

# Sri Bhakti-Tattva-Vigyaan

(A Scientific Study of *bhakti*)

## **What is *bhakti*?**

What is *bhakti*? When *Rishis* such as Sanak Muni asked this question, Gopâl-Tâpani Shruti answered –

*"bhaktirasya bhajanam tadihâm-utra-upâdhi-nairâsyena amusmin manah kalpanam- etad-eava hi naishkarmyam."*

Meaning - "Bhakti means 'to serve Sri Bhagavân'. When we are free of all material desires and engage our mind and all the senses in serving Sri Bhagavân, we call it 'bhajan' and this bhajan alone is 'naishkarmya'<sup>1</sup>."

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 *sevâ-ras* of Sri Bhagavân.

Tâpani Shruti has defined *bhakti* and how *bhakti* subjugates Sri Krishna. It says – "*vigyâna-ghana ânanda-ghana sachchidânandaika-rase bhakti-yoge tishthati.*"

Meaning - "Sri Krishna is intense special knowledge personified. He is revealed through *Bhakti-yog* that is eternal, conscious and blissful *ras*."

From the above statement we learn three things –

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

Sri Nârad-Pancha-Râtra says –

*"surarshe vihitâ shâstre harim-uddishya yâ kriyâ, saiva bhaktir-iti prokta taya bhakti parâ 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*'.

**What does  
'bhaj' mean?**

*bhaj* ityesha vai dhâtuḥ sevâyâm parikirtitah

Meaning - "The root word '*bhaj*' means '*sevâ*'." – (Garud Purân) However we should note that, if we perform *bhajan* with any desire other than pleasing Sri Bhagavân, we shall not gain eternal love.

"We do not get *prem* in spite of performing devotional practice if we have material desires, or the desire for liberation in our heart." – (C.C.Madhyâ.19.152)

<sup>1</sup> An action that does not bear any fruit and does not result in rebirth.

## Topmost Achievable Goal & The Scientific Way To Achieve It

*Bhakti* is the chief characteristic of Sri *Bhagavān*'s internal potencies *Hlādīni* and *Samvit*. *Hlādīni* has only one function – to please Sri *Bhagavān*. Therefore if we have any desire other than pleasing Sri Krishna, *Bhakti* will never appear in our heart. This is why we should first know the truth about Sri *Bhagavān* and *bhakti*. And then we should embark on the path of *bhajan*. Then our hearing, glorification etc. will bear result. Sri Shāndilya Rishi has told in his *Bhakti-Sutra* -

*"sā parānuraktireeshware"*

Meaning - "*Bhakti* means supreme love for Sri *Bhagavān*."

Sripād Swapnāchārya has explained this statement as follows –

"In this verse '*anu*' indicates that *bhakti* is the deep attachment we gain for God after we have gained knowledge about God's true form, His glory and what is *Bhakti*."

Srimat Rupa Goswāmipād has analyzed the above statements of *Shruti* and *Smriti* and has written a verse in the beginning of his beautiful text *Bhakti-Rasāmrita-Sindhu*. In this verse he has expressed the complete definition of **Bhakti**. And this is strictly in accordance with the *Shrutis* and *Smritis*. This definition holds good whether we are in *vidhi-marga*, *rāg-mārga*, *sādhan-bhakti*, *sādhya-bhakti*, *bhāv* or *prem*. The verse is -

*anyābhilāshitā-shunyam gyāna-karmādi-anāvritam,  
ānukulyena krishnānusheelanam bhaktiruttamā.*

Meaning - "The topmost *bhakti* is that which is free of all desires other than to please Sri Krishna; it is not shrouded in *gyān*<sup>1</sup> and *karmā*<sup>2</sup>. It is beneficial to Sri Krishna."

– (B.R.S.1.1.11)

Srimat Jiva Goswāmipād and Srila Vishwanāth Chakravartipād have elucidated this verse very nicely. Let us relish their explanation.

*'Bhakti'* comprises activities that are conducive for serving Sri Krishna. This is the true characteristic or main definition of *Bhakti*. The word '*anusheelan*' in the verse has originated from the root '*sheel*'. Now '*sheel*' means '*sheelan*' (to follow some rule) and it is of two types –

- **Do's** – We should do certain things with our body, mind and tongue. With our body we should serve the Deities, with our mind we should meditate on His divine pastimes and please Him with our thoughts; with the tongue,

we can glorify His Holy Name, qualities and pastimes.

- **Don'ts** – We should avoid *sevā*-offences and offences to the Holy Name.

'*Krishnānusheelan*' indicates all the do's and don'ts that we should follow to serve and please Sri Krishna. This involves everything starting from taking the shelter of Sri Gurudev's lotus-feet and practicing *sthāyi-bhāv*<sup>3</sup> and *vyābhichāri-bhāv*<sup>4</sup>.

In this manner if we please Sri Krishna with our body, mind and speech, we can say we are performing *Bhakti*.

We can perform *bhakti* in two ways –

<sup>1</sup> Path of knowledge that leads to liberation

<sup>2</sup> Path of action that results in heavenly enjoyments

<sup>3</sup> Permanent mood – in the case of the Goudiya Vaishnavs, it is the mood of a Manjari.

<sup>4</sup> Passing moods such as joy

- With impurity
- Without impurity

The 'impurities' in *Bhakti* comprise of

- Some other desires
- Adulteration.

When our *bhakti* is free of other desires and adulteration, we call it 'pure *bhakti*'.

### 'Other desires' and 'adulteration'

'Other desires' means longing for material objects, liberation, magical powers, monetary gain, power, position, fame etc.

'Adulteration' indicates the presence of '*gyān*' (knowledge) and '*karma*' (action). Here '*gyān*' refers to worshipping the Impersonal and '*karma*' implies activities such as sacrifices, charity and worshiping for material gains - as mentioned in the *smṛiti śāstras*<sup>1</sup>. Of course knowledge about *bhakti* and Sri *Bhagavān* are true knowledge and we should definitely acquire it. Also it is necessary to perform activities such as worshiping, glorifying and hearing about Sri Krishna. We should also be generous and helpful, but not for the purpose of gaining money, fame and glory. These are parts of 'Sri Krishna-*anusheelan*' (serving Sri Krishna). If we perform these activities without the desire for material gain and/or liberation then we are said to perform pure *bhakti*. This *bhakti* is also called by many other names such as - *nirgunā* (free of impurities), *kevalā* (only), *mukhya* (main), *ananyā* (exclusive), *akinchanā* (devoid of desires) and *swarup-siddhā* (self-independent or true form).

Here Srila Rupa Goswāmipād has used a word - '*ānukulya*' or beneficial. If we serve Sri Krishna in such a manner that it is not beneficial for Him, it is not *bhakti*. Let us understand this better. We may serve Sri Krishna in a non-beneficial manner also. Kamsa, Shishupāl, Jarāsandha too served and pleased Sri Krishna; however their activities were not beneficial for Him, rather they intended to harm Him. Therefore we do not call them '*bhakti*'.

Here if we think that, going by the dictionary, '*ānukulya*' also means 'pleasing' then we are wrong. For example, Sri Krishna was pleased to fight with the *asurs* and He relished the *ras* of battle. Although He liked it, we cannot say the *asurs* were performing *bhakti*, simply because they were not doing it for His good. Contrary to them, Mother Yashodā left the hungry Sri Krishna and hurried to save the milk from spilling. He did not like it one bit, however we call the mother's activity as *bhakti* because she was striving for His welfare (since the milk was meant for Him). So *ānukulya* means 'devoid of envy towards Sri Krishna'.

### What does Srila Rupa Goswāmipād mean by '*uttamā bhakti*'?

Srila Rupa Goswāmipād has proved what is '*uttamā*' or 'topmost *bhakti*' with this verse from Nārad-Pancharātra -

*sarvopādhi vinirmuktam tat-paratvena nirmalam,  
hrishikesha hrishikesha-  
sevanam bhaktir-uchyate*

Meaning - " *Bhakti* is serving Sri Krishna without any impurity, with organs (hands, mouth etc.) that are purified by their loving service."

We find that the following terms of this verse are synonymous with Srila Rupa Goswāmipād's verse.

<sup>1</sup> The scriptures dealing mainly with rituals

<b>Nârad-Pancharâtra</b>	<b>Srila Rupa Goswâmipâd</b>
'sarvopâdhi vinirmuktam' (free of impurities)	<i>anyâbhilâshitâ-shunyam</i> (free from other desires)
<i>tat-paratvena</i>	<i>ânukulyâtmak</i> (beneficial to Him)
<i>nirmalam</i>	<i>gyâna-karmâdi-anâvritam</i> (not shrouded by <i>gyân</i> and <i>karma</i> )
<i>sevanam</i>	<i>anusheelanam</i> (to serve)

"*Prem* arises from pure *bhakti*. Therefore I am expressing the characteristics of pure *bhakti*

- Forsaking other desires, other worship, *gyân* and *karma*
- Perform activities for Sri Krishna with all the organs of the body such that
- They are beneficial to Him.

This is pure *bhakti* and we gain *prem* by practicing it. The Pancharâtra and Srimad-Bhâgavatam expound the same." – (C.C. Madhya.19.147-149)

We have already heard what the Pancharâtra has to say. Now what does Srimad-Bhâgavatam state?

Sri Kapildev told Mother Devahuti – "O mother, I am the *supreme* Personality seated in everyone's heart. As soon as someone hears my excellences, if his heart rushes towards me continuously like the flow of the Gangâ towards the sea, if it does not seek anything else and is without the obstacles called *gyân* and *karma*, then it is *bhakti* without any impurity. My devotees do not accept anything else other than my *seva*. They do not accept *sâlokya* (living with me in the same abode), *sârshti* (an opulence alike to mine), *sârupya* (beauty like mine), *sâmipya* (staying close to me), and *sâyujya* (merging into me), even though I may offer it to them." – (S.B.3.29.11-13)

Such pure devotion results in *prem*. Sriman-*Mahâprabhu* instructed Srila Rupa Goswâmi about how we can gain *prem* as a result of performing pure devotion. Sri Chaitanya-Charitâmrita elucidates in a simple manner.

"After roaming in the entire universe some blessed creature, by the mercy of Sri Gurudev and Sri Krishna gets the seed of *Bhakti-latâ*<sup>1</sup>. He (the *sâdhak*) becomes the gardener and sows that seed. He nurtures it by pouring the water of hearing about and glorifying Sri Krishna (His beauty, excellences and pastimes). The seed germinates into a sapling, grows into a creeper, and ultimately pierces the covering of the universe. It crosses the River Virajâ and reaches the transcendental abode. There it goes to Golok Vrindâban and climbs Sri Krishna's feet that are like the wish-fulfilling tree. Once there, it spreads and ultimately it fruits into *prem*.

**How pure devotion results in *prem***

Here the gardener waters the creeper daily with the water of hearing, glorifying etc. If he commits *Vaishnav*-offence, which is like a mad elephant, then it uproots the creeper, and its leaves dry up. Therefore the gardener takes care not to commit *aparâdh*. However it is possible that parasitic plants may grow on the creeper.

What are these 'parasitic plants'?

<sup>1</sup> *Bhakti* is likened to *latâ* or a creeper since it is very tender and fragile. This also indicates that we have to nurture it with care.

They are the desires for material pleasure, liberation and countless other wishes. These parasitic plants also contain forbidden activities, crookedness, violence, monetary gain and power. The water nourishes these parasitic plants in stead of the Bhakti-creeper; they grow further and further, while the main creeper stops growing. Therefore first of all, we should cut off these other plants. Then only the main creeper will grow and travel to Vrindâban. It will fruit into *prem* that will ripen so much that it will fall off the creeper on its own and the gardener will eat it and enjoy. He will climb up with the support of this creeper and reach the wish-fulfilling tree (Sri Krishna's lotus feet). There he will serve that wish-fulfilling tree and enjoy the *ras* of the *prem*-fruit happily. This is highest reward and the supreme goal of human life. All other goals are worthless as compared to it." – (C.C. Madhya.19.143-146)

### **What is *bhakti* made up of?**

When we analyze *bhakti* from the philosophical point of view, we see that it contains nothing other realization and *ras*. Ordinary people have many doubts regarding *bhakti* because it contains joy. Srimat Jiva Goswâmipâd has written in Pṛiti-Sandarbha (65) – "Shruti says – 'Bhakti takes the devotee to God and reveals Him to the devotee. Bhakti subjugates Sri Bhagavân and it is the best and the surest way to attain Him.'

*Bhakti* is so great that it is able to madden Sri Bhagavân with its own joy – the same Sri Bhagavân who is bliss Himself! So what does *bhakti* comprise? The proponents of *Sâṅkhyâ*, who do not believe in the existence of God, say that no joy is greater than when we are established in goodness. Sri Jiva says - *Bhakti* is not like the happiness arising out of goodness because the mode<sup>1</sup> of goodness is material. We read in the scriptures that *bhakti* subjugates Sri Bhagavân, and nothing material can possibly control Him. Also He is joyful in Himself and self-satisfied. He does not feel the necessity for any material pleasure. Therefore *bhakti* is not synonymous with the mode of goodness.

When the worshipers of Brahman realize Him, His bliss transmits into them. Therefore they feel certain pleasure. However *bhakti* is not Sri Bhagavân's own joy either, since we find that *bhakti* gives more pleasure than Brahman-realization. Sri Bhagavân too is happier with *bhakti* than He is with Himself.

*Bhakti* definitely is not the inner joy arising out of the living being (if it does not arise from Sri Bhagavân, how can it arise from us since we are His part?) We are atomic; our happiness too is minuscule. It is impossible to make Sri Bhagavân delirious with such small pleasure. How can a goat attract the owner of crores of *kâm-dhenus*<sup>2</sup>?

Dhruva Maharaj says (quoted in Vishnu-Purân) – "O my Lord, You are the source of everything. The three potencies such as *Hlâdîni*, *Sandhîni* and *Samvit* reside in You. You are above all material modes of nature. Therefore *sattvâ*-gun that gives peace, the troublesome *tama*-gun and *raja*-gun – do not exist in You (but in the material world only)."

Now the question arises – how is it possible for *Hlâdîni shakti* to give such immense pleasure to Sri Bhagavân when all the while it is present in Him? Let us study the following case. There is a man called Devdatta. If we say 'Devdatta does not eat during the day, yet he is fat,' it surely indicates that he eats during the night. Similarly we find that Sri Bhagavân is getting immense pleasure from *bhakti* and at the same time it is not possible for *Hlâdîni shakti* to make Him so happy, since it already exists within Him. We have previously stated that when we do *Bhakti*, it gives Him much more joy than Brahman-realization. Therefore we conclude that *Bhakti* is not synonymous with *Hlâdîni shakti*, just as Devdatta cannot become fat without food. If he does not eat during the day, he must be eating at night – so if *Hlâdîni shakti* is not giving Him so much happiness by herself, then logic follows that she must be giving Him immense pleasure in some other form. What is that form? We conclude – when the devotee assists *Hlâdîni shakti*, She gains a special

<sup>1</sup> There are 3 material modes of nature – goodness, passion and ignorance.

<sup>2</sup> Wish-fulfilling heavenly cow

power and gives even Sri *Bhagavān* (Who is Her source) extreme happiness so much so that He is spellbound.

What happens is like this – *Hlādīni* has a property called extreme happiness. It continuously enters the devotees and exists in them as 'love for God'. Therefore when Sri *Bhagavān* feels that love, He too is extremely pleased with His holy devotees. *Bhakti* is an **intense combination** of *Hlādīni* and *samvit shakti*.

It enters the heart of a devotee and gives Sri *Bhagavān* immense pleasure. Therefore it is so powerful that it controls Sri *Bhagavān*. Here **intense combination** means *tat-sāratvancha tannitya-parikarāśrayak tad-ānukulyā-bhilāsha-visheshah* - 'Bhakti is the desire that forever exists in His eternal associates and benefits Sri *Bhagavān*.' This *bhakti* flows like the River *Mandākini*<sup>1</sup> from the eternal associates in disciplic succession of devotees (*Guru-paramparā*) in the material world.

We may ask – *bhakti* is transcendental. It is the intense combination of *Hlādīni* and *samvit*. It is the opposite of material nature. Even Sri *Bhagavān* experiences it and it is supremely blissful. Then how come this great element appears in this material world and that too in the minuscule living beings? The answer is that – the mercy of the pure devotee carries *bhakti* from the transcendental world and places it inside the living being, unknown to him. Later it attracts his heart and creates a situation so that the seed of the *bhakti*-creeper (the wish-fulfilling creeper) can be sown in the heart. This seed sprouts into a desire to serve Sri *Bhagavān* in favorable manner. A loving mother picks up her baby rolling in the dust, wipes it cleans with her own cloth and suckles it. *Bhakti* devi too is loving. We, who are turned away from God, have dirt inside us. This dirt consists of doubts regarding God, and many material desires. She cleans the dirt and enthusiastically sows the seed of *Bhakti*-creeper that is favorable for Sri *Bhagavān* and for *bhajan*. Then *Bhakti* devi makes us inquisitive about *bhajan*, knowledge of *bhakti*, firm scriptural faith that is good for *bhakti* and disinterest in material objects. When our *chitta* gets cleansed in this manner, the devotee thinks, whether my material attachment diminishes or increases, whether hundreds of obstacles appear in *bhajan*, I can never forsake the path of *bhakti*. The devotee is firmly determined; gradually his offences and *anarthas* disappear and he is blessed with *rati* and ultimately *prem*.

### **Bhakti is the means**

*Prem* is the most desired wealth and the topmost goal of the living being. And *bhakti* is the means to obtain it. Therefore we call devotional practice as the '*abhidhēya*' (means or process). We cannot get Sri *Bhagavān*'s mercy by following any path, be it *karma*, *gyān* or *yog* – if we do not possess *bhakti*.

"*Gyān*, *karma* or *yog* cannot subjugate Sri Krishna; He can be controlled only by the *ras* of love and devotion." – (C.C)

Sri Krishna has told Sri Uddhav – "O Uddhav, steadfast devotion for me subjugates me to such an extent that *yog*, *sāṅkhyā*, *dharma*, study of the Vedas, austerity and even renunciation cannot."

– (S.B.11.14.20)

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<sup>1</sup> **Mandākini** is a tributary of river Alaknandā. Mandākini originates from the Charabari glacier near Kedārnath in Uttarakhand, India. Mandākini is fed by river Vāsukigangā at Sonprayāg. Mandākini joins Alaknandā at Rudraprayāg. Alaknandā then proceeds towards Devaprayāg where it joins with Bhāgirathi River to form the Gangā.

## Topmost Achievable Goal & The Scientific Way To Achieve It

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"Devotion for Sri Krishna is the most important means to obtain Him. If we want to attain success in karma, *yog* or *gyān*, we have to resort to *bhakti*. These practices yield fruits that are next to nothing and do not have any power without the assistance of *bhakti*." – (C.C.)

*Bhakti* is the only means to achieve spiritual goal. In fact *bhakti* is the only way for the living being. *Bhakti* can help all living beings to attain happiness. Therefore the *śāstras* and *Mahājan* have called *bhakti* as the supreme *dharma*, supreme *yog* and supreme welfare. Srimad-Bhāgavatam says – when Sri Brahmā patiently analyzed all the Vedas thrice, he understood that the scriptures have only one message – and that is devotion for God. Not only this, *Bhakti* alone is the topmost goal for the living being. Devotional practice is universal. Anybody can follow this path, anywhere and in any situation. The *Chatuhshloki*<sup>1</sup> of Srimad-Bhāgavatam says –

"etāvadeva jigyāsyam Tattva-jigyāsunātmanah,  
anvaya-vyatirekābhyaṁ yat syāt sarvatra sarvadā."

Meaning - "O Brahmā, whoever wishes to know the confidential truth about love for me, will accept the path of devotional practice that contains do's and don'ts; it is universal and eternal. He will enquire about it from his Spiritual Master."

Sri *Bhagavān* is proving that devotional practice is the means to achieve our goal. Although karma, *gyān* and *yog* also have rules, it is not written anywhere that if you do not resort to them you will commit an offence. Rather some parts of the scriptures also criticize them. On the other hand, we find lots of statements that assert the need for *bhakti*. Srimad-Bhāgavatam states –

"Sri Chamas Yogindra told *Mahārāj* Nimi – O King, The *brahmins* are born from Sri *Bhagavān*'s mouth; they are in the mode of goodness. The *Kshatriyas* (warriors) have arisen from His arms; they are in the mode of passion. The *Vaishyas* are born of His thighs; they are in the combined mode of passion and ignorance. The *shudras* are born of His feet; they are in the mode of ignorance. Likewise, the four *āshrams* viz. the order of householders, celibacy, *vānaprastha* and *sannyās* have arisen from His thighs, heart, bosom and head respectively. Therefore we see that Sri Hari is the father of all four *varnas* and orders. If a member of the human society does not adore<sup>2</sup> Sri Hari, Who is the parent, he is disregarding Him. They fall down from their state."

– (S.B.11.5.2-3)

Sri Krishna has told in Gita with His holy lips –

"na mām dushkritino mudhāḥ prapadyante narādhamāḥ,  
māyayāpahrita-gyāna asuram bhāram-ashritāḥ."

Meaning - "O Arjun, all those who are sinful, foolish, have lost their intelligence due to *Māyā* and are in the evil mode of nature are the lowest of human species and they do not surrender unto me."

Thus we see that those who are without *bhakti* suffer in many ways. However we never come across any scripture criticizing the devotional process.

Devotional practice is indeed universal. We find it -

- **In every scripture**

Skanda Purān states –

<sup>1</sup> The *Chatuhshloki* Bhāgavatam which as the name suggests condenses the essence of the Purān into 4 verses. It was imparted by Sri *Bhagavān* to Brahmāji who was about to perform creation but has doubts as to the nature of what he is about to create. It occurs in the 9th chapter of the 2nd skandha of Srimad-Bhāgavatam.

<sup>2</sup> 'adore' naturally indicates *sevā* which in turn means *bhakti*.

ālochya sarva-shāstrāni vichārya cha punah punah,  
idamekam sunishpannam dhyeyo nārāyano sada.

Meaning - "After analyzing all scriptures and repeated pondering we conclude that always Sri Nārāyan is the Only Object of meditation."

- **Suitable for everybody**

Sri Brahmā has told Sri Nārad –

Fallen beings such as women, *shudras*, *huns* and *shabars* too can take the shelter of Sri Hari. If they surrender unto Him, Who is the only refuge for devotees and if they follow their nature

***Bhakti* is so universal that anyone, simply anyone – whether he is most sinful, pious, learned or without any knowledge, renounced or with deep attachment, striving for liberation or already liberated, not-yet-successful in *Bhakti* or he has accomplished success in *Bhakti*, practiced-and-became the Lord's associate or eternal associate – *bhakti* is for everyone, is good for all and spreads happiness all around. There is no restriction or requirement for anyone to follow this path. Therefore undoubtedly, we should all practice *Bhakti*.**

and activities, then they can know the truth about Him. They too can cross His illusory potency (*māyā*). Even if animals associate with devotees and follow their conduct and nature, they can also learn the truth about Sri *Bhagavān* and can transcend the material ocean. Then do we have any doubt that we can learn the truth about Sri *Bhagavān* and cross the material barrier after hearing instructions from the Holy Spiritual Master about *jap*, and we hear, glorify and meditate on Him?"- (S.B.2.7.46)

It is true that the ones **who have committed heinous crimes** too get **supreme** peace by practicing *bhakti*. Sri *Bhagavān* has Himself assured in Bhagavad-Gita -

"O Arjun, even if one commits most abominable activities, yet he serves me, then consider him a saint; for by the impact of *bhakti*, he will very soon become righteous and attain eternal peace. Dear Kounteya (son of Kunti), in this context you may declare in an assembly of debate that my devotee never perishes." – (B.G.9.30-31)

When someone who indulges in foul actions can achieve welfare by practicing *bhakti*, how much more will someone following the rules of *bhakti*, and having good conduct, attain – can we guess?

Sri *Bhagavān* has told Uddhav –

"O Uddhav, the people who live in impure countries and times – if they serve me who is the soul in all beings - either knowing me to be *sat-chit-ānanda*, or not knowing this – but if they adore me exclusively, then I consider them as the best of my devotees." – (S.B.11.11.33)

This proves that the ones **with knowledge or without knowledge** can practice devotion.

Srimad-Bhāgavatam very clearly mentions that even the ones who are very **deeply attached to material pleasures** are qualified for devotional practice.

"Sri Krishna told Uddhav – Dear Uddhav, *Bhakti* is very powerful. Even though in the beginning of devotional practice my devotee may be highly materialistic, yet with practice (by the impact of *bhakti*) he mostly transcends the temptations of materialism." – (S.B.11.14.18)

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Hence it is needless to state that by the effect of *bhakti*, the ones who are detached from materialism will definitely not succumb to its charm again.

The ones who are already liberated and the ones striving for liberations, both have the tendency for *bhakti* – we know this from Srimad-Bhâgavatam –

"mumukshavo ghora-rupân hitvâ bhuta-pati-natha,  
nârâya-na-kalâh shântâ bhajanti hi-anasuyavah.'

Meaning - "Sri Suta Muni said - O Shounak, those **who wish to be liberated** from the bondage of ignorance should reject the worship of terrible forms such as Bhairav etc. and instead adore the serene forms of Sri Nârâyan or the divine forms emanating from Him ."

Sri Suta Muni has described how the already liberated people serve Sri Hari –

âtmâ-râmashcha munayo nirgranthâ apy-urukrame,  
kurvanti-ahaitukim bhaktim-itthambhuto guno harih."

Meaning - "O Shounak, Sri Hari's excellences attract even the *âtmârâm sages* who are liberated from the bondage of false-ego and serve Him without any cause." – (S.B.1.7.10)

Whether a devotee has reached the state of *rati* or even if he has not attained *rati*, it is possible that he still likes to practice *bhakti* –

"Sri Shukadev told *Mahârâj* Parikshit – O King, some great people who are devoted to Vâsudev, destroy huge collection of sins by practicing pure devotion just as the direct rays of the sun annihilate fog." – (S.B.6.1.15)

This indicates the *ajâta-rati* devotee (**who has not attained *rati***) since this statement does not mention any special expression of bhakti manifested by the devotee.

The following statement proves that one **who has reached the stage of *rati*** too likes devotional practice –

"Sri Havi Yogindra told Nimi *Mahârâj* – O King, Brahmâ and other *devatâs* strive to obtain the lotus-feet of Sri *Bhagavân*, yet they do not achieve them. However the devotee's mind is transfixed on those extremely rare lotus-feet and does not waver for half a moment even though you may offer him the wealth of the three worlds. He is the best amongst the Vaishnavs." – (S.B.11.2.53)

We find the devotees who have become **the Lord's associates** by performing *bhakti-sâdhanâ* continue to do so –

"Sriman-Nârâyan told the great sage Durvâsâ – O Muni, my devotees who are free of all material desires do not want to accept the four types<sup>1</sup> of liberation although offered on a platter, since they are always engrossed in the joy of serving me. This is the effect of their *Bhakti*. When they do not wish for liberation that brings *supreme* bliss, then it is needless to say that they have no inclination for temporary material objects." – (S.B.9.46.7)

The **eternal devotees** (e.g. Laxmi devi) too practice *bhakti* –

"Sri Brahmâ told the *devatâs* – O *Devas*, The lakes of Vaikuntha contain extremely clear and pure water. It is nectarine in taste. The banks of these lakes are bound with corals. Laxmi

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<sup>1</sup> Sâlokya – living in the same abode as that of the Lord  
Sârshti – having the same opulence as the Lord  
Sâmipyâ – to live close to Him  
Sârupya – to look similar to Him

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devi sits on the shore along with her maidservants and worships Sri Vishnu with Tulasi leaves. Then she sees her reflection in the water of the lake and gazes at her pretty face with its curly locks and high nose. She meditates on Sri Nârâyan kissing her face." – (S.B.3.15.22)

- **Every sense organ is happy to perform *bhakti*.**

For example – "*mânasopachârena paricharya harim mudâ*

*pare vâm-manasâ gamyan tam sâkshât pratipedire.*"

Meaning - "Extremely fortunate devotees have got actual *darshan* of Sri Hari by serving Him in meditation, although He is indescribable and inconceivable."

And of course we all know how to serve Him with external senses. In fact, *Bhakti* means to serve Him with all our senses. The blessed Lord has told in Sri Gita –

*"patram pushpam phalam toyam yo me bhaktyâ prayachchhati  
tad-aham bhaktyupahritam-ashnâmi prayatâtmalah."*

Meaning - "O Arjun, who lovingly gives me a leaf, flower, fruit or water – I eat that loving offering of the pure devotee."

We can practice devotion by various activities –

Devarshi Nârad has told Sri Vâsudev - "Dear Vâsudev, if one hears Bhâgavat dharma, reads, meditates, respects or simply second (approve) of Bhâgavat dharma, even though he may be inimical to the entire universe, this action immediately purifies him." – (S.B.11.2.12)

- **We can perform *bhakti* through all activities –**

The Lord told Arjun – "O Arjun, whatever you do, eat, offer in sacrifice, give in charity, perform austerity – offer them all unto me." – (B.G.9.27)

- **Not only this, we also see that some have performed just a shadow of *bhakti* (not pure *bhakti*) and yet they have got the result, such as Ajâmil.**

He was scared of the emissaries of Yam (the Lord of death) and piteously called out to his son Nârâyan. As a result of this, he later went to Vaikuntha. All of us have heard this story from Srimad-Bhâgavatam. We find another incident in The Purâns –

Once upon a time, a mouse lived in a *Mandîr*. Everyday it used to carry away the cotton wick dipped in ghee to eat. One day when he was scurrying with the wick dipped in ghee; it accidentally touched a lighted lamp. The mouse tried its level best to get rid of the wick since his mouth was burning. But since it had got entangled in its teeth, he could not set free of the fire. The Lord accepted its movements as if it had performed *ârati*. In the next life it was born as a queen. She conducted a festival of lights for the Lord, pleased him and went to his abode.

In the above narration we see that the mouse has committed an *aparâdh* by stealing the ghee-wick. Also it has performed *ârati* which is not true *bhakti*, but just a shadow of *bhakti* (*bhakti-âbhâs*). Yet, Sri *Bhagavân* did not consider its offense (since the mouse was ignorant), rather He was satisfied with its *bhakti* (offering of lamp) and brought its soul to His abode.

- **Srimad-Bhâgavatam tells us that Sri Bhakti Devi can give all sorts of results in return for *bhakti*.**

For example –

"Who has no desire other than serving the Lord, who has all material desires and who longs for liberation – if they are intelligent, all of them will worship the Supreme Personality with deep devotion."

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The scriptures recommend *bhakti* as the mode of worship in every age –

"krite yad-dhyāyato vishnum tretāyām yajato makhaih,  
dwāpare paricharyāyām kalou tad-hari-kirtanāt."

Meaning - "Whatever the people achieved by meditation in *Satya Yug*, offering fire-sacrifice in the *Tretā Yug*, worshiping Him in *Dwāpar Yug*, they can attain the fruits of all these activities simply by taking the Holy Name in *Kali Yug*."

- **We can perform devotional practice anywhere and in any situation**, for example –

Prahlād in his mother's womb, Dhruva as a child, Ambarish and Bharat in youth, Dhritarāshtra in old age and Ajāmil at the time of death performed *bhakti* and achieved the highest welfare. Sri *Bhagavān* tells us about Chitraketu who served Sri Hari in the heaven. In *Nrisimha Purān* we read of an instance when a devotee attained Sri *Bhagavān* by taking His Holy Name in hell. Thus we observe that *bhakti* is universal and eternal. Therefore we can firmly state that *bhakti* is the only means to achieve the topmost goal of life.

### **Who is qualified for *Bhakti*?**

Each and every man is qualified for *bhakti*. Although *bhakti* is universal and does not depend on the place and time and person, Sri *Bhagavān* has told Uddhav with reference to who is qualified for pure devotion –

*yadrichchhayā mat-kathādou jāta-shraddhastu yah pumān*

Meaning - "When someone gains faith in hearing my *kathā*<sup>1</sup>, know him to be qualified for *bhakti-yog*." – (S.B.11.20.8)

Srimat Jiva Goswāmipād has explained this verse as – "While stating the qualification for *bhakti-yog*, Sri *Bhagavān* has said that the cause and rules of *bhakti-yog* are very much different for those of *karma-yog* and other spiritual paths. He has noted that scriptural faith alone is the cause of *bhakti*. In this verse '*yadrichchhayā*' means 'one becomes worthy for the path of *bhakti* when one comes in contact with some extremely self-sufficient (spiritually)<sup>2</sup> devotee and the devotee takes mercy on him. This brings about his welfare and he becomes qualified for practicing *bhakti*.'

**There are only two ways to gain faith – association with a devotee and getting his mercy.**

Sri Suta Muni told sages such as Shounak – "O pure souls, if we visit holy places we generally tend to serve the pure devotees; if we have respect for *Hari-kathā* and wish to hear about Sri *Bhagavān*, that *sevā* arouses in us an interest for Holy discourse." – (S.B.1.2.16.)

Srimat Jiva Goswāmipād has explained this verse as follows – "Suppose someone visits a Holy Place, say Vrindāban, simply

because his job warrants him to go there. He sees some devotees who might have come there to serve Vrindāban or they may be residents of that place. They take *darshan* of the great devotees, touch their feet, speak to them and serve them. As a result of their *sevā*, they start believing in them. Pure devotees are naturally engrossed in discussing about Sri *Bhagavān* amongst themselves. The visitor becomes curious – 'let me hear what they are talking'. When he hears Sri *Hari-kathā* from their holy lips, he gains interest in it."

<sup>1</sup> Divine discourse describing Sri *Bhagavān*'s beauty, the Holy Name, excellencies and pastimes.

<sup>2</sup> A devotee who performs *bhakti-sādhana* on his own, and does not need external prodding or inspiration to do so.

Thus, association and mercy of pure devotees result in faith, and faith is the only requisite to start with devotional practice.

### **What is faith?**

"*Shraddhā* (faith) means very firm conviction that if we perform Sri Krishna-*bhakti* we will achieve success in all our endeavors." – (C.C.Madhya.22.37.)

We should believe that the scriptures tell the truth, have firm conviction in them, try to study them carefully and adopt measures to resolve contradictions. If we follow the scriptures in this manner then we shall surely come to the conclusion that life is worthless without devotional practice.

#### **When can we say we have faith?**

Suppose we know that if we perform desire-free karmas our heart will become pure, and if we do not perform the same, we shall go to hell. In spite of knowing this, when we have the firm conviction that following these paths are obstacles in my service unto Sri *Bhagavān*, if

I perform only Sri Krishna-*bhakti*, I shall succeed in all my endeavors and resolutely forsake all other *dharma*s, we can say we have faith in Sri Krishna and Sri Krishna-*bhakti*. Such faith leads us to Sri Hari-*bhajan*.

*Shraddhā* = *shrat* + *dhā* + *am*. *Shrat* = heart; *dhā* = *dhāran* (to hold) or establish. Thus, *shraddhā* means – believing with all our heart – believe the scriptures – believe in the meaning of the scriptures. *Shruti* says –

"When we gain *shraddhā* in Sri *Bhagavān* then we think about Him and meditate on Him; an unfaithful person can never do this. Therefore O Nārad, first you try to understand what faith is." Sri Nārad said, "I wish to know about *shraddhā* itself. How do I learn about *shraddhā*?" – (Chāndogya Upanishad)

The reply to this question is – "*shradhātvanyopāyavarjyam-bhaktyumukhi-chitta-vritti-visheshah*"

Meaning - "*Shraddha* is to reject all other means and turn to *bhakti* alone." – (Āmnāy- sutra)

#### **How do we know we are detached from material pleasure?**

Hence when we have faith and turn to *bhakti*, then we gradually become detached from material pleasure. As a result we gain dislike for all topics unrelated to Sri Krishna and we are satisfied with whatever we get. This proves we have faith or *shraddhā*.

Another proof of *shraddhā* is – *bhagavat-sharanāgati* - complete refuge at the lotus feet of Sri *Bhagavān*. Srimat Jiva Goswāmipād says –

"*Sharaddhā* and *sharanāgati* (to accept His shelter or protection) are synonymous. It is logical, since if we have faith in the scriptures we shall surely believe that those who are not surrendered to Sri *Bhagavān* need be afraid and those who are in His shelter have no need to fear. Therefore if we have *shraddhā* we shall definitely have *sharanāgati*." – (Bhakti-sandarbha – 173)

Immediately after this Srimat Jiva Goswāmipād has mentioned a few characteristic of scriptural faith. Let us learn this in brief. He says that, if we gain scriptural faith - whether we realize our goal or not, we shall continue to serve Sri *Bhagavān* just like a gold-digger<sup>1</sup>. We shall not care for monetary gain, fame and power. Knowingly we will never offend the devotees. It is possible we may not be able to give up material pleasure altogether; however we will not have deep

<sup>1</sup> One who is convinced there is gold in a certain place continues to search for it in spite of failing repeatedly.

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attachment for the same. If we have *shradhā* we shall never be ill-mannered or commit anything foul.

Sri *Bhagavān* wants that we should be careful and enthusiastic when we embark on *bhakti*, since – “*jatnāgraha binā bhakti nā janmāy preme*”

Meaning - "Devotional practice does not result in *prem* if we are not careful and enthusiastic."

– (C.C.)

A father may give all his property to an unworthy son, yet he would be happier if he could make his son worthy and then confer the rights of the property to him. This is natural. Sri Hari loves us, therefore He gives us *bhakti* only after we have gained faith in Him, and it is true. However, how much qualified we are, to receive *bhakti*, depends on the extent of *shradhā* we have. The faithful can be classified into three categories –

- Ø Best
- Ø Medium
- Ø Junior

**The best** – He is a good expert in the scriptures and in presenting logic based on the same. He firmly believes that **Sri Krishna is the only Object of worship, Eternal Love is the only goal and *bhakti* is the only means to achieve this goal**. He has absolutely no doubt about this and has very deep *shradhā* – he is the most qualified to receive *bhakti*.

"Who is a good expert in the scriptures and has extremely firm conviction, He is the best amongst the faithful and can deliver the whole world." – (C.C.)

**The medium** – He is not so good at analyzing the scriptures nor is he so experienced in studying or presenting the *shāstras*. In case of a debate, if the opponent is strong he cannot decide what to say; neither can he resolve a difficult poser. However he has extremely strong conviction and is very sure about whom he should worship and what *bhajan* he should perform. None – not even a strong opponent – can shake his faith.

"He does not know the scriptures, however he has very firm faith; he is the medium devotee and is highly blessed." – (C.C.)

**Junior** – He has little knowledge of the *shāstras* and he has less faith. One may break his faith through arguments presented from the scriptures.

"He is a 'junior devotee' since he has less faith; he too will gradually ascend to the top." – (C.C.)

## **64 rules of *Bhakti***

Sri Prahlād *Mahāshay* has cited 9 rules of *bhakti* in *Srimad-Bhāgavatam* – hearing, glorification, remembrance, serve the lotus-feet, worshiping, prayer, servitude, friendship and self-surrender. Scriptures such as Sri Hari-Bhakti-Vilās mentions many more rules of *Bhakti*. To make us happy Srila Rupa Goswāmipād has skimmed through all the scriptures and compiled all of the rules. He made them easy for us so that we find devotional practice a joy and not drudgery. He has penned down 64 rules. Of these, the first twenty form the gateway to the Temple of *Bhakti* – there are 10 do's and 10 don'ts.

### **The 10 do's**

1. **Surrendering unto Sri Gurudev's feet** - First of all, we have to take the shelter of the Spiritual Master. Without this we can never start with *bhajan*. If we find someone making little progress in the path of devotion we should know that he had accepted the shelter of Sri Gurudev in his past life and had

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made some progress. Hence a faithful person should first take refuge at Sadguru's feet, take initiation in Sri Krishna-*mantra* and take instruction about *bhajan*. Sri Gurudev instructs him about the topmost achievable goal and how to accomplish it. He also teaches the devotee about good conduct, drive away the disciple's ignorance and show him the path to Sri *Bhagavān*. In this manner he showers mercy and blessing on him. On the other hand we see how much one suffers if he is not under the guidance of Sri Gurudev.

"The one who forsakes the feet of Sri Gurudev and tries to control the extremely wavering mind by regulating the sense organs and life-airs, they get painful experience from the very same sense organs and life-airs. They fall into hundreds of troubles and continue to exist in this material world (they are not delivered). They face the same peril as a sea-faring merchant without his captain." (S.B.10.87.33)

This indicates that when we follow Sri Gurudev's instructions and practice *bhajan* under his subservience, we gain the knowledge of *Bhagavad-dharma*<sup>1</sup>. By the *kripā* of Sri Gurudev, obstacles never overwhelm us and our mind quickly becomes unwavering.

In fact Sri Krishna expresses his powerful mercy through Sri Gurudev; He is more compassionate than Sri Krishna. Sri Gurudev is God in the incarnation of a devotee. In the transcendental abode he resides in the form of Sri Gurudev on the left side of Himself (Sri *Bhagavān*). He spreads extreme mercy – much more than Sri Krishna and awakens in us knowledge about Himself. *Shruti* is testimony to this –

"āchāryavān purusho veda"

Meaning - "Who surrenders at the feet of the Spiritual Master, can know God".

**2. Taking *dikshā* and instructions from Sri Gurudev** – We should take *dikshā* (initiation) from Sri Gurudev. The initiation should comprise of 'Sri Krishna-*Mantra*'. And we should learn the *Bhāgavat dharma* from him. After all '*dikshā*' is the process by which we get enlightenment and destroy our sins. 'Enlightenment' indicates that we know the '*dikshā-mantra*' as non-different from Sri *Bhagavān* and we realize our special relationship with Him.

In the scriptures we find many *mantras* with relation to *dikshā*. However Sri Krishna-*mantra* is the most important of all. Again, amongst Sri Krishna-*mantras*, some pertain to His *Vrindāban* pastimes while others are related to His *Mathurā* and *Dwārakā* pastimes.

**Just as Sri Krishna's *Vrindāvan-leelās* as a cowherd-boy are the sweetest, the mantras that reveal His supremely sweet *ras* of Brajadhām are the sweetest. Hence the ten-syllable and eighteen-syllable *mantras* are the best and we call them as 'the King of *Mantras*'.**

Certain scientific processes can turn lesser metals into gold; similarly by taking *dikshā* in proper manner we can turn our material body into spiritual and get the right to serve Sri Krishna.

"When the devotee surrenders during *dikshā*, Sri Krishna makes him His Own. He converts the devotee's material body into spiritual and he serves Sri Krishna with his transcendental body." – (Sriman-*Mahāprabhu* in C.C.Antya.4.184-185)

After taking *dikshā* it is necessary to learn Sri *Bhāgavat Dharma* from Sri Gurudev –

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<sup>1</sup> Divine path

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"We should consider Sri Gurudev as dear to us as our life and make him our worshiped Deity. We should be free from arrogance, be submissive to Sri Gurudev and learn Bhāgavat Dharma from him. When we approach the Spiritual Master to learn Bhāgavat Dharma we should serve him in such a manner so as to please Sri Hari Who has made us His Own." – (Srimat Jiva Goswāmīpād's explanation of S.B.11.3.22)

**3. Serve Sri Gurudev** – We should consider Sri Gurudev as our well-wisher, dear most friend and the embodiment of the supreme most being Sri Hari. Considering him thus we should serve him. If we do not have very strong faith that Sri Gurudev is divine manifestation, we can never gain the knowledge of the highest truth. If we think of the Spiritual master as mundane all our endeavors become fruitless.

"Sri Gurudev is the torch of knowledge and is the very embodiment of the divine one. Whoever has the corrupt intelligence to think "he is human" is only taking an elephant-bath (all his spiritual endeavors are fruitless)." - (S.B.7.15.26)

So we should serve Sri Gurudev most carefully since we are able to please Sri Hari by his blessing alone.

*yo mantrah sa guruh sākshāt yo guruh sa harih swayam,  
gururyasya bhavettushtasya tushto harih swayam.*

Meaning - "*Mantra*, Guru and Sri Hari are one and the same. When the Spiritual Master is pleased with a devotee, even Sri Hari is pleased with him."

**4. Walk on the footsteps of the pure devotees** – We should follow in the footprints of the pure devotees since they have obtained Sri Hari-bhakti.

Sri Bhakti-Rasāmrita-Sindhu has quoted the following statement from Sri Skanda Purāṇ –

"The previous *Mahājans* have obtained Sri Hari-bhakti without any labor. To achieve this they followed a path that is without stress and it is auspicious. It is our duty to follow that path."

Sri Vyāsdev has said –

"The rules concerning *Dharma* are very difficult to comprehend. Therefore we should follow the path taken by the *Mahājans* since they have attained what is good."

The *Mahājans* behave strictly according to the scriptures. This is why Sri Srila Rupa Goswāmīpād has immediately quoted Sri Brahma-Yāmal –

"If we practice single-pointed *Bhakti* yet neglect the injunctions of *Shruti*, *Smṛiti*, *Purāṇ* and *Pancharātra* then we simply create trouble."

Srimat Jiva Goswāmīpād has explained this statement –

"If we practice single-pointed *Bhakti* without following the injunctions of the scriptures, it is not good, since this means that we do not have faith in the Vedic scriptures. Here we are not referring to those who do not follow the scriptural injunctions because they are not aware of them or they may be simply lazy. We are referring only to those who know the rules yet disregard them because they do not consider them true. Their so-called 'single-pointed devotion' is an eye-wash since it is not according to the scriptures."

Believers respect the scriptures and forsake what is forbidden by them only to please Sri Krishna. Therefore a devotee naturally wishes to do what the scriptures prescribe and forsake what they forbid, since faith rests on the scriptures alone.

**5. We should be inquisitive about the devotional practice of the pure devotees -**  
We should ask questions such as - what sort of devotional practice did the pure devotees perform? How did they gain Sri Krishna's *sevā*? We should be eager to know these facts and ask learned devotees about the process of devotion.

If we are extremely curious about devotional practice we will become absorbed in this topic. This will make us somewhat interested in *Bhakti*, our heart will become pure and the facts about *bhakti* will arise in our mind spontaneously. We cannot realize *Bhakti* by using logic alone. Here by 'interest' we mean that the devotee has an earlier *sanskār* by which he considers Srimad Bhāgavatam and such scriptures as the highest and has extremely firm faith in the pure devotees and the spiritual master. This is how we understand the true knowledge of *bhakti* – we cannot realize it with dry logic. Sri Bhakti-Rasāmrita-Sindhu proves that we should inquire about the rules of *Bhakti* by quoting Nārad Purān –

"Those who are extremely eager to learn about the path followed by the pure devotees achieve the highest goal within a very short time."

**6. To forsake material enjoyment for Sri Krishna's pleasure -** Our minds are conditioned to take pleasure in worldly sound, touch, beauty, taste and smell. We always seek sense gratification. This desire is the root cause of material suffering and digression. Our goal should be to give up sensual pleasures and gradually engage the senses in relishing Sri Krishna's divine beauty and *ras*. If we have strong attachment for sense gratification, it is but natural that we will not be deeply inclined towards *bhajan*. Yet, if we do not perform *bhajan* with intense absorption we cannot please Sri Krishna. In fact if we want to obtain Sri Krishna we must please Him. To make Sri Krishna happy we must give up material enjoyment and the desire for such pleasure. We see in Sri Padma Purān –

"From time to time you have forsaken sense gratification; therefore the permanent treasure of Vaikuntha is waiting to welcome you (you will be given a grand welcome and the treasure of Vaikuntha will belong to you - that treasure will never exhaust unlike material prosperity that is temporary)."

We have a natural attraction for material pleasures. It does not go easily. However, the Vedas state that –

"âhâr shuddou sattva-shuddhi,  
sattva-shuddhou dhruvâ-smritih,  
smriti-lâbhe sarva-granthinâm vîpra-mokshah."

Meaning - "Eating pure food purifies our *chitta*. When our *chitta* becomes pure we remember Sri Bhagavân, along with that we naturally get rid of material desires."

Food nourishes and energizes the body and mind. Pure food cleanses the body, senses and the mind. This makes us more easily engrossed in *bhajan*. Therefore if we want to attain the purest state it is necessary to be very careful about food.

**7. We should reside in the holy places of Sri Krishna –** It is easy to get *bhakti* when we live in the places where the Lord has performed His pastimes – such as Sri Vrindāban, Sri Nabadweep, Sri Kshetra (Puri) and on the banks of the Gangâ. These places remind us of His divine pastimes and they create an ambience for *bhajan*. We also get *darshan* of pure devotees and saints since they too reside in such places. Otherwise it is very difficult to get their *darshan*. It also shows our surrender.

tavâsmiti vadân vâchâ tathaiva manasâ vîdan,  
tatsthânamâshritastanvâ modate sharanâgatah .

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"O Lord, who says 'I am Yours' and believes the same in his heart and joyously resides in Your *leelā-sthals*<sup>1</sup> is indeed surrendered unto You."

### **8. We should accept what is necessary for our living –**

"We should accept whatever is necessary for our living; if we accept either less or more than that we will stray from the spiritual path." (Nârad Purân quoted in B.R.S.)

Srimat Jiva Goswâmipâd has explained this as – "The *sâdhak* should earn and spend money in such a manner that *bhajan* should go on." The householder should earn by honest means, execute their duties and practice *bhajan*. Until we reach the stage of renunciation we should continue in this manner. If we attempt to earn more than what is barely necessary to maintain *bhakti*, our appetite for *bhajan* will decrease. On the other hand, if we earn less then our mind will be stressed. Therefore it is best to accept that much wealth as is necessary to execute family life and carry on with our *bhakti*."

**9. We should revere Hari-bâsar** – We call the end of Ekâdashi and the beginning of Dwâdashi as 'Hari-bâsar'. Hari-bâsar also includes other Vaishnav-fasts as mentioned in the scriptures, such as – Janmâshthami, Râdhâshthami, Râm-navami, Nrisimha-chaturdashi, Shiva-chaturdashi, the appearance days of Lord Gourânga, Lord Nityânanda, Lord Advaita etc. We should always forsake the '*biddhâ*' days and observe pure *vrata*. When we keep a *vrata*, we please Sri Krishna and if we do not, we commit great offence.

Many fast but they give up just food. In reality, 'fast' signifies –

"upavrittasya pâpebhyo yo bâsas-tad-gunaîh saha,  
upavâsah sa vigneya nopavâsastu langhanam."

Meaning - "Fasting does not mean merely giving up *Mahâprasâdam*. We should avoid all material activities and spend the day in hearing and glorifying Sri Krishna's name, excellences and divine pastimes. This is fasting in the true sense."

**10. We should respect dhâtri, ashwattha etc.** – "We should worship, pay obeisance and meditate on the *ashwattha*<sup>2</sup>, *Tulsi*, *dhâtri*<sup>3</sup>, cow, *brahmin* and Vaishnavs. This destroys our sins." – (Skanda Purân quoted in B.R.S.)

Srimat Jiva Goswâmipâd has explained further –

"Ashwattha is a majestic manifestation of Sri *Bhagavân*, hence it is worthy of worship. Sri *Bhagavân* descends to protect the cow and the *brahmin*; therefore even pure devotees worship them. Tulsi and the Vaishnavs are the topmost, so all of us should worship them. Especially if we desire *prem* it becomes inevitable for us to worship Tulsi and the Vaishnavs. This is an intricate part of our *bhajan*."

"We begin *bhakti* with these ten rules." – (B.R.S.)

This means that if we do not follow these ten laws, we do not start with *bhajan*. So these are the "do's". Srila Rupa Goswâmipâd now mentions ten "don'ts". They are as follows.

**11. We should reject the association of non-devotees** – They belong to two classes –

(a) Who do not perform *bhajan* is 'bhagavad-vimukh' (turned away from Sri *Bhagavân*)

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<sup>1</sup> Holy Places where Sri Bhagavân has performed His Divine pastimes

<sup>2</sup> Ficus religiosa

<sup>3</sup> Emblica officinalis or Indian gooseberry

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(b) Those who oppose the devotees, devotion and Sri *Bhagavân* are 'Bhagavad-vidweshi' (envious of God).

We should reject the association of both.

"It is better to live in a cage of fire than suffer in the company of one who does not meditate on Sri Krishna." – (Kâtyâyanî Samhitâ quoted in B.R.S.)

The point is that the association of non-devotees is detrimental for our devotional knowledge, material detachment and *bhajan*, so we should reject their company at all costs. If we keep their company our materialistic tendency is bound to increase and we get attached to all the things that are not conducive for *bhajan*. Just like an infectious disease the bad qualities of a non-devotee attack us and hence his association is dangerous for our spiritual health. Of course we cannot call a chance meeting with a non-devotee as 'association'. Even then we should accept him as a venomous snake ready-to-sting and run away from him trembling in fear. In fact to reject the company of non-devotees is part of Vaishnav-etiquette also.

"Vaishnav-etiquette requires us to reject bad company that comprises of '*stri-sangi*'<sup>1</sup> and non-Krishna-devotee." – (C.C.M.22.49)

Sri *Bhagavân*'s devotee can absorb our mind so deeply in Him by describing His beauty, qualities and sweetness that even Sri *Bhagavân* Himself cannot achieve; similarly a lusty man can make us deeply attached to sense gratification such that even a woman herself cannot do. Therefore we cannot over-emphasize the need to reject the company of such men at all costs.

### **12. We should not make too many disciples** –

"Sri Nârad Muni has said – Do not make too many disciples. Do not study too many texts. Do not earn your living by giving commentaries on the scriptures. Never ever start building religious institutions." – (S.B.7.13.8 quoted in B.R.S.)

Srimat Jiva Goswâmipâd has explained this point further –

"Read 'Do not make many disciples' as 'do not make unqualified disciples', since preceptors such as Nârad have given initiation to many. If we do not make disciples the *sampradâya* faces the danger of extinction and we are accused of being miserly with the dispensation of spiritual knowledge. However it is wrong to initiate unworthy people simply to increase the fold. 'Many' refers to non-devout unqualified disciples."

Sridharswâmipâd has written – "*nânubadhneeta pralobhanâdinâ balânnâpâdayet*". Meaning - "You should never make disciples by using either temptation or force."

It is *aparâdh* to make disciples to gain money, fame, power or increase one's fan-following.

"*ashraddhâne vimukhe'pi-shrinvanti yashchopadeshah shiva-nâmâparâdhah*"

Meaning - "It is an *aparâdh* to instruct someone in the Holy Name if he lacks scriptural faith and is not interested in hearing the Holy Name."

This means that one is qualified to become a disciple if he has such faith and is interested in the Holy Name.

**13. We should not start great projects** – When we take up mega-projects like building institutions, missionaries etc. it results in turning away from God. When we get involved in building temples etc. we lack the time and energy for *bhajan*. Srimad Bhâgavatam says – "*nârambhayet kwachit*" – which means – "Never ever start religious institutions." How much

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<sup>1</sup> Men who are attached to sexual pleasure. Here the point to be noted is, C.C. does not tell us to give up the company of the opposite sex but rather with those who are attached to sex.

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such endeavors affect our *bhajan* is evident from what is happening in the institutions today. The residents of religious institutions are in disagreement with each other, they are constantly fighting that even results in court-cases! The religious institutions are burning examples of all these grievous incidents.

Sri Krishna cites the character of a loving devotee in Sri Gita –

*"sarvārambha-parityāgi yo mad-bhaktah sa me priyah"*

Meaning - "O Arjun, He is my dear devotee who does not indulge in building big projects."

– (B.G.12.16)

Sridhar Swāmipād has explained this verse as -

*"sarva-drishta-adrishtārthan-ārambha-anudyamān parityaktum sheelah yasya sah"*

Meaning - "The one who rejects mega-endeavors is dear to Sri Krishna."

### **14. Avoid studying too many texts and explanations –**

This statement refers to the texts that oppose *bhakti*. Sri Nārad Muni has said –

*"granthānnaivābhyaśed bahūn na vyākhyām-upayunjeeta"*

Meaning - "Do not study too many texts and do not earn your living by lecturing on the scriptures."

Srimad-Bhāgavatam is the essence of all Vedic teachings. The Vedas are like a wish-fulfilling tree and Srimad-Bhāgavatam is like an extremely ripe and sweet fruit of this tree. In *Kaliyug* mankind is enveloped in darkness and Srimad-Bhāgavatam is shining brilliantly like the sun to show us the way. It is self-luminous. There is no scripture that is so full of love. Srimad-Bhāgavatam is extraordinary and sets us on the path of love and God. Our Goswāmis have composed texts of *bhakti*-principles and *ras* that are following the dictum of Srimad-Bhāgavatam. Therefore they too are of the same status. These texts are enough for us to relish *ras* and to gain the knowledge of *bhajan*.

Some people earn their living by reciting Srimad-Bhāgavatam, this is offensive and hence to be rejected.

### **15. We should not lack *bhakti* in practical life –**

"The *sādhak* who performs *bhajan* such as meditation should not get worried when there is lack of food and shelter or when food and shelter are destroyed; instead he should remember Sri Hari." – (Padma Purān quoted in B.R.S.)

Srimat Jiva Goswāmipād has explained this verse as –

"This is the way of Sri Hari's devotee. A *sādhak* who loves *sevā* is satisfied with whatever he gets and continue to execute loving service; he should not show humility by begging too much. In all practical sense, he should not be a miser."

### **16. We should not succumb to sorrow –**

"If our heart is full of misery and depression, how can Mukunda reveal Himself to us?" – (Padma Purān quoted in B.R.S.)

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It is but natural to feel hopeless and miserable when we lose a dear one such as our child, spouse, parents etc. However since we are *sādhaks*, we should quickly remember Sri Hari and realize that the body and things related to the body are meant to perish. We should not let sorrow overwhelm us.

### **17. We should not disrespect *devatās* –**

It is true that even the *devatās* worship Sri Hari; however we should not disrespect Brahma, Rudra and other *devatās*.

"Although a **devotee worships only Sri Krishna**, he should realize that *devatas* and *devis* are His devotees as well and so he should not disrespect them."

– (Padma purāṇ quoted in B.R.S.)

"*anya deb anya shāstra nindā nā koribe*" – (C.C.)

Meaning - "Do not slander other *devatās* and *shāstras*".

Also we should not show contempt for those who worship *devatās*. They seek material pleasure and hence they engage in such worship. It is their nature to be loyal to *devatās* and they are qualified only for that. If the *devatās* feel true mercy for them they too will become free of material desires and gain the opportunity to practice Sri Krishna-*bhajan*. Then they will be truly blessed. Janasharmā of Sri Brihad-Bhagavatāmrita was a worshiper of Kāmākhyā devi and later on became a Krishna-devotee.

### **18. We should not cause anxiety to anyone –**

"Do not cause anxiety to any living being physically or mentally". – (C.C.)

This is our singular duty.

"A devotee should behave sweetly with every living being just as a parent treats a child. He never causes anxiety to anyone. Lord Hrishikesh is quickly pleased with such a devotee for his consciousness is pure." – *Mahābhārat* quoted in (B.R.S.)

Sri *Bhagavān* has declared this with His sacred lips in Bhagavad-Gita as well –

"O Arjun, who does not trouble anyone, neither can anyone make him agitated, who is free of material joy, anger, fear and anxiety – he is dear to me." – (B.G.12.15)

### **19. We should forsake *seva-aprādh* and *nām-aparādh* –**

What is '*aparādh*'? Srimat Jiva Goswāmipād has written in Bhakti-Sandarbha (300<sup>th</sup> chapter) –

"When we say that a devotee should have '*shraddhā*' and '*bhakti*' it naturally means that we should be respectful. When we commit an offence it indicates disrespect. Therefore disrespect is the root cause for offence and we should stop being disrespectful."

*Seva-aparādh* and *Nām-aparādh* are offences we commit at the sacred feet of *Bhakti devi*. After all, we worship *Bhakti devi* when we hear, chant the Holy Name etc. We should place her on the highest pedestal. We should treat her with utmost reverence. It is necessary to love and respect all the devotees who are on the path of *bhakti* and feel pleased when someone glorifies them – otherwise we are committing *aparādh*.

Bhakti-Rasāmrita-Sindhu quotes Varāha Purāṇ in this context –

"Sri Varāha dev told Dharani devi (Mother Earth) – Dear Vasundharā, A Vaishnav should very carefully avoid all the *aparādhs* while serving me. They are as follows –

- 1) To enter Sri Bhagavān's *Mandir* riding in a vehicle or with footwear.

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- 2) not to take *darshan* of Sri Krishna's festivals
- 3) not to pay obeisance to the Deity
- 4) To glorify or serve Sri *Bhagavân* when we are in a state of '*ucchishta*<sup>1</sup>' and contamination.
- 5) To pay obeisance with one hand
- 6) To circumambulate (turn round and round) in front of the Deity or to circumambulate a *devatâ* in front of Him
- 7) To spread our legs and sit in front of Him
- 8) To sit in front of Him with our arms around our knees
- 9) To sleep in front of the Deity
- 10) To eat in front of Him
- 11) To tell lies in front of Him
- 12) To talk loudly in front of Him
- 13) To chit-chat in front of Him
- 14) To cry out in material sorrow
- 15) To quarrel
- 16) To chastise anyone before the Deity
- 17) To bless anyone or to accept obeisance in front of the Deity
- 18) To speak cruelly to anyone
- 19) We should not wrap ourselves in blanket while paying obeisance or serving Him
- 20) To blaspheme others in front of Him
- 21) To praise others in front of Him
- 22) To use vulgar language in front of Him
- 23) To break wind in front of Him
- 24) It is an offence if we bring less costly items to serve Him in spite of being able to afford more valuable things
- 25) To eat food that has not been offered to Him.
- 26) Not offering the seasonal fruit and flower to the Deity
- 27) If we give the first portion of anything to someone else and then offer Him from the remaining, it is an offence.
- 28) To sit with our backs turned to the Deity
- 29) Not to glorify our Spiritual Master
- 30) To praise oneself
- 31) To blaspheme the *devatâs*
- 32) To pay obeisance to someone in front of the Deity, to pay obeisance to the left side of the Deity or facing Him or inside the sanctum sanctorum.

These are the 32 *sevâ-aparâdhs*.

There are some more offences that we should avoid such as –

- to eat food offered by a materialist
- to touch the Deity in the dark
- to offer food after touching untouchable animals like dog etc.
- to speak during *archanam*
- to get up for passing stool and urine during *archanam*
- to offer incense before offering perfume and garland
- to enter the *Mandîr* without washing hands and feet and without taking a bath after intercourse
- to serve the Deity after touching the dead, offered lamp and contaminated objects
- to serve Their Lordships wearing red, blue and dirty clothes or wearing clothes worn by someone else and unwashed
- to serve the Deity in an angry mood
- after returning from the crematorium
- when the food in the stomach is not digested
- after taking addictives such as drugs

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<sup>1</sup> Without washing our hands and mouth after eating or drinking

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- after taking an oil-massage

Other scriptures also instruct us to forsake some more *seva-aparādhs* such as –

- to worship the Deity by disregarding the rules stated in the *Bhakti-shāstras*
- to disregard the *Bhakti-shāstras* and uphold other scriptures
- to chew betel-leaf in front of the Deity
- to worship Sri *Bhagavān* with flowers kept on castor leaf
- to worship at inauspicious hours
- to sit on the floor or on a raised seat during *archanam*
- to touch the Deity with left hand while pouring water (bathing) Him – the liquid should not touch our left hand and then pour on Him
- offering dry or rotten flowers
- to spit during *archanam*
- to feel proud that none can worship like me
- to draw a crooked *tilak*
- to enter the *Mandir* without washing the feet
- to offer and partake of food cooked by non-Vaishnavas
- to dress up the Deity or offer *bhog* within a non-Vaishnava's eye-sight

Now we appreciate that *seva-aparādha* means all acts that show even the slightest disregard for the Deity or show in any manner that we have but the highest love, care, and faith and respect for Him. We should carefully avoid all the *seva-aparādhs*. It is possible that we may commit them, not knowingly, but by chance; in that case if we take the Holy Name daily and recite the various hymns and glories then the *seva-aparādha* is destroyed. However if we perform them knowingly and then recite glorifications because we know that it will destroy the offence, it gets converted into a '*Nām-aparādha*', that is – 'to commit a sin on the strength of the Holy Name' and it is very difficult to get out of this one!

*Nām-aparādhs* are 10 –

1. to blaspheme a devotee
2. to consider the names of Sri Vishnu and Sri Shiva as independent
3. to disregard the spiritual master
4. to blaspheme the Vedas and scriptures following them
5. to consider the glory of the Holy Name an exaggeration
6. to give some interpretation to the Holy Name
7. to commit a sin on the strength of the Holy Name
8. to consider Sri Harinām equal to pious activities
9. to instruct in Holy Name a person who lacks faith in it.
10. not to love the Holy Name in spite of hearing its glory

"Who has committed all sorts of offences will become free of them when he takes the shelter of Sri Hari; a sinner who offends Sri Hari may get rid of it by taking refuge of the Holy Name; however if we commit an offence unto the Holy Name who is everybody's friend, we shall certainly suffer." -(Padma Purān quoted in B.R.S.)

### **20. We should not tolerate the blasphemy of Sri Krishna and His devotees**

How can we say that we love Sri Krishna and his devotees if we bear their criticism?

"Who does not leave the place after hearing the blasphemy of Sri *Bhagavān* or His devotee falls down since all his *sukrītis* get destroyed."(S.B.10.74.40 quoted B.R.S.)

Srimat Jiva Goswāmipād has explained this verse further as –

"Srimad-Bhāgavatam (4.4.17) orders us to leave the place only if we are incapable of doing anything; however if we have any power it is our duty to cut off the slandering tongue; and if

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we cannot do this we should give up our body. Sri Durgâ devi lost her self-control when she heard her father Daksha criticizing Shivji and said – “When an independent person is not capable of protesting he should cover his ears and leave the place in which Lord Shiva who protects *dharma* is criticized; and if he has the power he should cut off the tongue of the slanderer and then give up his body.” – (B.S.265)

Vaishnavs are more humble than a blade of grass, offer respect to others, yet do not desire respect. They do not wish to stress anyone by body, mind or speech, hence it is best for us to cover our ears, meditate on Sri *Bhagavân* and leave the place.

These 20 points are the gateway to *bhakti*. Amongst these the first 10 are necessary to obey as our *sâdhan bhakti* commences and we should shun the next 10 as ‘don’ts’. The next points are mostly related to certain activities.

### **21. We should don sacred marks on our body such as tilak and tulsi-**

“Vaishnavs who decorate themselves with Tulsi and lotus-deed-necklaces, draw Sri Hari’s sacred feet beautified with symbols of conch-shell, discus etc., whose foreheads dazzle with *tilak* – they definitely purify the world.” – (Padma Purân quoted in B.R.S.)

The scriptures also state –

*yagnopaveet-vad dhârya kanthe tulasi-mâlikâ  
kshana-mâra-parityâgât vishnu-drohi bhaven-narah.  
ashouche cha-py-anâchâre kale-akâle cha sarvadâ,  
tulasi-mâlikâm dhatte sa yâti paramam padam.*

Meaning - “We should don the Tulsi necklace constantly just like the sacred thread. If we detach it even for a moment we become anti-Vishnu. Even during child-birth, dealing with the dead, and intercourse, or at any other time – if we continue to sport the Tulsi necklace we shall attain the highest realm.”

These statements prove the glory of wearing sacred insignia. There are people who say – “*Bhakti* should be in our heart, what is the need to wear Tulsi beads and *tilak*? If they read these statements of the Holy Scriptures they will realize how much spiritual strength they confer on a devotee, and when we forsake them the loss is tremendous. For a Vaishnav the Tulsi necklace and *tilak* are reminders of his *swarup*, they are conducive for self-surrender and hence boost our *bhajan*.

### **22. We should write the Holy Name on our body -**

“Who write Sri Krishna’s names on their body with *chandan* etc. purify the world and attain Sri Hari’s abode which is *supreme*.” – (Padma Purân quoted in B.R.S.)

The Holy Name is non-different from Sri *Bhagavân*, hence it is indeed *sach-chidânanda*. When the Holy Name touches our body it is good for our health and general well-being also, what to speak of spiritual welfare. The saints advise us to serve the Holy Name with all our senses – we serve Him with our skin by writing the Holy Name on our body.

### **23. We should wear *prasâdi* garland -**

Flowers, garlands, *chandan*, Tulsi etc taken from the Deities are called ‘*nirmâlya*’. When this ‘*nirmâlya*’ touches our body it destroys *anartha* and grants us love for His holy feet.

“Uddhav *Mahâshay* is saying in Srimad-Bhâgavatam (11.6.46) – quoted in B.R.S. – My dear Lord, We are your servants; we shall don garlands, *chandan*, clothes and ornaments enjoyed (worn) by You and thus we shall easily overcome *mâyâ*.”

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This proves how we can destroy non-Krishna desires and gain Sri Krishna-*bhakti* by using materials offered to the Deity.

### 24. We should dance in front of the Deity –

"Who dances happily in front of the Deity with *bhāv* abd *bhakti* annihilates all the sins he has accumulated in hundreds of *manvantars*." (Dwārakā-Māhātmyam quoted in B.R.S.)

How simple it is to sing and dance in front of the Deity – in fact it is an enjoyable experience too – yet it supremely pleases Sri *Bhagavān*!

### 25. We should pay obeisance –

"We cannot compare the outcome of paying a single obeisance to Sri Krishna with the result of ten complete *Ashwamedh* sacrifices. We still get rebirth after performing *Ashwamedh* sacrifice, whereas who pays obeisance to Sri Krishna is released from the cycle of birth and death."

– (Nārad Muni quoted in B.R.S.)

Srila Vishwanāth Chakravartipād explains 'obeisance' –

"*swāpakaṛsha-bodha-anukula-vyāpāra-viśheśo namaskārah*"

Meaning - "'obeisance' is an act by which we degrade ourselves yet it is good for us."

There are four types of obeisance –

- Ø *Abhivādan*<sup>1</sup> (to touch the feet after exclaiming "Jay" or other words of glorification)
- Ø *Sāshtāṅga*<sup>2</sup> (to touch the feet by fully prostrating on the ground – this indicates the surrender with 8 organs - feet, knees, chest, eyes, head, hands, speech and mind)
- Ø *Panchāṅga* (to touch the lotus feet with 5 organs – hands, head, knees, speech and mind)
- Ø Join our palms and touch to our head

Padma Purān says –

"*ahamkritirmakārah syān-nakārah-tan-nishedhakah, tasmāttunamasā kshetriswātantryam pratishidhyati.*"

Meaning - "'na' means 'no' and 'ma' signifies 'ahamkār' (false ego). Hence 'namaskār' or obeisance is the best way to get rid of false pride."

When we pay obeisance to Sri Gurudev, we should touch our head to his feet and pay *panchāṅga* or *sāshtāṅga* obeisance with prayer.

### 26. We should rise (from sitting or lying position) when we get *darshan* of the Deity -

We should stand up when the temple doors open for darshan, and even when Sri Gurudev or senior Vaishnavs arrive. Or else it is not good for our welfare. When we arise, it is a mark of respect and it destroys inauspiciousness.

### 27. When we see a procession of the Deity and *Guruvarga* we should follow them -

"Even dog-eaters become as adorable as Vishnu if they accompany Sri *Bhagavān*'s chariot, procession etc. at the side, behind or in front." -(Bhavishyottar Purān quoted in B.R.S.)

### 28. We should visit the *Mandirs* in the Holy places such as Sri Vrindāban where Sri *Bhagavān* has performed His divine pastimes, and take His *darshan* -

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<sup>1</sup> = hail

<sup>2</sup> Sa= with; ashta = eight; anga = organs.

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When we visit the holy places we get the association of pure devotees; we feel blessed in their company, and especially so in Vrindâban since this Dhâm Prabhu has inconceivable potency. We shall describe this later.

### **29. We should circumambulate the Deity and Tulsi devi –**

The right way to do *parikramâ* is to keep the Deity to our right and circumambulate 4 times. This yields very quick and good result – it is better than bathing in the Gangâ. *Parikramâ* of Sri Girirâj in Braja-dhâm has very great glory and fulfils our desire swiftly. Many faithful devotees do Sri Girirâj *Parikramâ* on the Full moon day, new moon day, on special occasions and in the Purushottam month.

**30. Archanam** - it is the process by which we make offerings to the Deity after purifying ourselves and with *mantras*. It is the bounden duty of every initiated devotee to perform *archanam*, otherwise the consequence is terrible. During *archanam* we must never ever consider the Deity as an 'idol' or 'image', because He is really Sri *Bhagavân*. All those who perform *archanam* after initiation attain Sri *Bhagavân*'s eternal and blissful abode.

We should do *archanam* only after we learn the scriptural method of worshipping. **Although we may worship lovingly but not in the prescribed manner we get only one hundredth the result.** We get 0.01% result only because we have done the *pujâ* with love and care – without these we shall not gain anything. Hence it is necessary to perform *pujâ* according to the scriptural injunctions.

During *Yogpeeth-sevâ* we should meditate on our *siddha-deha*, be present near Sri Krishna Who is surrounded by Srimati Râdhârâni and the *sakhis*. Then we should worship as per the instructions of our Spiritual Master. After this we should worship externally with external paraphernalia. This *Yogpeeth-seva* is the soul of external *seva*. Without *Yogpeeth-seva*, the external *seva* is meaningless. The householders must serve the Deity to the best of their ability with the costliest items they can afford. If they serve only in meditation like the penniless recluse they fall under the category '*vitta-shâthya*' (monetary fraud). If we make someone else perform the *pujâ* as our representative, it means we are lazy and just 'keeping the routine'. This signifies irreverence and hence we should avoid it.

### **31. Paricharyâ – (to serve directly) –**

'*Paricharyâ* indicates that we should serve the Deity like a king – give Him royal treatment. We should clean the items used for *seva* and serve Him with fan etc.

Sriman-Nârad Muni has said –

"muhurtam vâ muhurtârddham yastishtheddhari-mandire, sa yâti paramam sthânam kimu shushrushane ratâh." – (B.R.S.)

Meaning - "Who resides in the temple of Sri Hari for a moment or even half a moment, he attains the supreme abode; then how much more a devotee who serves the Deity will gain – can we guess?"

There are many points in *archanam* and *paricharyâ*. Sri Hari-Bhakti-Vilâs has described them in detail. If we can engage even in one such *seva* our life is blessed. We should serve the Lord with objects suitable for that particular time and place<sup>1</sup>.

### **32. We should sing songs pertaining to Sri Hari's Holy Name, beauty and pastimes -**

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<sup>1</sup> For example in winter we should use warm water to bathe the Deity and should not fan Him. Also He will feel more comfortable with woolen garlands than flower ones. In summer we should dress Him in cotton clothes.

"The scriptures say - Do not sing any song other than Sri *Bhagavān*'s glory. Therefore the *brahmin* sang Sri Vāsudev's glorification constantly and attained His abode. That song yielded better result than even the glorification of Sri Rudra (Shiva)." – (B.R.S.)

**33. *Sankirtan* or Congregational singing of the Holy Name** – *Sankirtan* means to chant Sri *Bhagavān*'s name, qualities and pastimes loudly. Also when many devotees unite and sing the Holy Name together we call it '*sankirtan*'. *Sankirtan* is the '*yuga-dharma*' in the *Kaliyug*. Hence we should follow the other rules of *bhajan* always accompanied by *Sankirtan*.

"When we perform the nine types of *bhakti* we have to accompany them with *Nām-sankirtan*, otherwise our endeavor will not be successful." – (C.C.Madhya.15.107)

Often we cannot perform some parts of *bhajan* (e.g. *archanam*) perfectly. However it becomes perfect when we take the Holy Name along with it. The Holy Name itself is Sri *Bhagavān*. It is the 'Sound-incarnation' of Sri Hari. It is absolute. Therefore it has the ability to fulfill our short-comings while performing the other parts of *bhajan*. With the help of *Nām-sankirtan* we can easily get Bhagavat-*prem* (divine love) and side-by-side we also get rid of material attachments.

"The nine types of *Bhakti* are the topmost *Bhajan* and have great power to give us Krishna-*prem* and Krishna. However *Nām-sankirtan* is the best of all –and if we chant the Holy Name inoffensively we get the treasure called '*prem*'." – (C.C.Antya.4.65-66)

*Nām-sankirtan* is so powerful that nothing can stop it. Only *aparādhs* have the strength to pose obstacles on its path. Sriman-*Mahāprabhu* has Himself instructed us how we can avoid *aparādh* and attain the main objective of *Nām-sankirtan*, that is '*prem*' –

"Hear O Swarup and Rāmānanda Roy! This is the manner in which we should chant the Holy Name so as to attain *prem* –

*trinādapi suneechena taroreva sahishnunā,  
amāninā mānadena kirtaniyah sada harih.*

Sriman-*Mahāprabhu* has explained this verse as follows –

A devotee should have excellent qualities and yet consider himself more worthless than a blade of grass. Also he should be as tolerant as a tree in two aspects – a tree never protests when you cut it; it dries up, yet does not ask for water. Moreover it gives its fruits to whosoever desires them. It bears heat and rain, all the while lending shelter and protection to others. Similarly a Vaishnav should possess excellent qualities and yet be devoid of pride. He should respect every living being because he is aware that Sri Krishna is present in all.

When a devotee takes the Holy Name in this manner he gets love for the sacred feet of Sri Krishna." – (C.C.Antya.20.16-21)

Srila Krishnadās Kavirāj Goswāmi has mentioned that the Lord has declared with His Holy lips and has commanded –

"I give a clarion call with upraised arms – do add this verse with the Holy Name and wear it like a garland round your neck. Obey the Lord by following this instruction and you shall most certainly attain the sacred feet of Sri Krishna." – (C.C.Ādi.17.32-33)

This means that if we behave according to Sriman-*Mahāprabhu*'s instructions and chant the Holy Name, the one and only obstacle, Vaishnav-aparādh will never occur. It is also the tremendously powerful obstacle. But, if we are more humble than a blade of grass, and as tolerant as a tree, we shall never commit a Vaishnav-offence. Then we can very easily gain the good fortune of attaining *prem*.

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There are different types of *kirtan* (hymns) such as '*leelâ-kirtan*' (glorifying the divine pastimes) and '*guna-kirtan*' (glorifying the divine qualities) -

"Sri Prahlâd said – O Lord Narsimha, I am your humble servant who has received Your mercy. You are my dear well-wisher and the Supreme Being. Brahmâ **glorifies Your pastimes**<sup>1</sup>. I shall hear them constantly in the company of blessed *paramhamsas* who reside at Your lotus-feet. Then I shall get rid of material attachments and easily cross over mountainous sorrow."

– (S.B.7.9.18 quoted in B.R.S.)

The power of '*guna-kirtan*' is as follows – "The great devotees say that our *tapasyâ*, *Vedic*-study, performing nice *yagna*, uttering Vedic hymns perfectly, knowledge and alms-giving - all yield just one result – and that is we start glorifying *Bhagavân* Sri Hari's excellent qualities"

– (S.B.1.5.22 quoted in B.R.S.)

### 34. *Jap* –

When we utter a *mantra* very softly it is called *Jap*. It is part of meditation. *Jap* is of three types –

- a. **Vocal** – when we perform *kirtan* we take the *mantra* loudly
- b. **Soft** – in this we take the *mantra* so softly that only we are able to hear it and no one else
- c. **Mental** – we take the *mantra* without vibrating the tongue. In 'mental *jap*' we meditate on the meaning of the *mantra* and repeat it. It is part of meditation.

Taking the *Mantra*<sup>2</sup> in mind is better than repeating it softly and it is better than loud utterance. Whereas in the case of chanting the *Mahâmantra*, loud chanting is better than soft chanting which is better than chanting in the mind. We should learn the rules of taking the *mantra* and its meaning from Sri Gurudev.

**35. Talking** – "Whatever little you have spoken to Sri Hari has opened the doorway for your liberation." – (Padma Purân quoted in B.R.S.)

This talking is of many types such as **praying, expressing humility, displaying eagerness** etc.

**We should talk to Sri Krishna and tell Him about the feelings in our heart. This is praying.**

Example of **praying** –

"My dear Lord, just as a young man gets deeply attached to a young woman and vice versa, please makes my heart engrossed in You." – (Padma Purân quoted in B.R.S.)

Example of **humility** –

"Dear Purushottam, none in the whole world is as sinful and offensive as me. I am embarrassed to even request You to please forgive my sins." – (Padma Purân quoted in B.R.S.)

Example of **intense eagerness** (*lâlasâmayi prârthanâ*) –

*Kadâham yamunâteere nâmâni tava keertayan,  
udvâshpah pundarikâksha! rachayishyâmi tândavam?"*

<sup>1</sup> This indicates *guna-kiran*.

<sup>2</sup> Here 'mantra' refers to Kâm-beej, Kâm-Gâyatri, Gour-mantra/Gâyatri, Radha-mantra/Gâyatri etc. and not to Mahâmantra.

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"Dear Pundarikâksha, when will that day arrive in my life when I shall burst into a *tândav*<sup>1</sup> on the banks of the Yamuna with tears flowing from my eyes, while singing Your Holy Name?"

Only when the *sâdhak* attains the stage of *rati*/such prayer is possible. **Lâlasâmayi prayer is the right prayer for a râgânugâ devotee.**

### 36. We should recite glorification in front of Sri Bhagavân –

There are many eulogies in Gitâ, Srimad-Bhâgavatam, and bhakti-texts such as Goutamiya Tantra. The *Mahâjans* have composed many sweet glorifications. We should recite them repeatedly. The *râgânugâ* devotees who wish to perform intimate and intense *bhajan* should recite the *stavas*<sup>2</sup> from Stavamâlâ by Srila Rupa Goswâmipâd, Sri Stavâvali by Srila Raghunâth dâs Goswâmi, Prârthanâ and *Prem*-Bhakti-Chandrikâ by Srila Narottam dâs Thâkur *Mahâshay*.

### 37. We should relish Mahâprasâdam –

It is the food-offering we make to Sri Krishna with love and devotion accompanied by *mantrâs*. What food should we offer to Sri Krishna? All that is pure, pleasing, fit for human consumption and nutritious. A devotee should always accept only *Mahâprasâdam*. We must never ever accept what is not *Mahâprasâdam*. It is divine; when we take it, we are rid of material tendencies and ultimately we gain *prem* and *bhakti*.

In fact we should never accept food, water or medicine without offering to Sri Krishna. Accepting unoffered food is detrimental for a Vaishnav.

We may think that refusing *Mahâprasâdam* or neglecting it is a sign of material detachment. That is, it shows we have overcome sense-gratification. However it only shows *Phalgu-vairâgya*<sup>3</sup>. When we do not beg for *Mahâprasâdam* (say, when we see someone distributing it) it indicates false-pride. After getting *Mahâprasâdam* if we neglect it or disregard it, it is an *aparâdh*. We should never make *mahâprasâd* wait, for 'Prasâd Prabhu' is non-different from Govinda. It is better we accept *Mahâprasâdam* eagerly. In fact we should be interested in accepting anything pertaining to Sri Krishna, for only in this manner we can truly overcome our sensual desires.

### 38. We should relish the *charanâmrîtam* (foot-wash) of Sri Hari –

"Who do not give alms, nor recite the Vedas, nor worship nor perform any sacrifice, yet drink the foot wash of Sri Hari will attain the highest realm." – (Padma Purân quoted in B.R.S.)

### 39. We should smell the fragrance of incense offered to Sri Krishna –

Its glory is as follows –

"We are bitten by the snake-like material desires and attachments. If we wish to rid ourselves from the poison of this snake, it is our foremost duty to smell the scent of incense offered to Sri Hari." – (Tantra quoted in B.R.S.)

This goes for Sri Hari's garland and Tulsi as well. The fragrance of flowers and Tulsi offered to Sri Bhagavân enters our nose and destroys all *anarthas*. It transmits *bhakti* in us. The sages such as Sanak were situated in the bliss of submerging in Brahman. Yet when they smelt the Tulsi offered at Sri Nârâyan's lotus feet, that fragrance crushed their *Brahmânanda* and transmitted *supreme* devotion in them. Srimad-Bhâgavatam (3.15) describes this incident.

<sup>1</sup> A vigorous dance of frenzy or delirium

<sup>2</sup> Panegyric, tribute, adulation

<sup>3</sup> River Phalgu in Bengal appears dry since all we can see is a sandy spread which actually is a very thin layer. However the river flows quietly underneath. If a person tries to walk on the sand, he falls into the water. Similarly a person may display detachment, yet have desire for sense gratification inside. This is 'phalgu-vairâgya'.

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### 40. We should touch the Deity during archanam –

Earlier we have stated that it is compulsory for every initiated devotee to perform *archanam*. When we do *archanam* we should be physically and mentally pure and worship with faith, love and devotion.

*"sprishtvā vishnoradhushthānam pavitrah shraddhayānvitah."*

– (Vishnu-dharmottar quoted in B.R.S.)

Srimat Jiva Goswāmipād has explained this verse as follows –

"Let us learn the wonderful benefit of touching the Deity. However everyone does not have the right to touch Him. Only those who have got *dikshā* can touch the Lord.

Skanda Purān says –

*evam sri-bhagavān sarvaih shālagrāma-shilātmakah,  
dwijaih stribhishcha shudraishcha pujyoh bhagavatah pariah*

Meaning – All *bhagavat-parāyan*<sup>1</sup> brahmins, women and *shudras* can worship Sri *Bhagavān* Who is in the form of Shālagrām.

Here '*bhagavat-parāyan*' means 'those who follow the rules of *bhakti*, or the Vaishnavs<sup>2</sup>'. It naturally follows that those who are without love for Sri *Bhagavān* have no right to touch Shālagrām. Hence when we read in the scriptures that women and shudras should not touch Shālagrām we should know that it refers to non-Vaishnav women and shudras<sup>3</sup>. Such statements do NOT indicate women and shudras who follow Vaishnav-etiquette and have love for Sri Vishnu (or Sri Krishna).

### 41. We should take darshan of the Deity –

When we do not get an opportunity to touch the Deity we should take His *darshan*. We get a lot of benefit from this –

"O Vasundharā, those who go to Sri Vrindāban and take *darshan* of Sri Govindadev, do not go to the abode of Yamrāj (the Lord of death), instead they attain the realm of pious people." – (Varāha Purān quoted in B.R.S.)

Here 'realm of pious people' definitely refers to Sri Bhagavān's abode since we can get only one blessing from the *darshan* of Govinda dev – and that is *prem*. Srimat Jiva Goswāmipād has explained this verse as follows –

"The author (Srila Rupa Goswāmipād) has instructed the wonderful benefit of taking *darshan* of every worshipped Deity of Sri Bhagavān. After this, due to his immense *bhakti* he has stated the special glory of taking *darshan* of Sri Govinda dev Who is Sri *Bhagavān* in His true form. Here 'they go to the realm of pious people' means 'one attains the state of Sri Krishna-*bhakti*' for we should realize that *bhakti* is the topmost achievable goal."

### 42. We should take darshan of ārātrika (ārati)<sup>4</sup> –

Ārātrika or ārati as we commonly call it is a very loving affair. If we take *darshan* of the Deity during ārati, great sins too get destroyed and we gain very good result in our devotional life.

### 43. Hearing –

As soon as Sri Krishna's name, description of His beauty, qualities and associates touch our ears we call it 'hearing'. It spells the beginning of *Bhajan* and the best *bhajan*. Without hearing

<sup>1</sup> Those who have taken the path of *bhakti*, which incidentally, commences with initiation.

<sup>2</sup> Since Vaishnav are the ones who follow the rules of *bhakti*

<sup>3</sup> Shudras do not remain so after they have embraced Vaishnavism

<sup>4</sup> Offering of lamp, incense etc.

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we cannot learn why we should perform *bhajan* and its glory. Especially when we hear Sri Krishna-*kathā*, He enters our heart, destroys material desires and manifests *bhakti*. Also it is very beneficial to hear about Sri *Bhagavān* from great devotees.

Srimat Jiva Goswāmipād has written –

"Hearing Srimad-Bhāgavatam is the topmost hearing, since the words of Srimad-Bhāgavatam have immense power. The great sage Vyāsdev has commented in the very beginning of Srimad-Bhāgavatam that, forget hearing Srimad-Bhāgavatam, if we merely wish to hear it – immediately Sri *Bhagavān* is imprisoned inside our heart. - (S.B.1.1.2) Also Srimad-Bhāgavatam is the complete summum bonum of the Vedas. The Vedas are like a wish-fulfilling tree while Srimad-Bhāgavatam is its ripened fruit. Therefore its every bite is delicious."

- (Bhakti-Sandarbha).

Here Srimad-Bhāgavatam refers not only to Srimad-Bhāgavatam, but also all the 'Rasa-granthis'<sup>1</sup> composed by our Goswāmis since they are in accordance with Srimad-Bhāgavatam. We are worshiping in the mood of Braja-*ras*; hence if we are fortunate enough to hear about Sri *Bhagavān* from a pure devotee who is in the same mood then it is really a great blessing. Also when we hear Sri Krishna-*kathā* we should hear with love, faith and attention, since then only we shall gain passionate love for Sri Krishna's lotus feet. Later on we should ruminate on what we have heard.

"If we follow this rule for hearing, Sri Hari will come spontaneously and enter our heart. We do not have to make any special effort in this regard." – (Sri Shridhar Swāmi)

### 44. We should wait for Sri *Bhagavān*'s merciful gaze –

All our devotional efforts will be successful when the Lord gives us His bounty. Although sugarcane is sweet, we need a machine to squeeze the juice out. Similarly Sri *Bhagavān* is full of *kripā-ras*, yet we cannot get this *ras* without eager and enthusiastic *bhajan*. We have to work hard for it. Hence we should anxiously and constantly wait for Sri Krishna's mercy while performing *bhajan* so that it will bear fruits.

Sri Brahma glorified Sri Krishna by saying – "My Lord, when a devotee bears his share of joys and sorrows (he knows they are the results of his own deeds) and continues to perform *bhajan* with body, mind and speech, all the time simply praying 'Dear Lord, when will I get your mercy?' he naturally inherits You (the greatest treasure) just as a good son inherits his father's wealth." – (S.B.10.14.8 quoted in B.R.S.)

Srila Vishwanāth Chakravartipād has explained this verse as follows –

"Who has forsaken all other paths and follows only *bhakti* – he alone will gain You. Knowing this, we may question – what sort of *bhakti* should I perform? The answer is – we should perform *bhajan* with body, mind and speech while enjoying whatever life offers us – be it sorrow or joy. *Bhakti* gives happiness and *aparādh* brings suffering. The devotee goes through these experiences and eventually considers both as Sri *Bhagavān*'s mercy. A loving father feeds his child milk as well as *Neem*<sup>2</sup>-juice to maintain her health. Milk is palatable while the child abhors *Neem*-juice. However the father forces the child to drink both since they are nutritious. Similarly he sometimes hugs and kisses the child and at times may even slap to correct her. A surrendered devotee feels that I do not know what is good for me, only my Lord knows best. I am His devotee, time and karma have no effect on me – it is my Lord Who takes mercy on me and gives me joy and sorrow. When a devotee firmly believes in this and serves Sri *Bhagavān* with body, mind and speech, he gets liberation from material attachments (this is secondary result) and the right to serve the Holy feet of Sri *Bhagavān* (chief outcome). If we wish to inherit our father's wealth all we have to do is – continue to live. Similarly to gain the

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<sup>1</sup> Delectable texts

<sup>2</sup> *Azadirachta indica*, syn. *Melia azadirachta* L., *Antelaea azadirachta* (L.)

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treasure-like sacred feet of Sri *Bhagavān*, all we need to do is – continue in the path of *bhakti*. Therefore we should humbly live a life of *bhakti* and patiently wait for His causeless mercy.

**45. Meditation** – It means we should connect our mind in any manner with Sri *Bhagavān*'s name, beauty, qualities and pastimes. Remembering Sri Hari is the soul of *bhakti-sādhanā*. If we do not remember Him during *bhajan* it means *bhajan* is lifeless and we are just like robots.

"I seek shelter unto Sri Hari Who is without beginning and end, and Whom as soon as we remember we gain all welfare." – (Vishnu Purān quoted in B.R.S.)

Srimat Jiva Goswāmipād has written in Bhakti Sandarbha –

"Sri Krishna is the universal guru. When a devotee meditates on His lotus feet, Sri Krishna appears before him and offers Himself to the devotee. It indicates that He surrenders unto the devotee on His own. Then what more can we say about the devotee's material desires<sup>1</sup>? Since anyway, he does not desire much."

Meditation has five stages –

- Ø ***Smaran*** – this is the primary level. In this stage the devotee thinks of Sri Hari's name, beauty etc to a small degree.
- Ø ***Dhāraṇā*** – in this stage the devotee drags his mind away from other topics and concentrates on Sri *Bhagavān*'s beauty etc. This is an ordinary level of concentration.
- Ø ***Dhyān*** – when the concentration is deep then we call it '*dhyān*'.
- Ø ***Dhruvānusmṛitu*** – in this level the remembrance is continuous like the flow of oil – the mind does not wander.
- Ø ***Samādhi*** – in this stage the devotee experiences '*sphurti*' (spontaneous revelation).

Hearing, glorifying and remembrance are intermingled with each other. We cannot tell when one will lead to another. We may be hearing or chanting the Holy Name, and suddenly it absorbs us in His remembrance! Therefore chanting the Holy Name and meditation are often inseparable and one leads to the other. We shall discuss this in detail in 'A scientific Study of Rāgānugā-Bhakti.'

**46. *Dhyān*<sup>2</sup>** – '*Dhyān*' is the most important part of *bhajan* since no *bhajan* is fruitful unless and until we perform it with deep concentration. Therefore Srila Rupa Goswāmipād has given it as a special point.

'*Dhyān*' means 'extremely deep concentration'. It is the soul of devotional practice. Its outcome is extremely marvelous. Whatever we do, whether we hear, take the Holy Name, sing glorification, do *archanam* or for that matter any *sevā*, we have to do it with *dhyān*. We find in Srimad-Bhāgavatam –

"Sri Avadhut Gitā describes the inconceivable effect of *dhyān*. When a living being fixes its mind on anything – be it out of fear, love or envy – it attains the state of the 'object of meditation'. Let us explain with an example – Srimad-Bhāgavatam mentions that there is an insect that catches another smaller insect and imprisons it in its nest. The tiny insect is in constant fear of the bigger insect and hence constantly thinks about it. Therefore it starts looking like the insect even before leaving its body. This signifies that we can get a similar body like that of our 'object of meditation'. Then do we have any

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<sup>1</sup> They are sure to melt away

<sup>2</sup> The third level of meditation or very deep concentration

doubt that if we meditate on *sac-chidānanda* Sri *Bhagavān*, we too shall gain a *sac-chidānanda* form?" – (S.B.11.9.22-23)

*Dhyān* is of four types –

Ø ***Rupa<sup>1</sup>-dhyān*** – The scriptures have declared that if we meditate on Sri Krishna's lotus feet all our sorrows will be alleviated. Sri Krishna has 19 symbols on His soles – such as flag, thunderbolt, elephant-goad etc. Each symbol is capable of destroying *anarthas* that cause obstacles on the path of *bhakti*. It also has immense power to offer *prem* to the meditator.

Sri Krishna has infinite beauty and sweetness. When we meditate on His form it attracts our mind like a pitcher of honey drags a honey bee – so much so – that we naturally give up thinking about objects other than Sri Krishna.

Ø ***Guna<sup>2</sup>-dhyān*** – Sri Krishna has excellent and sweet qualities such as love for His devotees, compassion etc. If a devotee meditates on these qualities constantly with devotion even colossal amount of anarthas get destroyed and he attains the abode of Sri Hari.

Ø ***Leelā-<sup>3</sup>dhyān*** – Sri Krishna is heart-stealing and His pastimes are even more tempting. They are the essence of all sweetness. If we meditate on them we shall immerse in sweet *ras*.<sup>3</sup>

Ø ***Sevā<sup>4</sup>-dhyān*** – to serve '*manomayee<sup>5</sup>*' Deity in meditation.

"Certain devotees have served Sri Hari continually in their mind and have actually got his *darshan* although He is beyond all conception." – (Purān quoted in B.R.S.)

Srimat Jiva Goswāmipād has explained this point further by quoting an incident from Sri Brahma-Vaivarta Purān –

"There lived a simple and poor brahmin in Pratishthānpur (present day Paithān in Maharashtra). He was extremely eager to serve Sri *Bhagavān*. However due to poverty he was unable to buy the ingredients necessary for *pujā*. One day he attended an assembly of *Vaishnavs* to hear Bhagavad-*kathā*. There he heard that if someone is unable to get the items needed for external *sevā*, he can manifest the Deity in his mind and can simply worship Him with all the paraphernalia mentally. When the Brahmin heard this he was delighted. He decided that he would worship his *manomayee* Deity everyday. One day, after bathing in the Godāvari, he sat in a secluded place. In his mind he built a nice temple for Sri Hari, installed *manomayee* Deity, worshiped Him with royal ingredients and he felt supreme happiness. He continued to worship in this manner everyday. On one occasion he decided to offer *paramānnā* with ghee to the Deity. So he cooked it in his mind, poured it in a gold vessel and started fanning to cool it. After sometime, he mentally dipped his finger in it to check whether it had cooled or not. His finger got burnt. He felt sorry that now the *paramānnā* had become unfit for Sri *Bhagavān*'s *sevā*. His *samādhī*<sup>6</sup> broke. He saw that his finger had really got burnt and he could feel the pain. When Sri Hari saw His bewildered devotee, He smiled, called for a vehicle and brought His devotee to Him."

<sup>1</sup> beauty

<sup>2</sup> excellence

<sup>3</sup> We have discussed *leelā-dhyān* in detail in 'A Scientific Study of *Raganugā bhajat*'.

<sup>4</sup> Loving service

<sup>5</sup> When a form of Sri *Bhagavān* manifests in our mind (*man*) and we worship Him mentally, such a Deity is called '*manomayee*'.

<sup>6</sup> Rice cooked in milk and sugar

<sup>7</sup> The highest level of meditation

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47. Dâsyâ<sup>1</sup> – When we serve thinking “I am Sri Krishna’s servant” such a mood is called ‘dâsyâ’.

“When we are engrossed in the mood that “I am Sri Krishna’s servant” we get so much bliss – it is like an ocean – and even millions of Brahmânanda cannot equal a drop of this ocean.”

– (C.C.Antya.6.44.)

Srimat Jiva Goswâmipâd has written –

“Forget doing *paricharyâ*, if we are simply engrossed in the mood of a servant we shall attain success, that is, gain *prem-bhakti*.” – (B.S.304)

He has quoted evidence *Itihâs* to prove his point –

“janmântar sahasreshu yasya syânmatireedrishi,  
dâso’ham vâsudevasya sarvân lokân samuddharet.”

Meaning - “After gathering the good fortune over thousands of births someone gets the feeling ‘I am Vâsudev’s servant’ - such a person can deliver the entire world.”

What is ‘dâsyâ’?

Srimat Jiva Goswâmipâd has explained it as follows – “Dâsyâ’ means to pay obeisance, glorify, surrender all our activities to Him, do *paricharyâ*, remember His holy feet and hear about Him. Sri Hari’s servants always accomplish all *sâdhanâ* and achieve their goal – they never fail in anything. Srimad-Bhâgavatam says –

Sri *Bhagavâns* Name is so exalted that simply by hearing it once man gets purified. Then how great is His servant? Forget attaining complete success in *bhajan*, there is nothing he cannot achieve. – (S.B.9.5.16.)”

**We, the Goudiya *Vaishnavs* are proud to consider ourselves Srimati Râdhârâni’s maidservants and worship the Divine couple in this mood.** We shall discuss this in detail in ‘A Scientific study of *Râgânugâ Bhajat*.

48. Sakhyâ – It means to have faith and treat one another with friendly love. We should have faith in Sri Krishna and be friends with Him. We can express our *sakhyâ*-mood by endeavoring for His welfare and happiness. Some great devotees have such friendly and loving *bhâv* towards Sri Krishna that they sleep inside the temple to guard Him.

*Sakhyâ-bhâv* is not only a goal, but also a *sâdhanâ* since we can gain *prem* by practicing this mood. Sri *Bhagavân* is everybody’s friend, yet He has special love for His devotees. The devotees too always wish Him well. This loving relation between Sri *Bhagavân* and His devotees is unbroken. Therefore when we practice being friendly with Him, our natural love for Him blooms further.

49. Self-surrender - This means we should surrender everything to Sri *Bhagavân* – body, soul and everything we possess. When we surrender, it indicates that we do not try anything for ourselves. We leave our goal and *sâdhanâ* to Him – He will take care of my goal and also to my *sâdhanâ* – this is the feeling. We will only take great care of Him and He will see to the rest. This is self-surrender. It is like selling your cow. Suppose you possess a cow. Till you own it you are bound to worry about its food, health etc. But once you sell the cow you need not worry anymore; now let the man who has bought the cow take the trouble. Similarly as long as we are proud and think this body to be ‘I’ and material possessions to be ‘mine’ we have to worry about their maintenance. Once we have sought refuge in the path of *bhakti* and we have surrendered unto Sri Krishna’s lotus feet we need not be anxious for ourselves or our possessions (relations) any more.

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<sup>1</sup> *Dâs* = servant; *dâsyâ* = the mood of servitude.

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Our minds should just be deeply absorbed in Him and perform His *bhajan* - free of stress. Then we shall be blessed.

"When we seek refuge of Sri Krishna and self-surrender unto Him, He immediately makes us His own." – (C.C.Madhya.22.54.)

50. **We should offer Sri Krishna what is dear to us** – "When an object is permitted by the scriptures, it is lavish **and** it is also our favorite – and we offer such an object to Sri Krishna then the outcome is immeasurable." - (S.B.11.11.41. quoted in B.R.S.)

Here 'favorite object' refers to those items permitted by the scriptures since an object forbidden by the scriptures can never be a devotee's favorite. In the above statement 'and' indicates Sri *Bhagavān*'s favorite as well. When we offer such items we get immense results.

**51. All our endeavors should be directed towards Sri Krishna** - A devotee labors only to please Sri Krishna.

"O sage, who wishes to gain *bhakti* should direct all his activities – be it worldly or spiritual – to serve Sri Hari alone." – (Pancharātra quoted in B.R.S.)

If we are following the path of pure devotion we should not offer our activity to Sri Krishna after performing it, rather before doing anything we should question ourselves whether it is for Sri Krishna's pleasure or not? If it is, then we perform that deed – this is *seva*. Then it is worthwhile.

**52. Sharanāgati**<sup>1</sup> – Taking refuge is the main pillar of devotional practice. Our progress in *bhakti* is directly proportional to our *sharanāgati*. We should seek the refuge of Sri Krishna with body, mind and speech.

"The devotee who says – 'My dear Lord, I am only Yours', knows the same in his mind (he really feels he belongs to Sri Krishna) and physically lives in his *dhām*, he has indeed taken refuge and enjoys happiness." – (B.R.S.)

There are 6 rules of *Sharanāgati*–

*ānukulyasya samkalpah prātikulya-vivārjanam,  
rakshishyatiti vishwāśo goptritve varanam tahtā.  
ātma-nikshepa-kārpanye shada-vidhā sharanāgatih.*

Meaning –

- Ø Determined to do all that is favorable for *bhakti*
- Ø Reject everything that is unfavorable for *bhakti*
- Ø A firm faith that "Sri *Bhagavān* will protect me"
- Ø To feel that "Sri *Bhagavān* is my sole maintainer"
- Ø Self-surrender
- Ø Pray with humility

Amongst these "Sri *Bhagavān* is my husband or sole maintainer" is the main point, other rules follow suit. ***Sharanāgati* is wonderful and without this we can not say we belong to Sri Krishna.** Srimat Jiva Goswāmipād has said –

"Our *bhajan* processes become successful when we adopt *sharanāgati*." – (B.S.237.)

<sup>1</sup> refuge

### 53. We should serve Sri Krishna's dear ones –

"Sri Krishna's dear ones' refers to *Tulsi*, *Vaishnav*, *Brajamandal* and *Srimad-Bhāgavatam*; we should serve them." – (C.C.Madhya.22.71.)

Let us discuss the importance of these *seva* in detail.

### 54. We should serve the *bhakti*-scriptures such as *Srimad-Bhāgavatam* –

"Even the *devatās* worship those who adore *Vaishnav*-scriptures. They are liberated from all sins. When we keep *Vaishnav*-scriptures in our home, Sri Nārāyan resides there." – (Skanda Purān quoted in B.R.S.)

The Vedas are like a wish-fulfilling tree and *Srimad-Bhāgavatam* is its ripe fruit (it is the essence of the Vedas). Therefore it is the original *Vaishnav*-scripture. When we develop a passion for the sweet *ras* of *Srimad-Bhāgavatam* we do not feel interest in other books. Our preceptors – the Goswāmis of Vrindāban – have composed many texts following the dictum of *Srimad-Bhāgavatam*. They are *Brihad-Bhāgavatam*, *Laghu-Bhāgavatāmititam*, *Bhakti-Rasāmrita-Sindhu*, *Gopāl-Champuh*, *Ānanda-Vrindābana-Champuh* etc. They are also 'Bhāgavat'. When we read, hear and worship these texts, we are serving *Srimad-Bhāgavatam*.

### 55. We should serve *Braja-mandal* (also called Mathura-*mandal*) – We should hear the glory of *Braja-dhām* where Sri Krishna has manifested His sweet pastimes. We should visit *Braja-dhām*, take *darshan*, touch the earth of that place, reside there, sweep and wash the place. Then we shall achieve our goal easily.

"Who forsakes *Braja-dhām*, develops attachment for another Holy place and resides there, he is a fool. He has fallen in the grip of *māyā* and will wander in the cycle of birth and death." – (Ādi-Varāha Purān quoted in B.R.S.)

"Even if we serve all the Holy places in the three worlds, we cannot get supreme bliss (or *prem* – the topmost achievable goal); however it becomes easily available simply if we touch *Braja-dhām*." – (Brahmānda Purān)

### 56. We should serve the *Vaishnavs* – We can please the *Vaishnavs* in two ways

- Ø By arranging Sri Hari-kathā and Sri Harinām
- Ø By doing *paricharyā* such as offering *Mahāprasādam*, massaging the feet etc.

Sri Krishna has told Uddhav –

*"Vaishnav-sevā* is more pleasing to me than my own *seva*." - (S.B.11.19.21)

Srila Vishwanāth Chakravartipād has explained this statement as follows –

"I am more pleased when you serve my devotees; therefore you should serve the devotees."

Sriman-Mahādev has told the Mother Goddess –

"Worshiping Sri Vishnu is greater than all adoration. Worshiping the *Vaishnavs* is greater than that. Sri *Bhagavān* is easily pleased when we serve the *Vaishnavs*." – (Padma Purān)

The Lord Himself has stated –

"Dear *Pārtha* (Arjun), who claim to be my devotees are not really so, but those who love and serve my devotees are my devotees in truth." – (Ādi Purān)

"O sage, when we serve great devotees such as you, we get the immense joy of extremely deep love for the lotus feet of Lord Madhusudan." – (S.B.3.7.19.)

This proves that if we want Sri *Bhagavān*'s mercy we should diligently serve the *Vaishnavs*.

57. **We should arrange grand feasts to the maximum extent we can afford** - A grand feast is a happy event in which there is a lot of *Harinām-sankirtan* and *Vaishnavs* are fed *Mahāprasādam*. The saints glorify such feasts. We should procure objects according to what we can afford and hold such feasts for the *Vaishnavs*. A householder who has the funds yet does not arrange such feasts fall under the category 'monetary fraud'. A grand feast achieves two targets – spreading the Holy Name and *Vaishnav-sevā*.

58. **We should observe *Niyam Sevā vrata* in the month of *Kārtik*** - The month of *Kārtik* is more important than other months. We should keep some *Niyam*<sup>1</sup> during this month to read, hear, glorify and serve Sri Sri Rādhā-Dāmodarjiu with special love and care. In this period, even a small amount of *bhajan* gives Sri Rādhā-Dāmodar more pleasure. Whatever *bhajan* we may perform, the outcome is much more as compared to the same *bhajan* performed in other months.

If we reside in *Braja-dhām* during *Kārtik* and observe *Niyam Sevā*, all of a sudden we get Sri Hari-*bhakti* that is otherwise extremely difficult to gain.

*"bhuktim muktim harirdadyādarchito'nyatra sevinām,  
bhaktintu na dadātyeva yato vashyākri hare.  
sā twanjasā harerbhaktirlabhate kārtike narah,  
mathurāyām sakridapi Sri-dāmodara-sevanāt."*  
 – (Padma Purān quoted in B.R.S.)

Srimat Jiva Goswāmipād has explained the above statement as follows –

"When a devotee who is devoid of deep love and unqualified, worship Sri Krishna in any place other than *Braja-mandal*, He grants him material pleasures and liberation, but does not give him *bhakti*, that will make Him subjugated to the devotee. Sri Krishna grants *bhakti* only to a devotee who has deep love for Him, and to no one else. If a devotee does not have deep love for Sri Krishna, he is unqualified for *bhakti*. This is because He does not think it is right for Him to surrender to one who does not have deep love for Him. So He waits for the devotee to become qualified. What is that qualification? The devotee should realize that his welfare lies in *bhakti* alone, and he should become disinterested in everything else. However, if we reside in *Braja-mandal* even once and perform *Niyam-sevā* and worship Sri Sri Rādhā-Dāmodarjiu, then all of a sudden we can get Sri Hari-*bhakti*, in spite of being unqualified. This happens although Sri Hari-*bhakti* is extremely difficult to obtain."

Srila Vishwanāth Chakravartipād has added –

"If we serve the Dāmodar month (= observe *Niyam-sevā*) in *Braja-mandal*, in spite of not having performed any *sādhanā*, all of a sudden we get *bhakti*."

59. **We should celebrate *Vaishnav* festivals** – Appearance days of Sri Krishna, Sriman-Mahāprabhu and divine *avatārs* are joyous occasions. We should observe fasts on these days and blissfully indulge in Sri *Harinām*. After hearing Sri *Bhagavān*'s sweet pastimes and qualities we should glorify them. On the next day we can have a *Mahā-mahotsav* (more than a grand feast) for the *Vaishnavs*. Sri *Bhagavān* is pleased with such celebration and if we do not take part in it, it is an offence.

60. **We should take pleasure in serving the lotus feet of the Deity** –

"Who takes my name constantly and is always happy to serve me – I grant him *bhakti*, and not liberation." – (Ādi Purān quoted in B.R.S.)

*"bigraha noho tumi sākkhāt brajendranandan"*

<sup>1</sup> vow

## Topmost Achievable Goal & The Scientific Way To Achieve It

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Meaning - "You are not a Deity but the Son of Nanda *Mahārāj* in real form." – (C.C.)

When we feel like this, then our *sevā* naturally becomes loving. The best worshipers are those who serve the Deity in this mood.

61. **We should relish the meaning of Srimad-Bhāgavatam in the association of *rasik* pure devotees** – In the very beginning Srimad-Bhāgavatam lovingly invites the *rasik* and pure devotees to relish the highly delectable fruit of the Vedas which are like wish-fulfilling tree.<sup>1</sup>

"Dear connoisseurs of *ras*, dear *bhāvukas* (those who are expert in *ras*-realization), Srimad-Bhāgavatam is a transcendental drink that is devoid of any adulteration. The Vedas are like the wish-fulfilling tree and Srimad-Bhāgavatam is the extremely ripened fruit of this tree. It is flowing out of the Holy lips of Sri Shuka and has revealed itself to this world on its own (since eternity). Although you are in the state of self-realization, please drink repeatedly of this marvelous *ras*." – (S.B.1.1.3)

The sweetness of Sri *Bhagavān's leelā-ras* is much more remarkable than the bliss of merging with the Brahman. Shuka Muni was absorbed in the Brahman-realization which has no characteristic whatsoever. However when he heard Srimad-Bhāgavatam he was highly attracted by its *ras*. He came to Vyāsdev and studied Srimad-Bhāgavatam. He has admitted to Parikshit *Mahārāj* –

"O *Rājarshi*, I was immersed in Brahman-realization which is devoid of any characteristic. Yet Sri Krishna's divine pastimes are so sweet that they dragged me to my father and I studied Srimad-Bhāgavatam under him." – (S.B.2.1.9.)

To relish the *ras* of Srimad-Bhāgavatam in the company of *rasik* devotees is an intimate part of *bhajan*.

62. **Association of pure devotees** – A pure devotee is one who has *Vaishnav*-etiquette and is firm in *Bhakti*. We call him a *sādhu*. His association is always desirable. We wish ourselves well when we associate with a *sādhu* who is *samavāsan*<sup>2</sup>. He should be of a serene disposition and situated on a higher plane of *bhakti* than we are.

"All scriptures repeatedly exhort us to associate with *sādhus*; even momentary association with a *sādhu* can enable us to achieve our goal." – (C.C.Madhya.22.33.)

"Even a very short association with a *sādhu* can grant such incredible fruits that the heaven and *apavarga* cannot give us. It is needless to say that material kingdom and wealth that is highly destructible is nowhere near it." – (S.B.1.18.13)

Srimat Jiva Goswāmipād has stated that we have this effect when we associate with *savāsan sādhus* only.

Sri *Bhagavān's* bounties engulf us when we associate with *sādhus* and get their *kripā*. We cannot get His mercy by independent endeavors. Of course, Sri *Bhagavān's* mercy is compulsory to get *bhakti*, however we should know that His mercy comes to us in the form of a *sādhu*. It is foolish if we ignore the mercy that has assumed a form<sup>4</sup> and instead keep searching for second-grade mercy (directly Sri *Bhagavān's* mercy).

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<sup>1</sup> The Vedas are like the wish-fulfilling tree and Srimad-Bhāgavatam is the essence of all Vedic scriptures. Hence it is like the ripened fruit of this tree.

<sup>2</sup> A king who is also a sage

<sup>3</sup> With the same mood. For example, since we are practicing *bhajan* in the mood of a Manjari, we should desire the company of a *sādhu* who has the same mood (that is, of a Manjari).

<sup>4</sup> Mercy has come to us in the form of a *sādhu*

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Association of a *sādhu* and serving him does not mean simply going to a *sādhu*, living with him and feeding him *prasādam*, we will know that we have really done *sādhu-sanga* when we hear Sri Krishna-*kathā* from them, meditate on their words, follow their instructions and practice devotion according to their advice.<sup>1</sup>

63. **Sri Harinām-sankirtan** – This is the best *bhajan*. Srimad-Bhāgavatam says -

"na hyataḥ paramolāhbo dehinām bhrāmyatāmiha,  
yato vindeta paramām shāntim nasyeta samsritih."

Meaning - "The living beings are wandering in various forms of life – they do not benefit more from anything else other than the interest in Sri Harinām-*sankirtan*."

Therefore we should have interest in hearing and/or chanting the Holy Name. The main outcome is love for the lotus feet of Sri *Bhagavān* and its secondary outcome is the destruction of material desires. It results in supreme peace.

"Harinām appears constantly only in the mouth of one who has served Sri Vāsudev for thousands of life-times." – (Padma Purāṇ quoted in B.R.S.)

Srimat Jiva Goswāmipād has explained this statement as follows –

"A devotee who is firm in serving Sri Vāsudev goes through rebirths repeatedly only because Sri *Bhagavān* wishes to increase his eagerness and enthusiasm for *bhakti*."

"Sri Harinām *Sankirtan* results in the destruction of sin and material desires; it cleanses the subconscious mind. It is the source of all other *bhakti-sādhanās* that results in Sri Krishna-*prem*. It also enables us to relish this nectarine *prem*. It makes Sri Krishna available to us and submerges us in the nectarine ocean of *sevā*." – (C.C.Antya.20.10-11.)

64. **We should reside in Braja-mandal** – This is an intimate part of *bhajan*. Even the liberated souls crave for Sri Hari-*bhakti*- and we can get it simply by residing here for one day. To get the real benefit of residing in *Brajadhām* we should constantly hear the loving sweet pastimes of Sri Sri Rādhā-Krishna. If we stay here lovingly then all of a sudden we shall get *bhāv* and *bhakti*. When an inoffensive person merely touches *Brajadhām* he gets *bhakti*. This is because by Sri Krishna's wish, *prem-dhām*<sup>2</sup> Sri Golok-Vrindāban that is the highest point in the divine realm, has expressed itself on planet earth.

The highest point in the divine world is Sri Golok-Brajalok *dhām*. It is also called Sri Golok, Shwetadweep and Vrindāban. It is conscious, all-knowing, infinite, almighty and non-different from Sri Krishna's body. It pervades all quarters – has no limit. By Sri Krishna's wish it has appeared in this universe. It exists in the same form as in the divine world. In other words, it is not in two different forms." – (C.C.Ādi.5.17-19)

Although Srila Rupa Goswāmipād has mentioned the five points, namely, serving the Deity, Srimad-Bhāgavatam, devotee, Harinām and Braja-*dhām* – he repeats them to emphasize their importance and power. Forget honoring them, if we merely come in touch with them, and we are inoffensive, it will awaken *bhāv* in us all of a sudden.

"The association of *sādhus*, Harinām-*sankirtan*, hearing of Srimad-Bhāgavatam, residing in *Braja-mandal* and faithfully serving the Deities are the most important parts of *bhajan*. If we perform even little of these we can get Sri Krishna-*prem*." – (C.C.Madhya.22.74-75)

## **Gradual Progress in Bhakti**

Srila Rupa Goswāmipād has chalked out how we progress gradually in *Bhakti*, reach the state of *bhāv* and ultimately *prem* –

<sup>1</sup> Please read the 'Glory of associating with a devotee' in 'A Scientific study of the devotee'.

<sup>2</sup> The abode of transcendental love

*âdou shraddhâ tatah sâdhu-sango'tha bhajanakriya,  
tato'nartha-nivrittih syât-tato nishthâ ruchi-s-tatah.  
athâsaktis-tato bhâvas-tatah premâbhuyudanchati,  
sâdhakânâmayam premnah prâdurbhâve bhavet kramah."*

Meaning - "In the beginning we should acquire *shraddhâ* by hearing the scriptures in the company of *sâdhus*, then we should learn the process of *bhajan* by further association with them, after this starts actual practice of *bhajan* followed by *anartha-nivritti* (getting rid of bad qualities), *nishthâ* (firm determination in *bhajan*), *ruchi* (interest in *bhajan*), *âsakti* (deep attachment for *bhajan*), *bhâv* and ultimately *prem*. This is the usual process by which *prem* manifests in a *sâdhak*."

**Best *bhakti*** – *Bhakti* has two aspects – *sâdhyâ* - 'achievable goal' and 'Process'. We can classify *bhakti* into –

- Ø ***Sâdhan-bhakti*** – when we are in the stages from *shraddhâ* to *bhakti* we are said to perform *sâdhan-bhakti*. It comprises of hearing, glorifying and remembering.
- Ø ***Bhâv-bhakti*** – When our heart is cleansed by the above process, we reach the stage of *bhâv*.
- Ø ***Prem-bhakti*** – when we gain *prem*.

We should remember that *bhakti* is a property of Sri *Bhagavâns* *swarup-shakti* (internal potency) and although it is transcendental it becomes one with our senses and manifests itself on its own.

*"nitya-siddha krishna-prem sâdhyâ kobhu noy,  
shrabanâdi shuddha chitte koroye uday."*

Meaning - "Sri Krishna-*prem* is eternal and self-manifested. We can never achieve it by any process. When we hear, glorify and follow the paths of *bhajan*, our heart becomes clean and it reveals itself." - (C.C.Madhya.22.57.)

Now let us study the different stages in *bhakti*.

1. ***Shraddhâ*** – it means to hear the scriptures from the pure devotees and believe in the *shâstras*. "*âdou shraddhâ*" - *shradhhâ* is the first step of *bhajan* and the root of all devotional practice. Only when a person has *shradhhâ* he can gain knowledge about *bhakti*. We have already discussed in brief the characteristics of scriptural faith. The one who has such faith alone is qualified for *bhajan*. When *shradhhâ* arises in us, we cannot remain disinterested in *bhajan* anymore – we will surely set forth in the path of *bhakti*. When we gain scriptural faith we become agitated and start searching for a *Sadguru* so that we may seek refuge at his holy feet. At last, by the mercy of Sri Krishna we get the shelter of Sri Gurudev. This is *sâdhu-sanga* - the next step in the ladder of *bhakti*.
2. ***Sâdhu-sanga*** – The first time we do *sâdhu-sanga* is when we hear the scriptures from the *sâdhus* and the second *sâdhu-sanga* occurs when we crave for *bhajan* and are eager to take the shelter of Sri Gurudev's feet. Here *sâdhu* means those who have surrendered themselves at the lotus feet of Sri *Bhagavân*, they love Him and consider loving Him as the supreme goal of their life.

What is '*sâdhu-sanga*'?

'*sanga*' means serving the *sâdhu*, doing his *paricharyâ*, hearing Sri Krishna-*kathâ* from him, behaving as they behave, glorifying them – and be engrossed in serving them with body, speech and mind – this is *sâdhu-sanga*. Then amongst these *sâdhus* we may meet someone whose shelter we sincerely desire; he becomes our Sri Gurudev. We should take *dikshâ* and *shikshâ* from him.

3. *bhajan-kriyâ* – or the actual process of *bhajan* – Now we start hearing, glorifying, archanam, vandandam etc. *bhajan-kriyâ* is of two types –

- Ø not firm
- Ø firm

In the beginning stages our *bhajan* is not firm. We have to cross a few hurdles before our *bhajan* becomes firm. When a devotee who has *shradhâ* takes initiation from a *Sadguru*, and by his mercy starts *bhajan*, he is highly enthusiastic. He is always eager to practice *sâdhanâ*. So we call this stage as *utsâhamayi* or 'enthusiastic'.

However this state does not remain long. Within a short time we find our eagerness webbing. We feel bored and our *bhajan* suffers a 'low tide'. Sometimes our *bhajan* is intense and at other times it is slack. Therefore the wise call this state as 'intense-slack' period. during this time we get many ideas, such as – I shall leave my family and practice *bhajan* in seclusion or I will practice *bhajan* as a householder or out of hearing, glorifying etc. (nine types of *bhakti*) I will practice only one 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-sangarâ* or '**material association**' state.

Devotional practice should force our material desires to wane and increase love for *bhajan*. However if it does not happen we should realize that it is because we are not following the rules of *bhajan* properly (as given by Srila Rupa Goswâmipâd). Therefore we also call this state as *niyamâkshamâ* – '**unable to follow rules**'.

When we practice *bhajan*, 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 *Bhakti-kalpa-latâ* (*bhakti* is like a divine creeper that can fulfill all the wishes of a devotee). Therefore it is our duty to sever them first.

4. *Anartha-nivritti* – getting rid of bad qualities – When we are not firm in *bhajan*, our *anarthas* force us to slip down the ladder of *bhakti*. *Anarthas* are of four types –

- Ø **Those arising from sinful actions** – these *anarthas* arise from past and recent sinful activities.
- Ø **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*.

- Ø **Those arising from *aparādha*** - Offenses against the Holy Name and *sevā-aparādha*s result in *anarthas*.
- Ø **Those arising from *bhakti*** - When we advance in *bhakti* we may get money, fame and power. They give rise to *anarthas*. Thus *bhakti* too can cause bad qualities.

### What are the external symptoms that tell us we have got rid of *anarthas*?

When we lack the following –

- Ø ***Laya*** - we feel sleepy while chanting the *Mahāmantra*, hearing and meditating. In fact sleepy while doing *jap*, more sleepy during hearing and the sleepiest while meditating. This characteristic is called '*laya*'.
- Ø ***Vikshep*** - when we conduct worldly matters during hearing, glorifying etc. we call it '*vikshep*'.
- Ø ***Apratipatti*** - even though we may lack *laya* and *vikshep*, sometimes we do not feel like hearing or glorifying – this is '*apratipatti*'.
- Ø ***Kashāya*** - While doing *bhajan* such as hearing etc. if we get negative feelings such as anger, greed, pride – it is called '*kashāya*'.
- Ø ***Rasāswād*** - if we are unable to concentrate on hearing etc. because our mind is dwelling on material pleasures or attachments, it is called '*rasāswād*'.

We should not get overwhelmed by *anarthas* and instead we should perform *bhajan* in the company of *sādhus*. Also we should be very careful not to criticize pure devotees and be humble in any situation. Then by Sri *Bhagavān*'s mercy, all our *anarthas* will be destroyed and we shall enter the next stage, that is - 'firm *bhajan*'.

### 5. *Nishthā* – This is the stage of firm *bhajan*.

"How do we decide whether our *bhajan* is 'not firm' or 'firm'? When we are lax in hearing, glorifying etc. we are not firm, and when we are strong in these activities we are 'firm'." – (Mādhurya-Kādambini, 4<sup>th</sup> shower)

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 '*nishthā*'.

### 6. *ruchi* (interest) – When we relish the sweetness of Sri Krishna's name, beauty, qualities, pastimes and associates we have reached the state of '*ruchi*'. It is of two types –

- Ø **Depending on the subject** – suppose we are hearing a *kirtan* and we relish its sweetness because it has a sweet tune, proper music, rhythm etc. it indicates we are in the first stage of interest. It is similar to a person who has little hunger and wishes for delicious meal to satisfy himself.
- Ø **Independent of the subject** – This stage is like one who is ravenously hungry. He will eat with pleasure whatever you offer him. Similarly when we develop a higher level of interest we shall relish a *kirtan* even if it does not have a sweet tune or correct rhythm. What simply matters that it contains Sri *Bhagavān*'s name, and qualities. We feel immensely overjoyed just to hear about Him. After this we step into the next stage that is *āsakti*.

### 7. *āsakti* (deep attachment or addiction) –

"When our *ruchi* (interest) in *bhajan* becomes extremely intense and our thoughts keep roaming around Sri *Bhagavān* alone, then this stage is called '*āsakti*'. The process of *bhajan* is like a gracious wish-fulfilling creeper on which *āsakti* blooms like a cluster of buds that burst into the colorful flowers of *bhāv* (*āsakti* gives rise to *bhāv*) that finally turns into *prem* (the fruit)." (M.K.6<sup>th</sup> shower)

*Āsakti* cleanses our *chitta* so much that it shines like a mirror. It reflects Sri *Bhagavān* so clearly as if we are actually seeing Him. Earlier, by chance our heart would get torn away from Sri *Bhagavān*, we would voluntarily connect it to Him again – but not when we have reached *āsakti*. Now our mind is automatically absorbed in Him. The *Mahājans* have termed this state as *dhruvānusmṛiti* (constant remembrance). How a poor man suffering in drought will be attracted by a plate of delicious food and how a honey bee is dragged by the scent of honey – like that, when we attain *āsakti*, our *chitta* becomes addicted to Sri *Bhagavān* and His name, qualities and *leelas*. This is the pinnacle of *sādhan-bhakti*. After this we enter the realm of *bhāv-bhakti*.

8. ***Bhāv or rati*** – *Bhakti* is like a wish-fulfilling creeper and *bhāv or rati* is its flower. It is so fragrant that it pierces the envelope of the universe, pervades all divine abodes and drags *Bhagavān* Madhusudan to the devotee. When *āsakti* becomes extremely intense we gain *rati* (divine passion). When we gain *rati*, we see Sri *Bhagavān* in *sphurta* as if we are actually seeing Him. We can experience His wonderful words, touch, beauty, *ras* and fragrance. In this state we become one with our *siddha swarup* - we identify only with our spiritual body. We live as if we are completely different from the material body and we are existing outside this *sādhak*-body. Like a greedy honey bee all set to get intoxicated, our heart too becomes eager to drink the sweet nectar of His lotus feet.

"Nine symptoms of *bhāv-bhakti* are as follows-

- 1) Although from material point of view we should get agitated but we do not.
- 2) We do not waste a single second in anything not relevant to Sri *Bhagavān*
- 3) Disinterest in any topic that is 'other than Sri Krishna'
- 4) Devoid of false ego
- 5) Firm faith that Sri *Bhagavān* will certainly have mercy on me
- 6) Great eagerness to attain His lotus feet
- 7) Always interested in singing *Harinām*
- 8) Forever desiring to glorify Sri *Bhagavān*'s Holy Name, excellences etc.
- 9) Extremely enthusiastic to reside in holy places such as *Brajadhām*"

– (B.R.S.13.25-26)

*Bhāv-bhakti* has two characteristics –

- The devotee considers liberation as nothing
- *Bhāv-bhakti* is extremely rare

9. ***Prem*** – It is the highest stage of *bhakti*. When *prem* arises our heart is completely clean. The devotee very much feels "Sri *Bhagavān* belongs to me." *Prem* has two characteristics –

- Intense bliss
- Attracts Sri Krishna

"*Prem* is the most precious treasure and is the fifth *purushārtha*<sup>1</sup> of the living entity. It gives us the sweet relish of Sri Krishna. *Prem* makes Sri Krishna come under the control of the devotee and gives him the immense joy of serving Sri Krishna." – (C.C.Ādi.7.144-145)<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Goal of life

<sup>2</sup> We shall elaborate *prem* in 'A Scientific Study of *Prem*