiving training from him in spiritual initiation and practices regarding Sri Krishna; (3) serving the Spiritual Master with affectionate zeal; (4) Following in the path of saints

So we can see right there from the acarya for bhakti-yoga:

"krishna-diksadi-siksanam".

Initiation into Krishna-mantra and receiving instructions (siksha).

Diksha-guru is ONE, siksha-guru can be many.

4. The gift of Sriman Mahaprabhu - bhakti in the wake of the inhabitants of Vrindavana (raganuga-bhakti)

The word “raganuga” literally means “to follow loving attachment”, love directed towards God. Like already mentioned above, we can love God in aishvarya-bhava and in madhurya-bhava. Now, to love Krishna like the inhabitants of Vrindavana, we have to clearly understand the path of raganuga-bhakti.

We follow (anuga) the perfected souls in Vraja, who have "this special kind of love" (raga) in their soul (atmika). We are raganuga-devotees, following the ragatmika-devotees in eternal Vrindavana. They are our "role models".

The practice of bhakti is divided into two different paths.

vaidhi raganuga ceti sa dvidha sadhanabhidha (brs 1.2.5)

“Practice is of two kinds, namely vaidhi and raganuga.” The word “vaidhi” is derived from the Sanskrit word “vidhi”, referring to the commandments of the scriptures. The word “raganuga” is a compound of two words, namely raga, “loving attachment”, and anuga, “following in the wake of”. The general characteristics of these two paths are explained as follows:

vaidhi-bhaktir bhavet sastram bhaktau cet syat pravartakam
raganuga syac ced bhaktau lobha eva pravartakah (rvc 1.3)

“When devotion is caused by scriptural injunctions, it is called vaidhi-bhakti, but when its cause is spiritual greed alone, it is called raganuga-bhakti.”

yatra raganavaptatvat pravrittir upajayate
sasanenaiva sastrasya sa vaidhi-bhaktir ucyate (brs 1.2.6)

“That devotion which knows no attachment or greed, but which is prompted by the commandments of the scriptures, is called vaidhi-bhakti.”

virajantim abhivyaktam vrajavasi-janadishu
ragatmikam anusrita ya sa raganugocyate (brs 1.2.270)

“The devotion which is clearly present in the associates of the Lord in Vraja is called devotion filled with loving attachment (ragatmika-bhakti), and devotion following in the wake of this ragatmika-bhakti is called raganuga-bhakti.” As one desires to approach the Lord, so the Lord will approach the aspirant. (bg. 4.11) Whatever one remembers at the time of death, that he will

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attain without fail. (bg. 8.6) Reflecting on these famous words of the Bhagavad Gita, one can easily understand that varieties of goals are attained in accordance with one's desires. It is not that all paths lead to the same goal.

vaidhi-raganuga-marga-bhedena parikirtitah
dvividhah khalu bhavo'tra sadhanabhinivesajah (brs 1.3.7)

“The paths of vaidhi and raganuga are known to be separate from each other. Engagement in these two forms of practice certainly awakens two distinct varieties of bhava.” The goals of these two paths of devotion in practice are understood as follows:

vidhi-bhaktye parshada-dehe vaikunthete yaya (cc 2.24.87)

“Through vidhi-bhakti, one will attain the form of an associate in Vaikuntha.”

aisvarya-jnane vidhi-bhajana kariya
vaikunthake yaya catur-vidha mukti pana (cc 1.3.17)

“Those who worship according to scriptural commandments, being aware of the Lord's superhuman prowess, attain the four kinds of liberation in Vaikuntha.”

raga-bhaktye vraje svayam-bhagavane paya (cc 2.24.85)

“Through raga-bhakti, one will attain the Lord Himself in Vraja.”

raganuga-marge tanre bhaje yei jana
sei-jana paya vraje vrajendra-nandana (cc 2.8.221)

“He who worships on the path of raganuga will attain Vrajendranandana (Sri Krishna) in Vraja.” In the realm of Vraja, the sweet and intimate human-like pastimes of God prevail. Only in such an atmosphere love can attain its pinnacle. Love which is filled with awareness of the Lord's almight is of an inferior quality. As stated by the Lord Himself:

sakala jagate more kare vidhi-bhakti
vidhi-bhaktye vraja-bhava paite nahi sakti
aisvarya-jnanete saba jagat misrita
aisvarya-sithila-preme nahi mora prita
(cc 1.3.15-16)

“Everyone in this world worships Me through vidhi-bhakti. Vidhi-bhakti has no power for attaining the feelings of Vraja. The devotion of the world is mixed with knowledge of My divine prowess. I do not delight in love diluted with prowess.” It is thus evident that there is a need to deeply reflect on the nature and practice of raganuga-bhakti for anyone who desires to perfect his loving faculty in relationship with God. There is no other means for tasting the ambrosial sweetness of the Vraja-pastimes of the Lord!

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karma, tapa, yoga, jnana, vidhi-bhakti, japa, dhyana
iha haite madhurya durlabha
kevala ye raga-marge, bhaje krishne anurage
tare krishna-madhurya sulabha (cc 2.21.119)

“Sweetness is very difficult to attain through fruitive activities, austerity, yoga, intellectual speculation, vidhi-bhakti, recitation of mantras or meditation. The sweetness of Sri Krishna is easily attainable only for the one who affectionately worships Him on the path of raga.”

The nature of raganuga-bhakti

Raganuga-bhakti specifically means devotion which is inspired by and follows in the wake of Sri Krishna’s eternal associates in the divine realm of Vraja. Their love is known as ragatmika, being filled with natural loving thirst for the Lord.

ishte svarasiki ragah paramavishtata bhavet
tan-mayi ya bhaved bhaktih satra ragatmikodita (brs 1.2.272)

“That devotion in which one is filled with abundant natural love for the Chosen One is known ragatmika.”

This love is splendidly manifest in the eternal residents of Vraja.
Ragatmika-bhakti is known to be of two kinds.

sa kamarupa sambandharupa ceti bhaved dvidha (brs 1.2.273)

“Its two divisions are that which has the form of an amorous desire (kamarupa) and that which has the form of a relationship (sambandharupa).”

The servants, friends and parents of the Lord are established in a relationship consisting of a recognized relationship in the society. However, the pinnacle of love present in the paramour lovers of the Lord consists of sole amorous desire, which unhesitatingly breaks through the boundaries of acceptable social interaction

Just as there are two kinds of ragatmika-bhakti, so there are two kinds of raganuga-bhakti.

ragatmikaya dvaividhyad dvidha raganuga ca sa
kamanuga ca sambandhanuga ceti nigadyate (brs 1.2.290)

“As ragatmika is of two kinds, so is raganuga. It is known as that which follows the amorous desire (kamanuga) and that which follows the relationship (sambandhanuga).”

One who, upon hearing of the sweetness of the feelings of the Lord’s eternal associates towards Him, becomes eager to attain feelings akin to theirs, begins the path of raganuga. Let us now proceed to examine the gradations between the various relationships to be attained.

The specific flavours of raganuga-bhakti

Sri Krishna, the Original Personality of Godhead, descended to this world along with His associates some five thousand years ago in the land of Vraja, displaying His ever-sweet pastimes to attract the souls of this world to His divine abode.

Reflections on bhakti-tattva

anugrahaya bhaktanam manusham deham asritah
bhajate tadrishih krida yah srutva tat-paro bhavet (sb 10.33.36)

“To show favor to His devotees He appears in a human form, enjoying such pastimes upon hearing of which one must become completely devoted to Him.”

After Sri Krishna and His associates disappeared from the visible realm of Vraja, various schools of thought and practice, intent on attaining His service, arose. In due course of time, Sri Krishna Himself, eager to taste the sweetness of His own service, descended to this world in the form of a great teacher and devotee named Sri

Krishna Caitanya Mahaprabhu, known as Visvambhara during His earlier life.

prema-rasa-niryasa karite asvadana
raga-marga bhakti loka karite pracarana
rasika-sekhara krishna parama-karuna
ei dui hetu haite icchara udgama (cc 1.4.15-16)

“Sri Krishna is the crest-jewel of relishers and the most merciful one. His desire (to descend to this world) arose out of two reasons, as he wished to taste the essence of loving rapture and to broadcast devotion on the path of raga to the world.”

The unprecedented contribution of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu in the realm of raganuga-bhakti has been narrated as follows:

anarpita-carim cirat karunayavatirnah kalau
samarpayitum unnatojjvala-rasam sva-bhakti-sriyam
harih purata-sundara-dyuti-kadamba-sandipitah
sada hridaya-kandare sphuratu vah saci-nandanah (Vidagdha-madhava 1.2)

“Out of His causeless mercy, He descended in this age of Kali to bestow the matchless treasure of the rapture of amorous love in His own service, which had not been given since a long time. May this son of Saci, Hari radiant with the enchanting complexion of multitude of gold, always be manifest in the core of your heart!”

The concept of amorous love was certainly present in the bhakti-traditions predating Sri Caitanya. What, then, is His unique contribution? It is a unique variety of amorous love in servitude. Amorous love (kamarupa-bhakti) is divided into two distinct categories.

kamanuga bhavet trishna kama-rupanugamini (brs 1.2.297)

“The following of amorous feelings (kamanuga) appears as a thirst for following in the wake of that which consists of amorous feeling (kamarupa).”

sambhogeccha-mayi tat-tad-bhavecchatmeti sa dvidha (brs 1.2.298)

“Its two divisions are (1) filled with desire for union (sambhogeccha-mayi) and (2) consisting of a desire for Her feelings (tad-bhaveccatma).”

keli-tatparyavatya eva sambhogeccha-mayi bhavet
tad-bhavecchatmika tasam bhava-madhurya-kamita (brs 1.2.299)

Reflections on bhakti-tattva

“That which aims for amorous sports is known as sambhogecchamayi, and that which longs for the sweetness of the feelings is known as tad-bhavecchatmika.”

The desire for union is understood to consist of four kinds of longing for union.

sandarsana-samjalpa-samsparśa-samprayoga-lakṣhaṇa-bheda-catusṭaya-bhinnatvam drisyate
(Pṛiti-sandarbhā 375)

“The four different categories are understood as the various appearances of seeing, discussion, touching and sexual union.”

Particularly the last two forms of sambhoga characterize the sambhogecchamayi-devotion. The second division of amorous devotion, which consists solely of the longing to relish the sweetness of the feelings of Śrī Rādhā, devoid of even a scent of desire for bodily enjoyment with Śrī Kṛṣṇa, is known as manjarī-bhava; this is the mood of the maidservants of Śrī Rādhā. The eminent glories of the love of Śrī Rādhā, the foremost among the consorts of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, are narrated throughout the scriptures and the poetry of the saints. Indeed, She is the very embodiment of love for the Lord.

hladinīra sara amsa tara ‘prema’ nama
ananda-cinmaya-rasa premera akhyāna (cc 2.8.159)

“The essential aspect of the pleasure-giving potency (hladinī) of Śrī Kṛṣṇa is called ecstatic love (prema), which is understood as joy filled with rapturous mellows.”

premera parama-sara ‘mahabhava’ jani
sei mahabhava-riipa radhā-thakurāni (cc 2.8.160)

“The supreme pinnacle of prema is known to be maha-bhava, and Śrī Rādhā Thakurāni is the embodiment of this maha-bhava.”

premera ‘svarupa-deha’ prema-vibhāvita
kṛṣṇera preyasi-sreṣṭhā jagate vidita (cc 2.8.162)

“Her body is the very embodiment of prema and a transformation of prema. Throughout the world, She is known to be the dearest among Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s beloveds.”

sei mahabhava haya ‘cintamani-sara’
kṛṣṇa-vāṇṇa pūrṇa kare ei karmā tanra (cc 2.8.164)

“This maha-bhava is the the essence of a divine touch-stone; Her task is to fulfill all the desires of Śrī Kṛṣṇa.”

When one’s love for the beloved of Śrī Kṛṣṇa exceeds one’s love for Him, this condition is known as the jubilant arising of attachment (bhavollāsa-rati), the foundational mood of a maidservant of Śrī Rādhā.

sancari syat samano va kṛṣṇa-ratyah suhṛid-ratiḥ
adhikā pushyamāna ced bhavollāsa ratiḥ (brs 2.5.128)

Reflections on bhakti-tattva

“When the affection for Sri Krishna and a dear one are equal, the feeling is known as a transitory feeling, but when devotion to a dear one is nourished and becomes dominant, the feeling is known as bhavollasa-rati.”

The pinnacle of divine joy which is present in the heart of Sri Radha becomes reflected into the hearts of Her dedicated maidservants, thus causing them to taste love which far exceeds any other form loving relish both in quantity and in quality.

pataty asre sasra bhavati pulake jata-pulakah
smite bhati smera malimani jate sumalinah
anasadya svalir mukuram abhivikshya sva-vadanam
sukham va duhkham va kimapi kathaniyam mrigadrisah (Krishnahnika-kaumudi 5.128)

“Oh doe-eyed beauties! When your girlfriends are absent, you may have to look at a mirror before you can say whether you are happy or sad. They reflect every mood of yours, they perform all the services of a looking glass! When tears fall from your eyes they also cry; when you are excited, their hairs stand on end; when you laugh they also do so; and when you become depressed, they also look down-hearted.”

This manjari-bhava is the unique contribution of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu and the cherished treasure of the Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition. One who desires to attain the ultimate goal of life should diligently study the writings of the saints on the subject matter of raganuga-bhakti. Prior to engaging in any activity, a thoughtful person must carefully assess his eligibility for the same. We will now examine the causes and the characteristics of eligibility for bhakti in general and for raganuga-bhakti in particular.

Eligibility for devotion

No one is disqualified from engaging in acts of devotion on account of his lack of skill, of mental prowess or indeed of any other mundane faculty, nor does anyone become qualified for bhakti due to the virtue of such abilities. Rather, a mere desire for engaging in acts of devotion is the cause of eligibility for devotion.

bhaktau pravrittir atra syat taccikirsha suniscaya
sastral lobhat tac cikirshu syatam tad adhikarinau (rvc 1.4)

“According to devotional scriptures, an exclusive desire to engage in the practices of bhakti is the cause of engaging in bhakti. Bhakti of two different natures is born from fear of scriptural injunctions and from intense sacred greed respectively; accordingly, there are two kinds of candidates for bhakti-sadhana.”

The desire to engage in the practices of bhakti is born out of two distinct motivations. The one in whom the desire for devotion awakens on account of scriptural commandments is eligible for the practice of vaidhi-bhakti.

yah kenapyati bhagyena jata sraddho'sya sevane
natisakto na vairagya bhagasyam adhikaryasau (brs 1.2.14)

“When, out of inconceivable luck, faith awakens in someone for the service of the Lord, and he has no firm attachment for the Lord and is only slightly averse to bodily attachments, such a person is eligible for sadhana-bhakti.”

This desire for devotion is characterized by obedience of and faith in the scriptural commandments, which invoke a sense of duty for the service of the Lord. This desire is born out

Reflections on bhakti-tattva

of the fear of violating the scriptures and thus incurring sin and consequent calamity. On the other hand, eligibility for the practice of raganuga-bhakti is born out of greed for attaining feelings akin to the Lord's dear ones.

ragatmikaika-nishtha ye vrajavasi-janadayah
tesham bhavaptaye lubdho bhaved atradhikaravan (brs 1.2.291)

“The very being of those who reside in Vraja is steeped in loving attachment. One who becomes greedy to attain feelings similar to theirs possesses eligibility.”

Eligibility for the practice of raganuga-bhakti

The symptoms of the awakening of greed for attaining feelings akin to the Lord's eternal associates is described as follows:

tat tad bhavadi madhurye srute dhira yad apeksate
natra sastram na yuktim ca tal lobhotpatti lakshanam (brs. 1.2.292)

“When one hears about the sweetness of their feelings and so forth, and a desire for attaining the same awakens in the consciousness without dependence on scripture and logic, this is a symptom of the awakening of greed (lobha).”

However, the impetus of the vaidhi-bhakta remains dependent on the commandments of the scripture.

vaidha-bhakti-adhikari tu bhavavirbhavanavadhi
atra sastram tatha tarkam anukulam apeksate (brs 1.2.293)

“However, until bhava arises within the one eligible for vaidhi-bhakti, he remains dependent on scriptures and logical considerations.”

The greed for attaining Vraja-bhava only awakens in rare and fortunate souls.

ragamayi-bhaktira haya ‘ragatmika’ nama
taha suni lubdha haya kona bhagyavan (cc 2.22.152)

“That devotion which consists of deep attachment is called ragatmika. One who becomes greedy upon hearing about this is fortunate.”

lobhe vrajavasi-bhave kore anugati
sastra-yukti nahi mane – raganugara prakriti (cc 2.22.153)

“Greedy following in the wake of the feelings of the residents of Vraja, without considering scriptures or logic – such is the nature of raganuga.”

In such a person, the attraction for attaining particular loving feelings for the Lord overrules all other considerations.

vrajalila parikarastha sringaradi bhava madhurye srute dhira idam mama bhuyat iti lobhotpattikale
sastra yukty apeksa na syat satyam ca tasyam lobhatvasyaivasiddheh nahi kenacit sastra drishtya

Reflections on bhakti-tattva

lobhah kriyate nāpi lobhaniya vastu praptau svasya योग्ययोग्यत्वा विचारः कोऽप्युद्भवति. किन्तु
lobhaniya vastuni srute drishṭe va svata eva lobha utpadyate (rvc 1.5)

“If, upon hearing of the sweetness of the feelings, headed by passion, of Sri Kṛṣṇa’s associates in the Vraja-līla, one thinks, ‘Let me also attain such feelings,’ then at this time one need not depend either on the revealed scriptures or on favorable logical considerations. If such dependence remains, it cannot be said that greed has appeared. Greed never arises in anyone because of scriptural considerations, and in anyone who is desirous to attain the object of the greed, no considerations of qualification or lack of qualification arise. Rather, greed arises only by hearing about the object of greed or by seeing it.”

As love cannot arise due to commandments or as the outcome of a certain pattern of reasoning, it is not possible that eligibility for rāga-nuga-bhakti would arise on account of scriptural commandments or the subsequent logical considerations. Indeed, one who becomes greedy for Vraja-bhava hastens to attain it wherever it is available.

krishna-bhakti-rasa-bhāvita-matih
kriyatam yadi kuto’pi labhyate
tatra laulyam api mulyam ekalam
janma-koti-sukritair na labhyate (Padyavali 14)

“Wherever that consciousness laden with rapturous loving feelings for Sri Krishna is available, from there it must be acquired. For that there is indeed only one price, greed, which cannot be attained through pious deeds even in millions of births.”

Though the direct cause for the awakening of greed is the hearing of narrations about the Vraja-pastimes of Sri Krishna, one must also give due consideration to the foundational cause of the phenomena.

krishna tad bhakta karunya matra lobhaika hetuka
pushti margataya kaishcid iyaṁ rāga-nuga-cyate (brs 1.2.309)

“The only causes of the appearance of sacred greed are the mercy of Sri Krishna or the mercy of His devotee. Therefore some also call the path of rāga-nuga-bhakti with the name pushti-marga (the path of grace).”

Commenting on this verse, Sri Jīva Gosvāmī states:

krishneti – matra padasya vidhi marga kutracit karmādi samarpanam api dvaram bhavati tad
vicchedarthah prayoga iti bhava

“The word matra is used in the above because sometimes the offering of fruitive activities can lead to entry into vaidhi-bhakti, whereas rāga-nuga-bhakti is only (matra) attained through grace.” Though the paths of vaidhi and rāga-nuga are two distinct paths, the practice of vaidhi-bhakti can offer indirect support for the awakening of the eligibility for rāga-nuga-bhakti, its various practices being agents which assist in the purification of the heart. In addition to grace, a certain lucidity of awareness is necessary to facilitate the appearance of the aforementioned greed.

yasya purvoktam rāga-visheṣe rucir eva jātaṣṭi na tu rāga-visheṣa eva svayam, tasya tadrīsa-rāga-
sūdhakara-karabhaṣa-samullasita-hṛdaya-sphatika-maṇeḥ sastrādi-srutasu tadrīsyā rāga-tmīkāyā

Reflections on bhakti-tattva

bhakteh paripatishv api rucir jayate tatas tadiyam ragam rucy-anugacchanti sa raganuga tasyaiva pravartate (Bhakti-sandarbha 310)

“When the splendour of the moonrays of raga shines upon the crystal-like heart of a person in whom a taste for the aforementioned specific raga has awakened, but who himself does not possess distinct raga, his heart rejoices. He then hears from the scriptures about such ragatmika-bhakti and consequently develops a taste for the same. Following his taste for such raga, he engages in raganuga-bhakti.”

Just as pure crystal reflects the colours of an object placed next to it, so the heart untainted by lust, anger and mundane greed easily develops a taste for the rapturous mellows of ragatmika-bhakti. In the initial stages of the practice of raganuga-sadhana, one’s practice must be mixed with vaidhi-bhakti.

ajata-tadrisa-rucina tu sad-viseshadara-matradrita raganugapi vaidhi-samvalitaivanushtheya tatha loka-samgrahartham pratishthitena jata-tadrisa-rucina ca atra misratve ca yatha-yogyam raganugayaiki krityaiva vaidhi kartavya (Bhakti-sandarbha 312)

“Those in whom such taste (ruci) has not awakened, but who have a special interest for it, should engage in a mixture of raganuga and vaidhi. For the sake of establishing an example for the people of the world, the one in whom such ruci has awakened will do the same. Therefore, as appropriate, raganuga should be performed together with vaidhi.”

Since at this stage ruci as the driving force behind the practice of devotion has not yet been firmly established in the heart, one must engage in the practice of mixed raganuga-sadhana out of obligation at all times, just as one would do in regular vaidhi-sadhana.

It is understood that the greed which makes one eligible for following the feelings of the residents of Vraja awakens gradually in accordance with the degree of the purification of the heart.

sa ca lobho raga vartma vartinam bhaktanam guru-padasraya lakshanam arabhya svabhishta vastu sakshat prapti samayam abhivyapya “yatha yathatma parimriyate’sau mat punya gatha sravanabhidhanaih, tatha tatha pasyati vastu sukshmam cakshur yathaivanjana samprayuktam “iti bhagavad ukter bhakti hetukantah karana suddhi taratamyat prati dinam adhikadhiko bhavati (rvc 1.8)

“It is described that the devotees on the path of raga gradually progress from the initial surrender to the feet of Sri Guru up to the stage of directly attaining the object of their desires.

‘When the eye is smeared with medicinal ointment, its ability of perception becomes more and more refined, and accordingly it is able to perceive more and more subtle objects; similarly, according to the degree of the mind’s having become purified by hearing and chanting of My purifying pastimes, all the subtle truths of reality become manifest in the heart of the sadhaka.’

From these words of the Lord it is known that through sadhana-bhakti the consciousness of the sadhaka becomes more purified every day, and he gradually becomes more and more greedy.” In accordance with the purification of the heart and the growth of spiritual greed, one’s eligibility for raganuga-bhakti increases day by day from an initial desire to an intense, captivating longing for the object of one’s desires. Thus one gradually proceeds through the various stages of devotion.

atha raganuga-bhakti majjanasyanartha-nivritti-nishtha-rucy-asakty-antaram prema-bhumikarudhasya sakshat svabhishta-prapti-prakarah pradarsyate (rvc 2.7)

Reflections on bhakti-tattva

“Then it will be described how the one, who has progressed on the path of raganuga-bhakti through the cessation of the evils (anartha-nivritti), firmness (nishtha), taste (ruci), and attachment (asakti) all the way to the attainment of ecstatic love (prema), will directly come to attain his desired object.”

Eligibility for hearing narrations of the lord’s pastimes

We shall now take the question one step further, examining the nature of those deeds, namely hearing about and seeing the object of one’s desires, which provoke the aforementioned spiritual greed.

satam prasangan mama virya-samvido
bhavanti hrit-karna-rasayanah kathah
taj-joshanad asv apavarga-vartmani
sraddha ratir bhaktir anukramishyati (sb 3.25.25)

“In the association of saints, discussing the narrations of My wonderful deeds acts as the life-giving elixir for the heart and the ears. Being thus satisfied, one quickly proceeds on the path of liberation, as faith, attraction and devotion gradually appear.”
The glory of hearing about the loving sports of Sri Krishna is narrated everywhere in the scriptures.

vikriditam vraja-vadhubhir idam ca vishnoh
sraddhanvito yah srinuyad atha varnayed va
bhaktim param bhagavati parilabhya kamam
hrid-rogam asv apahinoty acirena dhirah (sb 10.33.39)

“One who faithfully hears or describes the loving sports of Sri Krishna and the young maidens of Vraja will quickly drive away the heart-disease of lust, become sober, and attain supramundane devotion of the Lord.”
However, is everyone eligible for hearing such confidential topics, which may invoke thoughts of mundane sexuality in the eyes of an ignorant spectator?

kintu rahasya-lila tu paurusha-vikaravad indriyaih pitri-putra-dasa-bhavais ca nopasya sviya-bhava-virodhat
rahasyatvam ca tasyah kvacid alpamsena kvacit tu sarvamseneti jneyam (Bhakti-sandarbhā 338)

“However, these secret sports are not to be worshiped by those who experience male transformations in their senses, or by those who are in the moods of father, son and servant, for it would be contrary to their moods. Confidentiality is understood according to the partial or complete touching of limbs.”
Thus the individual who desires to absorb himself in narrations of the Lord must himself assess his own eligibility and aspire to hear narrations in accordance with his capacity. However, such confidential topics should never be narrated to antagonistic individuals who are likely to disrespect the supremely sacred human-like sports of the Lord.

asraddadhane vimukhe ’py asrinvati yas copadesah siva namaparadhah (Padma-purana, Brahma-khanda 25.15-18)

Reflections on bhakti-tattva

“One who describes the auspiciousness of the Name unto those who are faithless, opposed and unwilling to hear, is an offender against the Holy Name.”

Hence the aforementioned verse (sb 10.33.39) lays emphasis on hearing such narrations with faith. Faith in the divinity and the purifying nature of the deeds of the Lord awakens through associating with faithful saints, as one learns about the scriptural conclusions regarding the supramundane status of the Lord from them.

For the faithful people, whether pure or impure in heart, hearing narrations of the deeds of the Lord is recommended. The immense potency of the nectarine pastimes of Sri Krishna is praised in the Govinda Lilamritam, one among the original texts narrating the eight-fold daily pastimes of the Lord.

yat pitam srutivan manobhir anisam trishnapradam tvadbhutam samsaramaya haryapi
pranayajonmadandhya mohadikrit sasvac carvitam eva bhuri rasadam dehadi hrit pushtidam
taj jiyad amrita spriha haram idam govinda lilamritam (gl 1.5)

“When drunk, it bestows astonishing, incessant thirst in the ears, speech and the mind; it destroys the bondage of samsara, giving rise to deep affection, madness, blindness, delusion and so forth! When constantly chewed, it produces a variety of tastes, nourishing the soul, the body and so forth; let those nectarine pastimes of Sri Govinda, which snatch away the desire for celestial ambrosia, be glorified!”

Indeed, who could fail to be attracted by such beauty and sweetness?

ko nirvrito hari-kathasu ratim na kuryat (Bhag. 2.3.12)

“Who is there who has no taste for absorption in narrations about Hari?”

nivritta-tarshair upagiyamanad
bhavaushadhac chrotra-mano-'bhiramat
ka uttamasloka-gunanuvadat
puman virajyeta vina pasughnat (sb 10.1.3)

“Description of the qualities of the Lord who is praised with the best of verses is sung and relished in the minds of those whose thirst for the mundane is quenched, and it is the remedy for material existence as well. Who else than a butcher could keep himself away from hearing such descriptions?” Thus a faithful person desirous of attaining the ultimate goal of life, having heard of the scriptural conclusions regarding the truths about the Lord and His infinite potencies, should engage himself in hearing narrations depicting the sweet, love-laden pastimes of Sri Krishna and His Vraja-associates.

The practice of raganuga-bhakti, though aiming at spontaneous, inherent love for Sri Krishna, is not whimsical in nature. The various aspects of raganuga-sadhana have been carefully described in the writings of the saints. Anyone who desires to smoothly progress on the path of raga must study their words diligently.

Reflections on bhakti-tattva

Initial stages of practice

Just as one must learn from a teacher if he desires to master any given subject in this mundane world, so one must approach a realized teacher who can give adequate guidance on the path of raga.

sa ca lobho raga vartma vartinam bhaktanam guru-padasraya lakshanam arabhya svabhishta vastu sakshat prapti samayam abhivyapya (rvc 1.8)

“It is described that the devotees on the path of raga gradually progress from the initial surrender to the feet of Sri Guru up to the stage of directly attaining the object of their desires.”

It has been described earlier that the mercy of Sri Krishna or His devotees is the cause of that spiritual greed, which causes eligibility for the practice of raganuga-bhakti.

sa ca bhagavat kripa hetuko ‘nuragi bhakta kripa hetukas ceti dvividhah
tatra bhakta kripa hetuko dvividhah praktana adhunikas ca
praktanah— paurva bhavika tadrise bhakta kripotthah, adhunikah etaj janmavadhi tadrise bhakta kripotthah
adye sati lobhanantaram tadrise guru caranasrayanam
dvitiye guru caranasrayanantaram lobha pravrittir bhavati (rvc 1.6)

“There are said to be two causes for the appearance of the aforementioned greed, namely the mercy of God and the mercy of an anuragi devotee. There are again two kinds of mercy bestowed by a devotee, namely old and recent. Greed which is born from the mercy of such devotees of Sri Krishna in a previous life is known as old (praktana). Greed which is born from the mercy of a devotee in the present life is known as recent (adhunika). In the one in whom greed has awakened in a previous birth, his greed manifests and he then takes shelter of the feet of a raganugiya devotee guru. One whose greed is recent will first take shelter of the feet of a guru, after which his greed appears.”

It is thus evident that approaching a guru is necessary for anyone who desires to progress towards the ultimate goal of life with firm confidence.

In describing the 64 main aspects of practice in his Bhakti-rasamrita-sindhu, Sri Rupa Gosvami delineates the first four as follows:

guru-padasrayas tasmad krishna-dikshadi-sikshanam
visrambhena guroh seva sadhu-vartmanuvartanam (brs 1.2.74)

“(1) Taking shelter of the feet of a guru, (2) Accepting initiation in Krishna-mantra and subsequent instructions, (3) Serving the guru with confidence, and (4) Following the path traversed by the saints.” The importance of accepting initiation into a Krishna-mantra has been described as follows:

divyam jnanam yato dadyat kuryat papasya sankshayam
tasmad diksheti sa prokta desikais tattva kovidaih
ato gurum pranamyaim sarvasvam vinivedya ca
grihniyad vaishnavam mantram diksha purvam vidhanatah (Bhakti-sandarbha 283)

Reflections on bhakti-tattva

“That, which bestows divine knowledge and destroys all sins, is called diksha by the knowers of the truth. Therefore, paying obeisance to the guru and offering unto him one’s all, one should receive Vaishnava mantra-diksha preceded with proper procedures.”

The great teachers have further glossed the importance of meditating on the diksha-mantra as a means of establishing a specific relationship with the Lord, which is, after all, the object of raganuga-bhakti sadhana.

divyam jnanam hy atra srimati mantre bhagavat-svarupa-jnanam, tena bhagavata sambandha-visesha-jnanam ca (ibid.)

“Here divine knowledge means the knowledge about the Lord’s intrinsic identity which lies within the mantra, along with specific knowledge of one’s relationship with the Lord.” This is repeated over and over again:

sri-naradadi-vartmanusaradbhih sri-bhagavata saha sambandha-visesham diksha-vidhanena sri-guru-carana-sampaditam cikirshadbhih kritayam dikshayam arcanam avasyam kriyetaiva (ibid.)

“Those who are following the path of Narada and others, and who desire the particular relationship with the Lord that is brought about at the feet of the guru through the rite of diksha, necessarily perform arcana (worship) when diksha is completed.”

Steadfast contemplation on the diksha-mantra gradually gives rise to and strengthens a certain loving relationship with the Lord. To refine the conception of the practitioner, it is customary for the guru to further instruct the initiate on the nature of his specific eternal, spiritual identity.

sakshad vraja-jana-viseshayaiva mahyam sri-guru-caranair mad-abhishta-visesha-siddhy-artham upadishtam bhavayami (Bhakti-sandarbha 312)

“I meditate on the specific form of one of Kṛṣṇa’s associates in Vraja, which my revered guru has instructed me in, in order to attain my specifically desired perfection.”

Therefore, the eager disciple will at one point in time approach the guru, inquiring about the eleven-fold existence (ekadasa-bhava) of his own eternal form (siddha-deha) in the spiritual world, along with the identities of the predecessor gurus in his lineage. The eleven prominently contemplated aspects of the siddha-form are known as follows:

1. nama – name of a manjari;
2. rupa (varna) – form (complexion);
3. vayas – age;
4. vesa – color of dress;
5. sambandha – relationship;
6. yutha – group (of a certain sakhi);
7. ajna – order;
8. seva – service;
9. parakashtha – highest aspiration;
10. palyadasi-bhava – the mood of a maintained maidservant;
11. nivasa – residence.

The unbroken chain of gurus, leading back to the eternal associates of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, is called guru-pranali (channel of gurus), and its celestial counterpart, the lineage of gurus in their Vraja-identities, is called siddha-pranali (channel of the perfected). Through this channel, the divine love of Vraja flows down into the heart of the aspirant.

Reflections on bhakti-tattva

esha tu bhaktis tan nitya parikaraganad arabhyedanintaneshvapi tad bhakteshu mandakiniva
pracarati . . . sa tathabhuta nitya dhamni nitya parshadeshu nityam cakasti surasarid iva tad bhakta
pranallya prapance ‘vatarati’ (Siddhanta-ratna of Sri Baladeva Vidyabhusana)

“This bhakti is being promulgated from the eternal associates of Sri Hari down to the present day practicing devotees like the current of the Mandakini-river (the celestial Ganges). Bhakti is always present within the Lord’s eternal associates within the eternal abode, and flows down to the mundane world through the drain of Sri Hari’s devotees like the stream of the Mandakini.”

In their daily meditation, the practitioners of raganuga-bhakti always meditate on the divine forms and characteristics of their predecessors along with the eternal associates of Sri Radha and Krishna.

tatradau manjari-rupan gurvadin tu sviyan sviyan pranally-anusarena samsmaret sri-guru-parama-
guru-krameneti tatah sri-radhikam dhyayet
tatah sri-nandanandanam (Paddhati of Dhyana-candra Gosvami,
344)

“In this meditation, before anything else, the practitioner should meditate on the manjari-forms of his guru-pranali, beginning with his guru, then parama-guru, etc. Then he shall meditate on Sri Radhika, and after that Sri Nandanandana (Krishna).”

Just as one hears narrations of the form and qualities of Sri Radha and Sri Krishna from authoritative sources, as they are inaccessible through the faculties of sensual perception and speculation, similarly one hears of the forms, qualities and so forth of all of Their associates, including the guru, from a realized person who is absorbed in the eternal service of Radha and Krishna in his eternal, spiritual identity.

manjaryo bahusah rupa-guna-sila-vayo ’nvitah
nama-rupadi tat sarvam guru-dattam ca bhavayet
tatra tatra sthita nityam bhajet sri-radhika-hari
bhavayan sadhako nityam sthitva krishna-priya-grihe
tad ajna-palako bhutva kaleshv ashtasu sevate (ibid. 107-109)

“One should meditate on the various forms, qualities, natures, blooming youth and so forth of the manjaris, as described by the guru. One should always stay with them, worshipping Sri Radhika and Hari. The practitioner shall stay in the home of Sri Radha, the beloved of Krishna, following their orders and rendering service throughout the eight phases of the day.”

Thus, having taken shelter of a genuine guru, one proceeds on the path of raganuga-bhakti sadhana.

Remembrance of Sri Krishna and His associates

In his Bhakti-rasamrita-sindhu (1.2.294-296), Sri Rupa Gosvami has presented three essential verses describing the practice of raganuga-bhakti. We shall now proceed to examine them one by one.

krishnam smaran janam casya preshtam nija samihitam
tat tat katha ratas casau kuryad vasam vraje sada (brs 1.2.294)

Reflections on bhakti-tattva

“One should remember the beloved Sri Kṛṣṇa and His associate of one’s own preference, being attached to narrations about them and always residing in Vraja.”

Examining the commentaries of the predecessors, a number of important considerations can be drawn from this verse. Sri Visvanatha Cakravarti has explained (rvc 1.11) this verse as follows:

First, through the words “remembering Krishna”, it is revealed that raga is a special feature of the mind, therefore one should remember; therefore the aspect of remembrance (smarana) is foremost on the path of raganuga. “Beloved” means the dearest, Sri Krishna, the lord of Vrindavana, who enjoys pastimes suitable to His own mood. “His people” means Sri Krishna’s people. Who are they? For this it is said, “of one’s own preference”, which means the desirable ones, such as Sri Radha, the mistress of Vrindavana, Lalita, Visakha, Rupa Manjari and others.

Although Sri Krishna is the object of one’s desires in a passionate mood, the associates of Sri Krishna, the ladies of Vraja headed by Sri Radha, are even more the object of the devotee’s desires on account of their having an excessive amount of passionate feelings which the devotee desires. “Live in Vraja” – this statement means that if it is not physically possible, at least in one’s mind one should live in Vraja.

Thus residing – whether physically or mentally – in the sacred land of Vraja, filled with stimulus for the remembrance of the sweet pastimes of Vraja, while remembering the pastimes of Sri Krishna and His associates one is particularly inspired by, filled with attachment for narrations about them, is the quintessence of raganuga-bhakti. How, then, is service to be rendered? Sri Rupa Gosvami explains this in the next verse.

Internal and external service

seva sadhaka rupena siddha rupena catra hi
tad bhava lipsuna karya vrajalokanusratah (brs 1.2.295)

“One should serve both in his present sadhaka-body and in his siddha-form, following in the wake of the residents of Vraja, desiring to have feelings similar to theirs.”

This very verse, in particular the interpretation of what is meant with serving with the sadhaka-form while following the residents of Vraja, was the root of a great controversy in the Gaudiya tradition at the time of Sri Visvanatha Cakravarti. His interpretation of the verse, which came to be accepted as conclusive, reads as follows:

“With the sadhaka-form” means in the present body, “with the siddha-form” means with one’s own desired, internally conceived body suitable for the direct service of Sri Kṛṣṇa, “desiring to attain their feelings” means to take shelter of one’s most cherished associate of Sri Kṛṣṇa and one’s desired Sri Radha, the beloved of Sri Kṛṣṇa, being anxiously desirous to attain the passionate feelings they have.

“Service”, how is it done? It is described as being performed with either items collected mentally or items collected with the physical body. The nature of this service is described as “following the people of Vraja”.

Following the residents of Vraja means to serve according to the model of Sri Rupa Gosvami and other residents of Vraja in the sadhaka-form and to serve according to the model of Sri Rupa Manjari and other residents of Vraja in the siddha-form.

The same is echoed, though more concisely, in an earlier work of Sri Krishna Das Kaviraja:

Reflections on bhakti-tattva

bahya, antara, ihara dui ta sadhana
bahye sadhaka-dehe kare sravana-kirtana
mane nija-siddha-deha kariya bhavana
ratri-dine kare vraje krishnera sevana
(cc 2.22.156-157)

“External and internal, these are indeed the two sadhanas. Externally, in the sadhaka-form, one engages in hearing and chanting, and in the mind, in one’s own siddha-form, day and night one thinks of and serves Sri Krishna in Vrindavana.”

The meaning of the sadhaka-form is evident: it means the present physical body. However, the concept of siddha-form deserves further examination. How is one to serve in a siddha-form, if one has not attained perfection (siddhi)? After all, the siddha-devotee is the one who has attained prema, and this verse appears in a section describing sadhana-bhakti. Is this not an oxymoron? To this, the commentators (Jiva Gosvami, Mukunda Gosvami and Visvanatha Cakravarti) answer in chorus:

siddha-rupena antas-cintitabhishta-tat-sevopayogi-dehena

“In the siddha-form means in an internally thought, desired form suitable for His service.” The chorus is slightly broken by Mukunda Gosvami, who states “manas-cintita”, “mentally thought” in the place of “antas-cintita”, “internally thought”. Furthermore, the word “abhishta”, “desired”, reveals that we are speaking of something which is yet to be attained.

The concept is further illuminated by Sri Narottama Das Thakura:

sadhane bhavibe yaha, siddha dehe pabe taha
raga marge ei sei upaya (Prema-bhakti-candrika 57)

“Whatever you think of during your sadhana, you will attain in your siddha-body. Such is the means on the path of raga.”

sadhane ye dhana cai, siddha dehe taha pai
pakkapakka matra se vicara (ibid. 58)

“The treasure I covet during my sadhana, I will attain in my siddha-body. The only difference between the two is their being ripe and unripe.” Thus, both in the present body and in the internally contemplated siddha-form, one should follow the residents of Vraja, desiring feelings akin to theirs. The service in the present, physical body is further explained in the following verse.

External practices

sravanotkirtanadini vaidha bhaktyuditani tu
yanyangani ca tanyatra vijneyani manishibhih (brs 1.2.296)

Reflections on bhakti-tattva

“Hearing, chanting and all the other limbs of vaidhi-bhakti are also to be engaged in. This is what the learned ones have ascertained.” Mere internal practice which neglects the external practices of bhakti, such as hearing, chanting and worshiping, is forbidden. For absorption in remembrance, a peaceful mind is required, and the mind can never be peaceful when the heart is filled with impurities.

suddhantah-karanas cet “etan-nirvidhyamananam icchatam akutobhayam” ity ady-uktatvan nama-kirtanaparityageṇa smaranam kuryat (Bhakti-sandarbha 265)

“According to the statement ‘etan-nirvidhyamananam icchatam akutobhayam’ (sb 2.1.11), to purify the mind, one should engage in remembrance without neglecting kirtana.”

Indeed, on the virtue of its power of captivating all the senses and connecting them with the Lord, kirtana has been declared as the emperor among the practices of devotion in the present age of disturbance.

Indeed, one who neglects the practice of hearing and chanting the holy names is to be blamed on account of his disobedience of the scriptures.

sruti-smṛiti-purāṇādi-pancarātra-vidhim vīṇā
aikāntiki harer bhaktir utpatayaiva kalpate (brs 1.2.101)

“Exclusive devotion to Lord Hari which does not follow the rules and regulations prescribed by the Śrutis, Smṛitis, Purāṇas, or the Nārada Pañcarātra, is only causing disturbance.”

Though the impetus for the practice of rāgānuga-bhakti is independent from the scriptural commandments, nevertheless one who desires to learn about the path of practice must turn to the scriptures for guidance. Śrī Viṣṇuācārya Cakravartī illustrates the principle in his Rāgā-vartma-candrika:

tatas ca tadrīṣa lobhāvato bhaktasya lobhānīya tad bhava prāptyupaya jīṇasayam satyam sastra
yuktyapekṣa syat sastra-vidhinaiva sastra-pratipadita yuktyaiva ca tat prādarsanat nanyathā yathā
dugdhadīṣhu lobhe sati katham me dugdhadikam bhaved iti tad upaya jīṇasayam tad abhijñapta
jāna kṛtopadeśa vakyapekṣa syat tatas ca gam kṛinatu bhavan ityadi tad upadeśa vakyad eva
gavanayanatad ghaṣa pradāna tad dōhana prakaraṇādikam tata eva śikṣheṇ na tu svataḥ (rvc 1.7)

“Now, when the aforementioned greedy devotees become inquisitive about attaining their desired feelings, we see that they depend on scriptures and logic. The attainment of the desired feelings is taught through scriptural injunctions and scriptural logic, not in any other way. Just as when greed for milk awakens, what is the means for acquiring it? One desires to know the means, and at that time he relies on the instructions of a trusted person on the means for acquiring milk. He will say, ‘You should purchase a cow’, and so forth, instructing how to bring a cow, how to feed her with grass, and how to milk her. One cannot gain knowledge independently, without being instructed.”

Thus one must depend on the scriptures while pursuing the desired goal.

There is no substantial difference between the external practice of vaidhi-bhakti and rāgānuga-bhakti; the difference lies in motivation. When one engages externally in the various aspects of vaidhi-bhakti with greed for attaining Vraja-bhava as his driving force, such practice is called rāgānuga-bhakti sādhana.

Reflections on bhakti-tattva

In his Bhakti-rasamrita-sindhu, Sri Rupa Gosvami has delineated the 64 principle aspects of devotion in practice. In the end, he repeats five of them, declaring these five to be eminent among all the practices of devotion.

sraddha viseshatah pritiḥ śrī-mūrter anghri-sevane
śrīmad-bhagavatārthanam asvado rasikāḥ saha
sajatiyasaye snigdhe sadhau sangah svato vare
nama-sankīrtanam śrīman-mathura-mandale sthitiḥ
anganam pañcakasyasya purva-vilikhitasya ca
nikhila-sraishṭhya-bodhaya punar apy atra kīrtanam
(brs 1.2.90-92)

- “1. Serving the lotus feet of the Deity with faith and particular loving disposition
2. Relishing the taste of the meanings of the Bhagavata with those who are expert in tasting the moods of loving rapture
3. Associating with saints who have similar inclinations, who are soft-hearted and affectionately disposed towards oneself, and who are more advanced than one is
4. Engaging in congregational chanting of the holy names
5. Residing in the area of Mathura-mandala (the land of Vraja).

These aforementioned five limbs are understood as the essence of everything, and therefore they are glorified again.”

Internal practices

The inner, contemplative practices of raganuga-bhakti are divided into two categories, namely spontaneous (svarasiki) and static (mantramayi).

tatra nana-līla-pravaha-rupataya svarasiki gangeva
ekaika-līlatmataya mantropasana-mayī tu labdhā-tat-sambhava-hrada-srenir iva jñeya (Kṛṣṇa-sandarbhā 153)

“Spontaneous pastimes are like the flow of the Ganges, as there are many different pastimes that flow into one another continuously.

The static pastimes are compared to a lake created by the Ganges in which one particular pastime is concentrated upon. This is generally meditated upon at the time of mantra worship, hence the name mantramayi.”

The contemplation on the spontaneous pastimes refers to contemplating on the eight-fold daily pastimes (aṣṭakaliya-līla) of Śrī Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in Vraja.

The outline of these pastimes is mentioned in the Govinda-līlamṛitam of Śrī Kṛṣṇa Das Kavirāja:

kunjad goṣṭham nisante praviśati kurute dohaṇannasanādyam
pratāha sayam ca līlaṁ viharati sakhibhiḥ sangave carayan gah
madhyahne catha naktam vilasati vipine rādhayaddhapaṛaḥne
goṣṭham yati pradōṣhe ramayati suhṛido yaḥ sa kṛṣṇo ‘vatan naḥ (1.4)

Reflections on bhakti-tattva

“At the end of the night, the Lord returns home from the forest; in the morning, he milks the cows and takes his meal. In the forenoon, he takes the cows to pasture and at noon meets with Srimati Radharani at Radha Kunda. In the afternoon, he returns to Nandagrama with the cows and cowherd boys, enjoying different pastimes with them through the evening. In the later evening he takes a meal and then goes off to meet with Radha in the forest. May Lord Kṛṣṇa, whose daily activities are such, be kind and deliver us all.”

However, inner participation in the eight-fold daily pastimes necessitates a considerable absorption in one’s internally conceived siddha-form, which is suitable for direct service of Sri Radha and Krishna, as well as acquaintance with the scenery of the pastime along with its numerous characters. Therefore, the practitioners first focus their attention on static meditation.

A classical depiction of such meditation is to be found in the invocation of the Caitanya Caritamrita:

divya-vrindaranya-kalpa-drumadhah
srimad-ratnagara-simhasana-sthau
srimad-radha-srila-govinda-devau
preshtalibhih sevyamanau smarami
(cc 1.1.16)

“I meditate on Sri Radha and Srila Govinda Deva, who are seated on a beautiful throne in a jewelled palace under the shade of the desire trees of Vrindavana, surrounded by many dear friends and handmaids who eagerly serve them.”

Such meeting takes place at yogapitha, “the seat of union”. Sri Radha and Krishna, along with their associates, assemble thrice daily on the platform of yogapitha to bless the practicing devotee and to accept his service. The morning-time meeting takes place at Gupta-kunda near Nandisvara, the mid-day meeting takes place in Madana-sukhada-kunja at Radha Kunda, and the nocturnal meeting takes place in a jewelled temple of the Maha-yogapitha and Govinda-sthali. The golden platform of yogapitha is shaped like an eight-petaled lotus. Sri Radha and Krishna are surrounded by Their confidantes, namely the eight sakhis (girl-friends), who are located on the outer part of the inner eight petals of the lotus, the eight manjaris (maidservants) who are located on the inner part of the inner eight petals of the lotus, and the eight additional sakhis located on the eight outer petals of the lotus.

Following his guru who has assumed a form similar to the confidantes of the Divine Couple, the aspirant renders various services to everyone in his own internal guru-given form of a maidservant.

Sri Narottama Das Thakura has written a captivating poem depicting the scenery of the yogapitha.

vrindavana ramya-sthan, divya-cintamani-dham
ratana-mandira manohar
avrita kalindi-nire, raja-hamsa keli kare
tahe sobhe kanaka kamal
tara madhye hema pith, ashta-dalete veshtita
ashta-dale pradhana nayika
tara madhye ratnasane, basiyachen dui-jane
syama-sange sundari radhika
o riupa lavanya-rasi, amiya padiche khasi

Reflections on bhakti-tattva

hasya parihasa sambhashane
narottama-dasa kay, nitya-lila sukha-may
sadai sphuruk mora mane
(Prarthana)

“What an enjoyable place, this Vrindavana, the abode of celestial touchstone! There is a delightful jewelled temple surrounded by the Yamuna River, which is filled with playing swans and golden lotus flowers.

In one such large golden lotus is a podium surrounded by eight large petals in which stand the chief girlfriends of Radha. In the very centre is a jewel-bedecked throne upon which the beautiful Radharani is seated in the company of the blackish and enchanting Sri Krsna.

Their forms are like a mountain of loveliness from which nectar is tumbling like waterfalls. They laugh and exchange joking conversation.

Narottama Dasa says: “The eternal pastimes of the Lord are full of happiness; may they always be manifest in my mind!”

Sri Caitanya and Sri-Sri Radha-Krishna

The confidential pastimes of Sri Radha and Krishna are far removed from the residents of the mundane realm. Nevertheless, Sri Krishna, accepting the feelings and lustre of Sri Radha, descended into this world to relish the nectarine taste of His own service and to spread devotion on the path of raga to the mankind. In his kindness, He broke open the dam of divine love, providing an easy gateway for the present-day practitioners to walk through into the kingdom of pastimes.

Therefore it is customary in the Gaudiya Vaishnava tradition to first engage in remembering the daily pastimes of Sri Caitanya, thereafter moving into the realm of Vraja in the wake of the natural flow of His feelings.

evam sri-caitanya-devam nishevya siddha-dehena sri-krishna-sevagam vidadhyat
(Paddhati of Dhyana-candra, 78)

“Having served Sri Caitanya Deva, one should engage in the service of Sri Krishna in one’s siddha-form.”

Sri Visvanatha Cakravarti echoes the same in his Sriman Mahaprabhu Ashtakaliya-lila Smarana-mangala-stotram:

sri-gauranga-vidhoh sva-dhamani navadvipe ’shta-kalodbhavam
bhavyam bhavya-janena gokula-vidhor lila-smriter aditah (11)

“The pastimes of the moonlike Sri Gauranga are manifest in His own abode Navadvipa during the eight phases of the day. They should be meditated upon prior to the remembrance of the pastimes of the moon of Gokula.”

The eight-fold daily pastimes of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu are summarized as follows:

ratryante sayanotthitah sura-sarit snato babhau yah prage
purvahne sva-ganair-lasaty upavane tair bhati madhyahnike
yah puryam aparahnake nija-grihe sayam grihe ’thangane
srivasasya nisa-mukhe nisi vasan gaurah sa no rakshatu (ibid. 2)

Reflections on bhakti-tattva

“At the end of the night, He arises from His sleep; in the morning He takes bath in Ganges, the river of the gods. In the forenoon and mid-day, He exhibits many beautiful pastimes with His devotees in the gardens. In the afternoon, he roams about in the village; in the evening he returns to His home. In the late evening and throughout the night, He stays in the courtyard of Srivasa; may this Gauranga Mahaprabhu protect me!”

These jubilant pastimes of Sri Caitanya are like an ocean from which countless streams of Sri Krishna’s pastimes flow in the wake of His moods.

krishna-lilamrita-sar, yara sata-sata dhar
dasa-dig bahe yaha haite
se caitanya-lila hay, sarovara akshay
mano-hamsa caraha tahate (cc 2.25.271)

“Krishna’s actions are the ultimate nectar of the gods; their hundreds and hundreds of currents stream in every direction. Send the swan of your mind to swim on the lake of Caitanya, the fathomless spring from which they arise.”

Therefore, one’s devotion for Sri Radha and Krishna grows in proportion to one’s devotion to Sri Caitanya.

yatha yatha gaura-padaravinde vindeta bhaktim krita-punya-rasih tatha tathotsarpati hridy
akasmad radha-padambhoja-sudhambu-rasih (Caitanya-candramrita 89)

“One who has accumulated a great deal of merit, will find that as his devotion to Caitanya’s lotus feet increases, the ocean of nectar that is the lotus feet of Radha manifests itself suddenly in his heart.”

While the service of the lotus feet of Sri Radha and Krishna may be far removed from the residents of this world, if one is swept away by the waves of the loving rapture of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, he will easily be tossed to the farther shore of the ocean of Yugala-seva.

gaura-prema-rasarnave, se tarange jeba dube
se radha-madhava-antaranga (Prarthana)

“He who dives into the waves of the ocean of the rapturous mellows of Gaura’s love will become a confidential associate of Sri Radha and Madhava.”

Let, therefore, Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu reign victorious in the hearts of the practising devotees who aspire to dedicate their lives at the feet of Sri Radha and Govinda!

5. The glorious nature of bhakti

Many devotees fear that they are not “pure” enough to practice bhakti, what to speak of raganuga-bhakti. But alas, there is HOPE!

In Sripad Vishvanatha Cakravartipada’s “Madhurya Kadambini”, we find the following wonderful paragraph with the beautiful commentary of Sri Srimat Ananta das Babaji.

bhaktes tu 'vikriditam vrajavadhubhiih' ityadau—
bhaktim param bhagavati pratilabhya kamam hrid rogam asvapahinotyacirena dhirah
(bhag. 10.33.39)

Reflections on bhakti-tattva

ityatra 'ktva' pratyayena hrid rogavatyevadhikarini paramaya api tasyah prathamam eva pravesas tatas tayaiva parama svatantraya kamadinam apagamas ca. tesham kadacit sattve'pi 'api cet suduracaro bhajate mam' iti 'badhyamano'pi mad bhakta' ityadibhis ca tadvatam na kvapi sastreshu ninda leso'pi. ajamilasya bhaktatvam vishnudutair nirupitam. 'sanketa bhagavannama putra snehanushangajam ityadi drishtya tad abhasavatam apyajamiladinam bhaktatvam sarvaih sangitam eva' tad evam karma yogadinam antah karana suddhi dravya desa suddhyadayah sadhakas tad vaigunyadayo badhaka bhaktis tu prana dayinyeveti. sarvatha paratantryam eva tesham. nahi svatantrah kenapi sadhyante badhyante veti.

TRANSLATION:

Although lust is also considered a fault on the path of bhakti, one can still enter the devotional path, despite being still afflicted by lust and other material desires.

Srimad-Bhagavata (10.33.39) says:

“A person who faithfully hears or describes the Lord’s pastimes of rasa-lila with the gopis of Vraja attains supreme devotion of the Lord. He quickly becomes steady and conquers over the senses, giving up lust, the disease of the heart.”

In this text “after attaining supreme devotion” is an unfinished act showing that bhakti can be attained even though one has lusty desires. This shows the most independent nature and power of bhakti to destroy lusty desires. Sometimes lusty desires exist even while practicing devotion. From verses like,

“If the most sinful person worships Me exclusively...” and “Though my devotee is afflicted by lusty desires...” it is clear that though lusty desires may exist in a devotee, still he is not condemned even slightly.

The messengers of Vishnu judged Ajamila as a devotee. From sastric evidence it is seen, “Ajamila uttered the name of the Lord, though he was calling his son’s name out of affection.” Uttering of the Lord’s name by Ajamila was just an abhasa (glimpse). He did not chant the Lord’s name, but merely used it to call his own son named Narayana. Still, he is glorified as a devotee by all. With karma-yoga and jnana-yoga, perfection depends on purity of heart, materials, place, and so on. Purity of all these factors assists in attaining the fruits of karma and jnana.

Their lack obstructs the attainment of their respective fruits.

Bhakti, however, infuses life in them. Karma, jnana, and yoga are always dependent on bhakti, and they are never independent. They are nourished by certain factors and obstructed by others.

Piyusha-kana-explanation (commentary):

Sacrifices performed by karmis are inhibited even by minor faults, and may give opposite results. As long as lusty desires exist, jnana and yoga practice is not possible. By the slightest unworthy acts, jnanis and yogis are condemned, and their eventual falldown from their paths is inevitable. But under the shelter of bhakti, most pure and autonomous, a devotee is never condemned though some sinful activities may be observed in him. Bhakti bestows her mercy and finally gives him divine prema. The author is establishing this fact by sastric evidence. In Srimad-Bhagavata (10.33.39) while narrating the rasa-lila, the crest jewel of all pastimes, Sukadeva Muni describes the most powerful glories of devotion —

vikriditam vrajavadhubhir idam ca vishnoh sraddhanvito'nusrinuyad atha varnayed yah bhaktim param bhagavati pratilabhya kamam hrid rogam asvapahinotyacirena dhirah

Reflections on bhakti-tattva

"Whoever faithfully hears and narrates the loving pastimes of Sri Krishna with the ladies of Vraja will attain the topmost devotion for the Lord, will swiftly become grave and give up the heart's disease of lust."

In this verse the saying 'he attains the highest devotion to the Lord' is an *asamapika kriya* or unfinished act, whereas the words *kamam hrid rogam asvapahinoti*, 'he will swiftly give up the heart's disease of lust' is a *samapika kriya* or a completed act.

Thus it is established that while lust is not yet conquered the symptoms of topmost loving devotion are already present, and that later, by the force of the most powerful and independent bhakti, the heart's disease of lust will be destroyed.

In the Vaishnava-toshani commentary on this verse it is explained "*atra tu hrid rogapahanat purvam eva parama bhakti praptih tasmāt parama balavad evedam sadhanam iti bhavah*" that the common principle is that first lusty and other material desires are destroyed, and then one attains *prema-bhakti*.

Here, however, the attainment of *prema-bhakti* is described, though lusty desires still exist. This indicates that hearing or describing the *rasa-lila* is a very powerful process of devotion by which one quickly attains *prema-bhakti*.

The Gosvamis explain here that the word *para- bhakti* refers to the most exalted *prema-bhakti*, existing in the Vraja gopis.

What to speak of the existence of lust, even a very sinful person can perform bhakti and still he is not condemned. Evidence is given in the Gita (9.30):

api cet suduracaro bhajate mam ananya-bhak sadhur eva sa mantavyah samyag vyavasito hi sah

Sri Krishna says,

- "O Arjuna! If a person with his heart exclusively absorbed in worshipping Me commits very sinful acts, he is still considered a sadhu, because his efforts in devotion are commendable."

The essence of the Sarartha-Varshini-commentary of this sloka by Sri Visvanatha Cakravartipada is as follows:

"Affection of the Lord for His devotees is very natural. The devotion of a devotee is never destroyed though he commits very sinful acts. Rather, the Lord elevates him.

To express this idea in this verse, the Lord describes the *ananya-bhaktas*, those bhaktas solely and wholeheartedly engaged in devotion. That means they do not worship any other gods, taking shelter of karma, jnana or any other path except bhakti, and desire nothing other than Krishna.

If such a devotee, by the effect of some previous sinful habits, commits violence, has illicit sex, or steals, still he must be considered as sadhu. The word *mantavya* in the imperative case means one must consider him as a sadhu. As this is a direct order of the Lord, non-acceptance of His order is offensive. There is hence no space for doubts as to whether or how one can be a sadhu and yet commit such sinful acts.

One may ask:

"Can a person not be partially considered a sadhu to the extent to which he is doing bhajana, while his sinful acts make him partially condemned as a sinner?" The words *sadhur eva*, are given here, however, *eva* meaning that he should not be partially considered as sadhu, but in all respects. He is rightly situated and sincerely believes that, "I will never give up the exclusive

Reflections on bhakti-tattva

devotion of the Lord, though I have to go to hell or take an animal life for my sinful acts, which are difficult to give up.”

The conclusion here is that this Gita-verse glorifies ananya-bhakti, not that it condones sinful acts. Since there is generally no possibility of the existence of evil desires within the heart of an ananya-bhakta, the word *api* is used to indicate that 'if somehow or other they would exist'. If such a devotee accidentally commits sinful acts due to some serious evil *samskaras* of his previous births or by the effect of evil association, they cannot exist for long by the immense power of Bhakti-devi.

Bhakti by its presence burns the heart of a devotee in the fire of repentance and very soon purifies it. Therefore the Lord proclaims in the next verse (9.31):

kshipram bhavati dharmatma sasvac-chantim nigacchati kaunteya pratijanihi na me bhaktah pranasyati

"O Arjuna! Such a devotee being firmly fixed in devotion very soon attains eternal peace and becomes saintly. Therefore declare loudly that My devotee never perishes."

Persons not considering the link between these two verses misunderstand their essence. They deliberately commit sinful acts on the strength of the verse *api cet suduracaro*, with no repentance for their acts.

They cannot be considered *sadhus* at all; rather, they are guilty of the grave offense of committing sinful activities on the strength of chanting the holy name.

One should know that if one in a state of repentance, giving up all sinful activities, is constantly engaged in *nama-sankirtana*, then gradually the holy name becomes pleased and he again attains the stage of a *sadhu*, otherwise not.

In *jnana-yoga*, however, if a *jnani* commits even a slight unworthy act, he is condemned and is not considered knowledgeable.

The Bhagavata (11.18.40) says:

yas tvasamyata shad vargah pracandendriya-sarathih jnana vairagya rahitas tri dandam upajivati

“A *sannyasi* following the path of *jnana* with uncontrolled mind and senses is controlled by the intellect acting as a chariot driver of the powerful senses. He accepts the staff of renunciation just for his own livelihood, but he is devoid of *jnana* and *vairagya*.”

On the other hand, though a devotee may commit serious evil acts, neither he nor his devotion is condemned.” The author further clarifies this fact with another verse from the Bhagavata (11.14.18):

badhyamano’pi mad-bhakto vishayair ajitendriyah prayah pragalbhaya bhaktya vishayair nabhibhuyate

"O Uddhava! By his powerful devotion, My devotee who has not fully controlled his senses is not bewildered by sense objects."

Reflections on bhakti-tattva

To say nothing of the power of full devotion, a sinful person who has just a glimpse of bhakti (bhaktyabhāsa) is considered to be a devotee.

The messengers of Lord Vishnu considered Ajamila to be a devotee.

"Ajamila accidentally uttered the Lord's name, affectionately calling his son named Narayana, not the Lord."

On the basis of this scriptural statement it can be concluded that Ajamila was considered a devotee simply by accidentally chanting the name of the Lord. Everyone glorifies him as such. Now it can be concluded that in the practice of karma, jnana, and yoga, certain factors help in attaining perfection while others become obstacles.

For instance, purity of heart is necessary for perfection in jnana and the presence of lust is an obstacle in its practice. That practice that depends on the help of other factors and is obstructed by an obstacle cannot be considered as independent.

With most powerful bhakti, purity of heart is not necessary, since chanting and hearing is possible even in impure stages of the heart.

Moreover, the existence of lusty desires does not obstruct the practice of bhakti. Therefore, undoubtedly the path of devotion is quite independent of other paths and practices. Bhakti, being so independent, is neither nourished nor obstructed by any other process.

(taken from "Madhurya Kadambini" by Sripad Vishvanath Cakravarti Thakur, commentaries by Srila Ananta das Babaji, English translation by Advaita das)

6. The final destination (prayojana-tattva)

Understanding the highest goal is called "prayojana-tattva".

The highest goal in bhakti-yoga, prayojana-tattva, is given to us by the mercy of Sri Caitanya Mahāprabhu.

When we know our true self and when we love our true self, we can understand the way or the path we have to follow. Srila Sanātana Goswami tells us who we really are and about our eternal relationship with Sri Sri Rādhā Kṛṣṇa and Srila Rupa Goswami shows us the way to reach our goal.

The goal is to love Sri Sri Rādhā Kṛṣṇa in a very special way. When we want to love Kṛṣṇa, we have to follow those who have the topmost love for Him. Our goal is the highest love. So we should find out who has the highest love for Kṛṣṇa.

In Srila Sanātana Goswami's work "Bṛihad Bhagavatamṛta", we will find out who has the highest love for Kṛṣṇa. Uddhava, Kṛṣṇa's dearest friend, prays that he can take birth as a blade of grass in Vrindavana so that the feet of the gopis can touch his head permanently.

When Uddhava saw Srimatī Rādhārāṇī talking to the bumble bee in the forest of Vrindavana, he realized that Srimatī Rādhārāṇī's love for Kṛṣṇa is the zenith, the highest reachable point, on the scale of pure love for the Lord. Nobody has a deeper love than Srimatī Rādhārāṇī.

We are very fortunate that Sri Caitanya opened up the treasure box of this most astonishing love. He freely distributed that amorous love of the gopis of Vrindavana. If we follow his teachings, written down by his most intimate followers, we too can realize the love of the gopis of Vrindavana. We only have to take shelter at those who have this highest love in their hearts. We have to take shelter at the Lotus Feet of Srimatī Rādhārāṇī. She is compassion personified and She is our only shelter.

Srimatī Rādhārāṇī is our shelter (ashraya) and love of Kṛṣṇa (prema-bhakti) is our goal (vishaya).

Reflections on bhakti-tattva

We do this by taking shelter of our Sri Gurudeva, who is very near and dear to Srimati Radharani. Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu instructed **Srila Raghunatha das Goswami** to write about this subject, about the highest love imaginable.

He wrote many books, but his final work **“Sri Vilapa-kusumanjali (A flower-bouquet of lamentations)”** deals with the most intimate loving service a spiritual soul (jiva) can possibly perform: the loving service to Srimati Radharani, the soul identifying herself as a very intimate ladyfriend of Srimati Radharani.

This is the gift of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu and by humbly following his teachings and the teachings of his acaryas under the guidance (anugatyā) of a loving Sri Gurudeva, we all can realize this gift and live forever happily in the kingdom of Radha-dasyam (service to Srimati Radharani).

Srila Raghunatha das Goswami prays:

tvam gopika vrisharaves tanayantike 'se
sevadhikarini guro nija-pada-padme
dasyam pradaya kuru mam vraja-kanane
shri- radhanghri-sevana-rase sukhinim sukhabdhau

“O beloved spiritual master, you are always in the presence of the cowherd girl Radha, the daughter of King Vrishabhanu. Please award me the loving service to your lotus-like feet, which are the proprietors of devotional service. Please place me in the ocean of joy by bestowing upon me the happiness in the mellows of service to the feet of Sri Radha in the groves of Vraja Dhama.”

At the moment of initiation, the jiva-soul receives the seed of bhakti. From this moment on, the jiva-soul is about to embark on a truly fantastic journey. At the end, pure love awaits and a perfect spiritual body. It is called the siddha-deha.

When the jiva-soul receives the diksha-mantras, it is only a question of time until he realizes his God-given eternal form (siddha-deha or siddha-svarupa).

Now, the eternal FORM is not in the heart of the jiva-soul, although many still claim this misunderstanding. The only thing that is in the heart of the jiva-soul, who is the tatastha-sakti, is the potency to receive bhakti and to attain a spiritual body in Goloka Vrindavana.

Right now, we identify with our material body, but when we reach the stage of asakti or bhavaa, we are identifying truly with our eternal body.

This is the amazing thing. The jiva-soul, the spiritual drop of consciousness is able to “pervade” a material body and when perfected, it is able by the mercy of BHAKTI (Gurudeva and Radhika) to “pervade” a spiritual body, which is “provided” by Krishna.

Diksha-initiation is THE crucial moment and bhakti flows down from Gurudeva to Gurudeva.

My beloved Gurudeva writes:

„What do we mean by diksha or initiation?

In his Bhakti-Sandarbha (283), Srimat Jiva Goswamipad quotes the shastra to describe the greatness of initiation- “The acharyas who know the truth define ‘diksha’ as that which bestows divine knowledge and destroys all sins.”

Sri Jivapad adds: “Here ‘divine knowledge’ means the knowledge about the Lord’s svarup which lies within the mantra, along with special knowledge about our relationship with the Lord.”

Reflections on bhakti-tattva

“The svarup of the living entity is that he is Krishna’s eternal servant. He is Krishna’s tatastha shakti and so he is both different and non-different from Him.”

– (C.C.)

Although we are Sri Krishna’s eternal servant, we have been averse to the Lord since time infinite. Hence ignorance and illusion have gripped us.

Since we are under such illusion we identify with our false body, senses and mind. We forget our own svarup and call this false body “I”.

We forget our eternal relationship with Sri Hari and become bound to spouse, children and money.

“The living being has forgotten that he is Sri Krishna’s eternal servant, and due to that fault maya has tied a noose round his neck.”

– (C.C.)

In this way, although we are originally transcendental, we are bound by maya and wander around in the miserable material world, reincarnating from one species to the other. Thus we suffer the pain of birth, disease, old age and death. Sri Gurudev mercifully cuts the bondage of maya and breathes transcendental energy into our heart. Thus he awakens awareness in us – about who we are and our eternal and special relationship with Sri Hari - this is diksha.

Then again, the mantra is non-different from the Lord. By the grace of the pure devotees and the Spiritual Master, who are the condensed form of Sri Hari’s mercy, the Lord enters the disciple’s heart in the form of mantra to make his body, mind and life-air transcendently suitable for serving the Lord. Sriman-Mahaprabhu has said with His holy lips-

“At the time of initiation the devotee surrenders himself and at that time Sri Krishna makes him His own. The Lord then makes the devotee’s body transcendental and in this transcendental body the devotee serves His lotus feet.”

– (C. C.)”

(Sri Srimat Ananta das Babaji)

When Sri Gurudeva sees a disciple fit and qualified, he will reveal to him or her (the soul is anyway female!) the transcendental body, suitable to the jiva-soul’s mood. Gurudeva goes into deep meditation and meets with a form of Krishna, called the samasthi-Guru. This form of Krishna reveals to Sri Gurudeva the spiritual body with everything to it (name, form, age...in short: ekadasa-bhava), which is “waiting there” for the jiva-soul.

By the power of pure bhakti, the heart of the jiva-soul becomes purer and purer and finally the jiva-soul is able to “see” its eternal form, the siddha-deha. Again, we can listen to Sri Srimat Ananta das Babaji:

What is the siddha-deha?

‘Siddha-deha’ means the body that our Spiritual Master gives us and we meditate on it. Srimat Jiva Goswamipad says – ‘siddha deha’ is the body that is worthy of serving Sri Krishna.

Srila Vishwanath Chakravartipad has said – ‘siddha-deha’ is the body that is worthy of serving Sri Sri Radha-Krishna in reality (sakshat seva). By using the word ‘sakshat’ he is indicating that when a jiva-soul meditates on the siddha-deha, then Sri Krishna accepts the seva in truth.

In Raganuga-bhakti when a jiva-soul has not reached the stage of rati (passion), then he deliberately meditates that he is serving the Divine Couple with siddha-deha; however when a jiva-soul attains the level of rati, he identifies naturally with his siddha-deha.

The siddha-deha that the jiva-soul meditates on is not imaginary. It is the supreme truth, eternal, blissful and conscious. Some people think that although the soul is originally spiritual, it is infinitesimally small; hence the jiva-soul has to meditate upon an imaginary body.

He pleases Sri Bhagavan by his sadhana and then following the rule – “yadrishi bhavaana yasya siddhirbhavaati tadrishi”

Reflections on bhakti-tattva

– Sri Bhagavan converts the jiva-soul's soul into His associate. So the message is that, although later on the siddha-deha does exist (as Sri Bhagavan's associate), just now it is imaginary. This means, we are meditating on a make-believe image. This is not a Vaishnava-conclusion.

The siddha-deha of the jiva-soul is a beautiful treasure of the eternal divine abode and it is permanent. All the siddha-dehas are conscious, blissful and is in the mode of especially pure goodness. We see in Srimad-Bhagavatam – “*vasanti yatra purushah sarve vaikuntha-murtayah.*”

"Innumerable bodies are present in the divine Vaikuntha. They are parts of Sri Bhagavan's effulgence and are the precious and beautiful treasure of the Holy Abode."

Sri Gurudev is Sri Bhagavan's intense compassion personified. He knows our siddha-deha by the power of his meditation. Then he reveals to us our siddha-deha. We should meditate on this divine body and think "I am this divine body". Such meditation is called "meditating on siddha-deha".

So we should note that our sadhana does NOT create the siddha-deha. It is already there. When we accomplish success in bhakti and we become worthy of serving Sri Bhagavan in reality, we become blessed and get the opportunity to serve the Divine Couple in our siddha-deha. Hence it is imperative that we follow the Siddha-pranali received in the Guru-parampara and perform sadhana accordingly. We should meditate on that siddha-deha which we receive in Sri Guruparampara.

And that which Sri Gurudev has given us.

Lord Sadashiva has instructed us in Sri Sanatkumar-Sambhita how to meditate:

"The Brajasundaris who are in parakiya-bhava, give immense pleasure to their Beloved Sri Krishna according to their bhava. Similarly, you too consider yourself as a Gopa-maiden and serve in subordination to their bhava. You are a maidservant amongst the Gopa-damsels. How will you meditate on this self? You will think – 'I am an extremely attractive maiden brimming with beauty, youth and sensuousness. I am a Gopa-girl and experienced in many arts regarding Sri Krishna's seva. I am Srimati Radharani's eternal companion and follower.' Your loving seva lies in uniting Srimati Radharani with Sri Krishna and your happiness lies therein. If Sri Krishna ever begs you for love-making, you will refuse, since you are Sri Radha's maidservant and you feel joy in making her happy. In this manner you will serve Srimati Radharani eternally and love Her more than Sri Krishna. You will serve Her during all eight parts of the day and unite Her with Sri Krishna. Thus you will submerge in the joy of seva. You will serve right from the Brahma-muhurta till the end of the night."

Those of us who cannot see the siddha-deha clearly, or do lila-smaran conspicuously – rather they even find it laborious – it is better if they are not over-enthusiastic about meditating on siddha-deha and practicing lila-smaran. It is better if they hear from the holy lips of the great devotees about the divine pastimes. Then they should read lots about the glory of Gopi-bhava, repeat them and say lalasamayi prayers that crave for such bhava. They should try to practice very little Gopi-bhava in the form of remembering and thinking. If they perform bhajana like this, then gradually they will be able to meditate nicely on their siddha-deha and they will be qualified to meditate on the pastimes of the Divine Couple. They will also be able to meditate on the loving seva of the Divine Couple in the correct manner. “

(Sri Srimat Ananta das Babaji)

In the book of Sri Srimat Kunja Bihari das Babaji, Manjari Svarupa Nirupana, we find the following wonderful explanation:

Reflections on bhakti-tattva

About the spiritual body

In the tenth section of the Priti-sandarbha, Jiva Goswami writes:

“In the spiritual world, the Supreme Lord has unlimited spiritual forms, all are expansions of himself illuminating that world. With each one of those forms, the Lord enjoys pastimes with a single individual liberated soul.”

These liberated souls therefore have spiritual bodies like that of the Lord. In the Lord’s abode, there are an unlimited number of forms, all suitable for rendering service to him. Every one of those forms is non-different from him, being expanded from his effulgence; each one is eternal, full of consciousness and bliss. They are the crowning central jewels of the spiritual world—its very life.

These unlimited spiritual bodies are the perfected forms of the liberated souls which are awarded to an individual, according to his taste, when he reaches the state of absolute liberation. This state is called attainment of the spiritual body. All these spiritual bodies are eternal for they exist even before the liberated souls enter them and will continue to exist ever afterward. However, prior to the entry of the liberated soul they are in an inactive state.

As all of the unlimited souls are servants of the Lord, each one of them has a spiritual body in the Lord’s abode just suitable for rendering service to the Lord. When an individual becomes qualified for direct service to the Lord by the grace of the Goddess of Devotion, then the Supreme Lord awards him that spiritual body.

A good friend of mine has compiled a variety of statements about the principle of siddha-pranali:

“The system of spiritual practices, followed by the Gaudiya Vaishnava-school, call for the practitioner to receive siddha-pranali from his spiritual master. A siddha-pranali consists of the guru-pranali, a channel of gurus, in their siddha-forms (manjari-svarūpas). One’s own guru, his guru, and the subsequent gurus traced back to the associates of Sri Chaitanya Mahāprabhu form the guru-pranali, or guru-parampara.

In due course of time, a guru in the Gaudiya Vaishnava sampradaya reveals the details of his own siddha-form, of the siddha-forms of the preceding gurus, and of the siddha-form of the sadhaka to the qualified practitioner.

This is popularly called the giving of siddhapranali, as the initiate becomes the last link in a channel of manjaris preserved over the generations from a guru to a disciple.

The concept of siddha-rūpa in the realm of Gaudiya-theology makes its famous appearance in Sri Rupa Goswami’s Bhakti-rasamrita-sindhu, in a section where the practice of raganuga-bhakti-sadhana is explained.

*seva sadhaka-rūpena siddha-rūpena catra hi
tad-bhava lipsuna karya vraja-lokanusaratah
- BRS 1.2.295*

“One should serve both in his present sadhaka-form and in his siddha-form, following in the wake of the residents of Vraja, desiring to have feelings similar to theirs.”

Or as Sri Jiva Goswami has explained:

*kecid ashtadasakshara-dhyānam go-dohana-samaya-vamsi-vadya-samakṛishṭa-tattat-sarvamayātvēna bhavayanti
yatha caikē tadrisam upasanam sakṣhad vrajajana-viśeshayaiva mahyam sri-guru-caranair mad-abhisṭa-viśeṣa-
siddhy-artham upadisṭam bhavayami*

- Bhakti-sandarbha 312

“Some, while remembering the eighteen-syllable mantra, meditate on the pastimes of tending cows and playing flute, becoming attracted and absorbed in them. In such upasana (worship), in order to attain my specifically desired perfection, I should meditate on that very form of a resident of Vraja my revered guru has instructed me in.”

Reflections on bhakti-tattva

This manner of atma-dhyana (self-meditation) is further explained in the Sanat-kumarSambhita, as cited by Srila Thakura Mahasaya in his Prema-bhakti-candrika:

*sakbinam sangini-rupam atmanam vasanamayim
ajna-seva-param tat-tad-rupalankara-bhushitam
- Prema Bbhakti Chandrika verse 58*

"One should meditate on oneself in a form that is a female associate of the sakhis, engaged in services on their command, decorated by Her ornaments."

Sri Visvanatha Cakravartipada comments in his tika as follows:

*sakbinam sri-lalita-sri-rupa-manjary-adinam sangini-rupam atmanam dhyayed iti seshah kimbhutam? ajna-seva-param ajnaya tasam anumatya seva-param sri-riadha-madhavayor iti seshah punah kimbhutam? tat-tad-rupalankarabhushitam suprasiddha-sri-krishna-manohara-rupena sri-radhikanirmalyalankarena bhushitam nirmalya-malya-vasana-bharanas tu dasya ity ukteb punah kimbhutam? vasanamayim cintamayim iksbate cintamayam etam isvaram ity adivat
- verse58*

"One should think of himself as a female associate of sakhis such as Sri Lalita, Sri Rupa Manjari and others. In which way? Ajna-sevaram - Serving Sri Radha-Madhava with their consent and according to their orders. And again, in which way? Tat-tad rupalankara bhushitam - Decorated with an exquisite form captivating the mind of Sri Krishna and the left-over ornaments of Sri Radhika; in service, ornamented with the left-over flower garlands. Thus it is said. And again, in which way? Vasanamayim - Seeing oneself in contemplation in this capacity; and so forth.

In the spiritual realm there are infinite siddha-rupas, each reserved for one individual jiva.

*vaikunthasya bhagavato jyotir-amsa-bhuta vaikuntha-loka-sobha-rupa ya ananta murtayas tatra vartante, tasam ekaya saba muktasyaikasya murtir bhagavata kriyata iti vaikuntasya murtir iva murtir yesham ity uktam
- Pritisandarbhā 10*

Literal translation:

The Lord of Vaikuntha (or "the Lord known as Vaikuntha") (vaikunthasya bhagavato) there has (tatra vartante) infinite spiritual forms (ananta murtayas) which come out of a fragment of his light (jyotir-amṣa-bhuta) and which beautify the Vaikuntha world (or are the ornament of the people in Vaikuntha (vaikuntha-loka-sobha-rupa). With one of those forms (tasam ekaya saba), a form of a single liberated soul (muktasyaikasya murtir) is created by the Lord (bhagavata kriyate). Thus (iti) it is said (ity uktam) "whose form is like Vaikuntha's form."

Meaning:

"In the spiritual world, the Supreme Lord has unlimited spiritual forms; they all are expansions of Himself illuminating that world. With each one of those forms, the Lord enjoys pastimes with a single individual liberated soul."

Reflections on bhakti-tattva

The siddha-deba one longs to attain is not a figment of imagination; it is one among the infinite siddha-rupas in the spiritual realm. In fact, beyond being expansions of bhagavanthe sakhi-gana with their various svabhavas are expansions of Sri Radha. As in the Chaitanya Caritamrita:

*akara svabhava-bhede vraja-devi-gana
kaya-vyuha-rupa tanra rasera karana
- CC 1.1.79*

“The multitude of Vraja-gopis have various natures (svabhava). They are the forms of Her bodily expansions (kaya-vyuha-rupa) and Her instruments for creating rasa.”

The one desirous for service in the wake of the sakhis will certainly be granted an appropriate form for such service.

*vraja-lokera kona bhava lana yei bhaje
bhava-yogya deha pana krishna paya vraje
- CC2.8.122*

“Whoever accepts the bhava of the residents of Vraja, engaging in bhajana appropriate for that bhava, will receive a body suitable for it, attaining Sri Krishna in Vraja.”

This is accomplished through Sri Guru, the Lord’s able agent in this world. The guru, being the bhagavat-kripa-svarupa (a form of the Lord’s mercy), by dint of empowerment received from him, has the insight to reveal the various details of the siddha-rupa of the disciple.”

Again we can find in the book “Manjari Svaupa Nirupana” the following information:

From this siddha-pranali, the disciple becomes aware of the nature of his spiritual body. Dhyana-candra Gosvami writes in his Paddhati that the siddha-pranali has eleven aspects (ekadasa-bhava). No one should think that this is nothing more than imagination; the spiritual body is eternal and true. The spiritual master knows his disciple’s transcendental identification through the power of his meditation and then reveals it to him as the form in which he will be accepted by the Lord. When the disciple meditates on the transcendental activities of the Lord through a sense of identification with that spiritual body, mentally serving the Holy Couple in that body, then gradually his absorption in identification with the material body is correspondingly reduced.

Narottama Dasa Thakura has said:

“That which you think of during your practice is the very thing that will be attained at the time of perfection. It is only a question of its ripening : when one’s desires have ripened he attains prema-bhakti, and for as long as they are unripe he remains on the platform of practice. This is the essence of understanding the truth about pure devotional service.”

The Lord also states in the Bhagavad-gita:

“Whatever one happens to be thinking of at the time of departing from this body will determine the state to which he will attain in his next birth, for one’s desires do not leave him at that time, but remain and determine his future life.”

Reflections on bhakti-tattva

Until the disciple comes to the point of prema, he does not actually attain this siddha-deha, but has to take repeated births in the material world. Vishvanatha Cakravarti explains in his commentary on the Ujjvala-nilamani, “Those persons who are practicing raganuga-bhakti

At the present time are on various stages of advancement such as nishta, ruci, asakti, etc.

If they should at any future lifetime attain to pure love (prema) then they will become fully qualified to serve the Lord. It is only then that they will receive a body appropriate for rendering such service and will become actual associates of the Lord.”

The process for achievement is as follows, according to Vishvanatha Cakravartipad:

“Such a practitioner of raganuga-bhakti, when he finally attains prema due to his dedicated performance of sadhana and is completely absorbed in the anxiety of desire, even though he has not attained the higher stages of love of God, such as sneha, etc. (which are actually impossible to attain in a material body), then the Lord himself appears along with his eternal associates and gives a direct vision of himself as well as the opportunity to engage in direct service—even if only once in a dream. Then he gives a spiritual body (in this case, the body of a gopi) just in the way one was given to Narada Muni at the time of his death. After that, when the Lord makes his appearance in some material universe, his internal potency, Yogamaya, causes that very body to be born in the womb of some gopi in the Vrindavana of that world. Then in that body, the higher stages of prema are realizable by the devotee.”

Thus Narottama Dasa Thakura prays:

“When will I take birth as a daughter in the house of Abira Gopa, and when will I be married in the village of Yavat.”

Prema descends into the heart of the jiva-soul and all anarthas will be removed in due course of time and at the stage of asakti and then on bhava, glimpses of that siddha-deha will appear and the jiva-soul will “perform” seva in this spiritual body...this is the zenith of bhakti.

“Whenever a practitioner of raganuga-bhakti attains prema (which causes the experience of internal and external full spiritual bliss, direct meeting with the Lord and the direct apprehension or appreciation of his all-attractive qualities) then he goes and takes birth in the womb of a gopi in some material universe where the Lord’s activities are being performed. “

- (Manjari Svarupa Nirupana, Sri Srimat Kunja Bihari das Babaji)