

NARAD BHAKTI SUTRA

Aphorisms for Devotion to God and The Principles of the Philosophy of Love for Him

[Roman Transliteration of Text, English Exposition, Elaborate Notes]

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this Book to Lord Sri Ram who is my dearest of dear, most beloved, the essence of my life and being, and for whom, and for whose pleasure, and on whose behest, and on whose divine mission, this book is dedicated.

Nothing that I write is of my own creation. It is the Lord who is getting it done. So I deserve no credit. However, being an ordinary man like the rest of us, I may have committed errors, and for those I beg forgiveness. I hope this book will help to continue the great tradition of singing the glories of the different aspects of same indivisible one Divinity in order to meet diverse needs of the Soul, the Spirit, one such being to find peace and happiness amidst the surrounding turmoil of the world by being able to spend some time in the thoughts of the Divine Being, the same 'Parmatma', the same Lord known by different names in different tongues.

No creature is perfect; it's foolhardy to claim so. The best of paintings cannot replace the original; the best of words cannot express the original emotions and sentiments. Even the Lord was not satisfied by one flower or one butterfly—he went on endlessly evolving and designing newer forms. So, I have done my best, I have poured out my being in these books. Honestly, I am totally incompetent—it was the Lord who had done the actual writing and had moved my fingers as if they were merely an instrument in his divine hands. But nonetheless, it's a tribute to the Lord's glory that he does not take the credit himself, but bestows it to them whom he loves as his very own. And to be 'his very own' is indeed an unmatched honour. However, I still beg forgiveness for all omissions, commissions and transgressions on my part that I may have inadvertently made. It's the Lord's glories that I sing, rejoice in, write on and think of to the best of my ability. I hope my readers will also absorb the divine fragrance effusing from the flowers representing the Lord's books, enjoy the ambrosia pouring out of them and marvel at the Lord's stupendous glories.

I submit this effort at holy feet of my beloved Lord Ram whom even Lord Shiva had revered and worshipped. And surely of course to Lord Hanuman who was a manifestation of Shiva himself. Finding no words to express my profound gratitude to Ram, I just wish to remain quiet, and let my silence do the speaking and praying on my behalf.

I hope the reader will find my book useful and interesting. Since English is an international language, this book will help the English speaking world to access this masterpiece of classical Indian scriptural text.

“He leadeth me! O blessed tho't!
O words with heav'nly comfort fraught!
What-e'er I do, wher-e'er I be,
Still 'tis God's hand that leadeth me!” [A Hymn by: Joseph Henry Gilmore in 1862.]

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Author

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Preface

The “Narad Bhakti Sutra” is an excellent treatise on the spiritual philosophy of ‘Bhakti’ that is attributed to the great celestial sage Narad who is regarded as an expert in this field and the greatest exponent of devotion and love for the Lord God. It can also be called a ‘Book of Spiritual Advice as taught by sage Narad’.

Narad’s “Bhakti Sutra” is an excellent Book of Aphorisms that succinctly pinpoint the key principles that act as a guide for an aspirant who wishes to attain spiritual blessedness, a sense of eternal bliss and joy that is obtained by self and God realisation. ‘Bhakti’ is a devotional path to God that creates an unbreakable bond of love and affection between the devotee and his beloved Lord so much so that no distinction remains between the two of them. These aphorisms describe the philosophy of love and devotion for Lord God in a very concise and precise manner.

The word ‘Sutra’ means a ‘key’, a ‘code’, an ‘aphorism’, a ‘formula’, a ‘principle’. A ‘Sutra’ when applied to any body of knowledge refers to a basic formula or the key principle by understanding which one can easily grasp the wider body of knowledge. Here that knowledge pertains to how ‘Bhakti’ (devotion and love) for Lord God can be practiced, what its many variants are, what are the pitfalls to be guarded against, and what its spiritual rewards are. A ‘Sutra’ is an indicator of something of profound importance and great significance. A wise man’s effort should be to understand what that indication is; he must look for the spiritual goal that Bhakti points to and leads to.

All learners need an easy to read and understand guide-book to help them grasp the essentials of the subject of their interest. Similarly on the spiritual path too an aspirant would need guidelines and a road map to show him the correct way forward, to tell him what to do in order to achieve success in his spiritual endeavours and warn him against the various pitfalls and how to avoid them, to provide him with some benchmarks against which he can judge his success, and at the same time tell him the wonderful reward that awaits him if he follows the instructions properly.

In the spiritual realm, Bhakti (devotion and love) for Lord God is of tremendous and singular importance. There are scriptures that deal with this eclectic spiritual theme, but they are so many of them, so vastly scattered and voluminous, and so varied in their contents and different in their prescriptions that a devotee is more likely to get confused and lost in the maze of advices given by them than actually be able to benefit from reading them. The present book “Narad Bhakti Sutra” fulfils this necessity—as it presents the guidelines of Bhakti in a very precise and concise form in a language that is easy to understand.

This book contains gems of spiritual wisdom and is certain to inspire any person who is seeking spiritual guidance as to how to please his beloved Lord God in the easiest and the best possible way. This path would also lead him to the true goal of human life, which is to attain eternal bliss and beatitude as well as to find liberation and deliverance for the soul from the endless miseries associated with the cycle of birth and death in this mortal, delusory and gross world, which is attained by God-realisation and becoming one with the cosmic Soul.

A word of caution here: When the phrase “Lord God” is used anywhere in the text it refers to the ‘Supreme Being’ whom the devotee worships. This Supreme Being is the Lord as well as the God for the devotee. A person may have other Lords and Masters in this world to whom he is obliged to pay his respects to and be obedient to because of exigencies of life in the world; and similarly there are hosts of other Gods in this creation too before whom a creature is obliged to bow and keep them in good humour. But the person does so only because he is under obligation to honour them and obey them for practical reasons even if he does not want to do so. But the ‘Lord God’ is someone for whom love, respect and adoration comes spontaneously from within the heart of the person, for this ‘Lord God’ represents the Supreme Being who is the person’s loving Father and Redeemer, his true Friend and his spiritual Destiny. This ‘Lord God’ is the one whom Jesus Christ referred to as “My Father”, and who is called “Brahm” by the Upanishads and the Vedas. Therefore, when the term “Lord God” is used in our text, the reader must clearly understand that it is referring to the Supreme Being who has manifested in the particular form that is loved, adored, revered and worshipped by the individual devotee. It may be the Lord’s visible form with attributes (such as those of Lord Ram or Lord Krishna), or the Lord’s invisible cosmic form that is known as pure Consciousness that has no attributes or discernible forms (such as Brahm). It is the devotee’s choice as to how he would prefer to worship and love the Lord God who is the Almighty Supreme Being and whose primary form is nothing but ‘pure cosmic Consciousness’.

The word ‘Sutra’ also means a ‘thread’. Hence, ‘Narad Bhakti Sutra’ is like a garland of salutary spiritual wisdom consisting of the many beads symbolized by the excellent practical advice given by sage Narad to all spiritual aspirants who seek the nectar of eternal happiness, joy, peace, bliss and beatitude, and these beads of spiritual wisdom have been threaded together using an easy medium of having the purest and the truest form of ‘love’ for Lord God, a method that everyone can access and easily practice. The additional bonus that the spiritual seeker gets is attainment of liberation, deliverance, emancipation and salvation for his soul. This is achieved by following the path of Bhakti, i.e. the path of submission, devotion, love and faith in Lord God, the path that requires no formalities and rituals, a path that is absolutely easy to follow, and a path that grants the fruit that is difficult for even great sages and ascetics to obtain by practicing other spiritual methods advised in the scriptures.

These fundamental principles related to ‘Bhakti for God’ were first propounded by the celestial sage Narad. Hence they are named after him. Narad was the ‘Manas-Putra’, i.e. mind-born son of the creator Brahma, and was the greatest exponent of Bhakti. So therefore, he was well qualified and competent to expound upon this spiritual theme. Though there are many other scriptural texts dealing with Bhakti, but Narad’s Bhakti Sutra stands out amongst them by its precision, brevity, clarity, matter-of-fact and easy-to-remember style.

Narad’s ‘Bhakti Sutra’ fulfils the six basic characteristic qualities for any formula to be excellent and practicable—viz, it is easy to understand and remember as it is clear and unambiguous, it gives complete information on Bhakti, it is succinct,

concise and aphoristic, it contains the essence of the matter presented in a beautiful manner, it has a universal application and covers the entire theme by not leaving anything out of its ambit, and it is irrefutable in as much as its veracity and effectiveness cannot be challenged.

‘Narad Bhakti Sutra’—which we have seen means the fundamental formula or ‘Sutra’ that defines what comprises devotion and love for Lord God as enunciated by sage Narad—is therefore a wonderful treatise on Bhakti that is succinct, precise, easy to understand, and universally respected as being one of the best spiritual guides in its genre of scriptural literature. It has only 84 Sanskrit verses.

Now, the question that naturally arises is ‘What is ‘Bhakti’? Simply put, it is the devotional path to God-realisation. It entails having a deep and steady sense of devotion, love and affection for the Lord, to worship and revere the Lord most sincerely, to submit oneself completely to the Lord, to selflessly serve the Lord devotedly and enthusiastically, and to rely on the Lord exclusively for all the needs that one may have in this world, whether such needs pertain to existential life or to fulfil one’s spiritual quest. Hence, Bhakti is complete commitment on the part of the Bhakta (the practitioner of Bhakti) towards his Lord God, and it is a personal affair between the Bhakta and the Lord.

Like any other spiritual practice such as Yoga (meditation), Dhyana (contemplation), Tapa (penance and austerity), Japa (repetition of the holy name of the Lord), Yajna (religious sacrifices) etc., ‘Bhakti’ has its own unique and excellent rewards. What makes Bhakti special is that it is easy and convenient to practice, and it is very dear to the Lord himself. The Lord takes care of the practitioner of Bhakti, the ‘Bhakta’, himself like a parent taking care of his or her infant child. On the other hand, the practitioner of Yoga, the ‘Yogi, is like an adult child who is able to take care of himself, though of course the parent, the Lord God, is always available to help the Yogi should the latter need it.

Another salient and remarkable feature of Narad’s Bhakti Sutra is that it explains the Philosophy of Love and expounds upon the True Nature of Love in a succinct manner, especially when it cites the example of love that the Gopis (the female devotees of Vrindavan) had for Lord Krishna (verse nos. 21-24) in the context of the love that a devotee has for his or her beloved Lord God. True love is one that is selfless, it is a giver of joy, when one cheerfully sacrifices everything for the sake of the beloved, where there is bliss, ecstasy and elation but no trace of guilt or fear, and which is so profound and deep that with the passage of time it gets more and more robust and abiding.

Sage ‘Narad’ was the mind-born son of the creator Brahma. He was so deeply committed to Bhakti that wherever he went he got immediate respect, and whomsoever he preached was influenced by his wisdom and enlightened views on Bhakti—i.e. the path that showed the listener the way to God-realisation. He had even antagonized his own brother Daksha Prajapati by teaching his children the path of Bhakti so much so that all of them renounced the world and became Sanyasis (one who renounces all attachment with the world). Daksha became so annoyed that he cursed Narad that he would not be able to stay at one place for long, and that is why Narad roamed in the world endlessly. But this curse proved to be a boon for all living beings in this mortal world as well as the dwellers in the world hereafter—because

Narad spread spiritual cheer and bliss by preaching the good word of love, devotion, faith and submission for the Lord wherever he went, giving one and all the message of liberation and deliverance from the endless cycle of birth and death with its accompanying pain and miseries.

Narad committed a mistake once due to which he had to take birth as a maid-servant's son, but he did penance as a means of repentance, and was rewarded by a divine glimpse of Lord Vishnu, the Supreme Being. But the Lord vanished soon, filling Narad's heart longing for more. So the sages advised him to do more penance and develop a strong sense of devotion for the Lord he loved exceedingly. Then onwards, Narad moved around in this creation, constantly singing the Lord's holy name with the help of a musical instrument known as the 'Veena' (Indian lute) and glorifying the Lord.

As we have read above, the 'Narad Bhakti Sutra' consists of 84 Sanskrit verses that are precise and succinct, making it easy for a person to recall them during spiritual discussions and discourses. Now let us summarise the contents of this 'Sutra' as follows:-

It says that the easiest (verse no. 58) and the best instrument for God-realisation (verse no. 80, 81) is 'Bhakti' because it gives the spiritual fruit or reward for which a person does any auspicious effort in the first place (verse no. 26, 30).

Bhakti is superior to Gyan (knowledge), to Yoga (meditation), to Karma (rituals and religious observances), and other spiritual traditions (verse no. 25).

Bhakti is a complete and wholesome way to attain self and god realisation; it needs no other support or help (verse no. 59).

Bhakti gives eternal peace and bliss of the highest order (verse no. 60).

Bhakti is divided into two aspects—(i) Paraa Bhakti, and (ii) A-paraa Bhakti. The A-paraa Bhakti is divided further into (a) Gauna Bhakti, and (b) Mukhya Bhakti.

The Paraa Bhakti is the aim of spiritual practice, while the A-paraa Bhakti is a means to achieve success in it.

Paraa Bhakti is attainment of extreme and eternal bliss obtained upon God-realisation which is equivalent to self-realisation because the Parmatma, the Supreme Soul and the cosmic Spirit, is the same as the individual's Atma or his own soul. It is like nectar, and gives immortality and supreme form of bliss (verse nos. 2 and 3); it helps eliminate worldly desires and temptations (verse no. 7).

The A-paraa Bhakti involves some methods to make this possible—such as having interest in worshipping the Lord (verse no. 16), having desire and interest in listening to the stories associated with the Lord (verse no. 17), to be engrossed in the thoughts of the 'self' or the Atma (verse no. 18), surrendering all deeds to the Lord and always remembering him (verse no. 19).

But it must be noted that Gyan or truthful knowledge of the reality is also conducive to attaining nearness or oneness with God (verse no. 28). In other words, Gyan and Bhakti go hand in hand; they aid each other instead of constracting one another (verse no. 29).

Bhakti is the only way that leads to Mukti—liberation and deliverance from this world of transmigration leading to permanent rest for the soul (verse no. 33). Bhakti helps one to break free from the shackling effects of this deluding and entrapping world (verse no. 33).

The methods by which Bhakti can be established and made to bloom in one's heart are narrated in verse nos. 34-42 as follows—to abandon attachments to material sense objects and sensual pleasures of this world, to desist from self gratification of

the sense organs (verse no. 35), to do Bhajan—or the constant remembrance of the Lord, his divine name and divine deeds (verse nos. 36, 79), to hear and sing the divine stories, the virtues and the holy name of the Lord along with others in the community (verse no. 37), to have contact and communion with holy men such as great saints (verse no. 38-39, 42) which is obtained when the Lord is kind (verse no. 40), to treat true devotees of the Lord as being equivalent to the Lord himself (verse no. 41), to offer all the deeds and their fruits or rewards to the Lord (verse no. 61) along with any trace of negativity such as desires, anger, pride etc. that may still linger on (verse no. 65), and in general doing everything that is auspicious and holy which makes it possible for him to enhance his level of Bhakti (verse no. 76).

Other aids to Bhakti are the following—Abandonment of the feeling of worldly happiness and joy on the one hand, and of sorrow, misery and grief on the other hand, eliminating any sort of desires and passions such as for gain or profit of any kind, and to be careful not to waste a single moment and be prepared for death that may come any time (verse no. 77). Practicing the virtues of ‘Ahinsaa’ (non-violence), ‘Satya’ (truthfulness), ‘Shaucha’ (cleanliness and purity), ‘Dayaa’ (mercy and compassion), and ‘Aastikta’ (belief in God and the Holy Spirit as well as the teaching of the scriptures) etc. (verse no. 78).

The main obstacle in Bhakti is bad company (verse no. 43), as well as Kaam (wordly desires and passions), Krodh (anger) and Moha (infatuations, attachments, delusions, entanglements) that lead to Smriti-bhransa (failure to remember the horrible consequences of committing sins and getting entangled in the world), Buddhi-naash (destruction of intelligent thinking and wisdom), and Sarwa-naash (complete ruin) (verse no. 44).

Maya (the web of delusions so characteristic of this world) is a great obstacle and it is overcome only by detachment from all things (verse no. 46). Other methods of overcoming Maya are to live a serene life away from the world (verse no. 67), to break all worldly fetters and bondages, to become neutral by rising above the three Gunas of Sata, Raja and Tama, and to discard attempts to acquire and then worry about the protection of worldly possessions (verse no. 47), to not bother about the fruits of one’s deeds and labour but do one’s duty as ordained by destiny, peacefully and stoically (verse no. 48), and to abandon even the Vedas (excessive study of the scriptures once the basic knowledge and guidance has been obtained) and become free from all doubts, confusions, perplexities and consternations (verse no. 49).

One must also avoid the following—talking about or remembering anything pertaining to women, material wealth (verse no. 63), futile debates, controversies, arguments, idle talks and hearsay that create doubts in the mind about the truth of the Holy Spirit, talks about one’s enemies or those who are unfavourable—because all these things unnecessarily create vexation for the spirit (verse no. 74); negative characters such as Abhimaan and Dambha (pride and arrogance accompanied by deceit, conceit, hypocrisy and pretensions) etc. (verse no. 64); getting involved in worthless debates and arguments (verse no. 74).

The ‘Gauna’ (silent, subtle form of) Bhakti is like a dumb man attempting to describe some delicious food (verse no. 52)—i.e. it is a silent form of devotion for the Lord which has no external signs. Here, the devotee sips the nectar of spiritual bliss that comes with self and god realisation without showing any signs of his spiritual enlightenment. It can be experienced and never be described; nothing more remains to be attained or desired for after that (verse no. 54).

The ‘Gauna Bhakti’ is of three types (verse no. 56)—(i) Saatvika, (ii) Raajsik, and (iii) Taamsik. These are also called ‘Aarta-bhakti’, ‘Arthartha-bhakti’, and

‘Jigyaasu-bhakti’. Gauna Bhakti is easy because it does not require any effort as it is done directly by having natural love for the God that arises in one’s heart. It leads to internal peace and bliss (verse nos. 58-60).

A true and sincere devotee of the Lord acquires a holy aura around him which makes him effuse divinity and holiness similar to the Lord, thereby making their presence beneficial for the whole world around them (verse no. 68-71). Like the universality and oneness of the Supreme Being, Supreme Spirit, the Supreme Truth and the Supreme Reality, such realised devotees of the Lord have no distinction as to their caste, religion, knowledge, physical form, birth, level of worldly prosperity or poverty, or the type of deeds done by them—because they have risen above such mundane considerations (verse no. 72-73).

The 11 types of devotees of the Lord—Narad Bhakti Sutra, verse no. 82 outlines the eleven forms of Bhakti, which are actually variations of the same virtue of Bhakti because their main objective is the same—to develop devotion and love for the Lord God which lead to spiritual bliss, to liberation of the soul from worldly delusions and miseries, and to attain oneness of the individual’s soul with the Supreme Soul of creation so that the cycle of birth and death is terminated for good. They are as follows:—(i) Guna and Mahatmya of the Lord—this involves narrating, singing and generally propagating the glories of the Lord and his divine virtues; (ii) Rupa—this involves remembering the divine form of the Lord and worshipping this form; (iii) Pooja—this involves offering of formal forms of worship to the Lord; (iv) Smaran—constantly and always remembering the Lord; (v) Daasya—to become a humble servant of the Lord; to serve the Lord with great simplicity and humility, not expecting anything in return; to be ever eager to do anything which would please the Lord; (vi) Sakhya—to treat the Lord as one’s close friend and companion; (vii) Kanta—to honour the divine radiance of the Lord, and visualize that the Lord’s radiance shining on one’s self as the light of the sun; (viii) Vaatsalya—to love the Lord dearly as one loves one’s children; (ix) Atma-nivedan—to submit one’s self to the Lord; to pray to the Lord internally; to treat one’s Atma as a fraction of the Supreme Atma represented by the Lord God; (x) Tanmayataa—to remain perpetually engrossed in the thoughts of the Lord and to remain lost in the bliss derived from it; and (xi) Param-viraha—to suffer gravely due to separation from the Lord just like a lover remains submerged in grief if his loved one is separated from him.

Finally, Narad Bhakti Sutra lists some of the great devotees of the Lord as follows—Sanat-kumars, Veda-vyas, Shukdeo, Shandilya, Garga, Vishnu, Kaundinya, Shesh, Uddhav, Aaruni, Bali, Hanuman, Vibhishan, etc. (verse no. 83).

One final word: Though I have tried to do my best to present an accurate and a faithful account of the Sutras and explain their hidden meaning in a simple and correct manner so that they can be easily understood even by a common man, but still there may be inadvertent errors for which I beg forgiveness because I am an ordinary human with no scholarship of anykind to claim credit for this book. It is my firm belief and is also a matter of fact that it is the Lord God who himself has got this book written, albeit it was me who was lucky and fortunate enough to be the pen in the Lord’s divine hand. I just wrote down what came to my mind and what my heart told me was the meaning of the verses. There is at least one thing I can say with certainty from whatever little knowledge that I could garner during the course of my writing of a wide variety of books dedicated to the Lord is that ‘he’ resides inside a loving person’s heart, and if that person would just pay a little attention then he would realize

that it is the Lord who is speaking to him and holding his hand through the journey of his life. It is the Lord who inspires him to do something noble and pious.

So therefore it is truly correct and an honest submission to say that whatever I managed to write while preparing this book 'Narad Bhakti Sutra', and the wonderful way the excellent Sutras have been explained in a simple and easy-to-understand manner, was actually the Lord himself dictating the text of this book, especially more so because I have neither the competence nor the scholarship or the ability to tackle such a profound subject as 'Bhakti' with its immense spiritual import and dimension.

Further, by writing this book I am only trying to selflessly serve my beloved Lord God and obey his divine command in the best possible way I can think of, as through these books I try to spread the 'good word of the Lord' and make the pitcher of excellent nectar of spiritualism contained in the ancient Indian scriptural texts for which they are so famed, but unfortunately this nectar was restricted due the language barrier, available to the world in the English language so that they can be easily accessed by even the common man. I will feel happy if even a few souls benefit from my book.

It is a service that I am rendering to my beloved Lord Sri Ram. And I pray to the Lord to bless me as well as my esteemed reader with his divine grace and mercy!

I also express my thanks to Sri Somil Bharti ji who was kind to provide the Roman Transliteration of the Sanskrit verses to me. I pray to the Lord God to bless him.

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[Roman Transliteration of Text, English Exposition, Elaborate Notes]

१ अथातो भक्तिं व्याख्यास्यामः

1 athāto bhaktim vyākhyāsyāmaḥ

(1) Now therefore, I (Narad) shall try to explain (expound upon) the nature of 'Bhakti' (devotion for Lord God).

[The word 'therefore' (athāto) here starts the teaching of Narad, and it clearly means that he had expounded upon other spiritual philosophies before he finally decided to explain the principles related to Bhakti, because this was his favourite theme. So 'athāto' marks the beginning of the preaching of Narad's Bhakti Sutra.

Narad knew by experience that all knowledge was useless unless the creature can develop love and devotion for Lord God. He had realized that the best and the easiest way to attain bliss and happiness in one's life is to have Bhakti for the Lord God. So now he embarks on sharing his spiritual knowledge and experience to all other living beings like a benevolent teacher should do.

He elaborates on the divine path of Bhakti that leads the creature to God-realisation, i.e. the path of devotion and love for the Lord that brings the creature closer to him, and finally helps him to establish oneness with the Lord. So it's a path of action, a path that needs action by way of making all-out efforts to serve and please the Lord in the best way the devotee can.

Hence, during this discussion, Narad expounds on what constitutes Bhakti, and the means to be successful in Bhakti.

What was the need for Narad to 'explain' the concept of Bhakti as it looks plain and simple on the surface—for it simply means to have devotion for Lord God? Well, surely, Narad must have felt that this eclectic spiritual theme has been widely misunderstood and misinterpreted. Classical texts dealing with Bhakti are so many and varied and huge in size that they leave scope for interpolations and misrepresentation of its meaning and practice. So it was the need of the hour to sort out the mess and make things easy, clear and to the point in a way that Bhakti can be properly and correctly understood, free from errors arising from misinterpretations and misunderstandings, and then can be easily put to practice.

The importance of Bhakti has been highlighted in Srimad Bhagvat Mahapurān, 11/26/30, where the Lord has said: "What else remains to be achieved by a pious soul who has attained devotion (Bhakti) for me, who am endowed with

endless virtues, is the ultimate cause of all, and an embodiment of absolute spiritual Truth, cosmic Consciousness and eternal Bliss.”

Again, in Srimad Bhagvat Mahapurān, 1/2/6, it is said: “The supreme spiritual aim of the Jiva, the living being, should be to develop Bhakti (devotion) for the Lord God. It ought to be done in a selfless manner, and with no expectation. It is the only way that leads to complete contentedness of the ‘self’, the pure conscious soul.”

Narad sought to erase all confusions and doubts about Bhakti by explaining it concisely and in simple terms.]

२ सा त्व् अस्मिन् परमप्रेमरूपा

2 sā tv asmin parama-prema-rūpā

(2) That (Bhakti; devotion) indeed takes the form of supreme love for Him (the Lord God). [This love is transcendental in nature, and it has an ethereal and sublime form. It is the truest and the purest form that ‘love’ can take. Loving the Lord is another way of saying that the devotee worships his beloved Lord and adores him through the medium of complete devotion for him. The loving devotee is completely committed to serving the Lord and doing everything within his means to please the Lord he loves so dearly.]

[Now, the first principle of Bhakti is to have ‘supreme love’ for the Lord God. There is no doubt in it—“sā tv asmin”.

The word ‘param’ means the highest form of love; the love that transcends boundaries of the gross mortal existence; love that is ethereal and sublime. ‘Param’ means a state where all comparisons end. Hence, Bhakti refers to the sort of love of God which is incomparable in this world. It is also not subjected to any conditions—i.e. it is selfless and undiluted; it is limitless and everlasting; it never diminishes under any circumstance. This love is genuine, deep and unwavering.

The Bhakta does not expect anything in return for this love of God because this love is of a ‘selfless’ kind. But the Lord is so gracious by nature and so grateful to the Bhakta that he duly reciprocates his love by loving the Bhakta more than anything and anyone else in this world. Nay, the Lord even loves his devotee more than his ownself because if someone offends the Lord the offender would be forgiven instantly, but if he offends the Lord’s true Bhakta then there is no respite from the Lord’s wrath. This universal truth was reiterated even by the preceptor the Gods in epic Ram Charit Manas, Ayodhya Kand, Chaupai line nos. 3-5 that precede Doha no. 218.

Narad talks about Bhakti as a manifestation of one’s true love and affection for Lord God. As it has been observed herein above, when one loves the Lord dearly, the Lord too reciprocates his love. So this starts the process of mutual love for each other—the devotee loves his Lord God, and the Lord loves his devotee. This bond is so strong and resolute that it cannot be compromised and broken under the greatest of adversities. Love brings the two, the devotee and the Lord, closer to each other. This is the essence of Bhakti; it is the means by which Bhakti can bear fruits. Developing ‘Pure Love’ for God is a mean by which the devotee comes closer to his object of affection, which is the Lord God.

The ‘love’ that Narad refers to is ‘supreme love’, the love of a transcendental kind, the love that is sublime and ethereal in nature, and not a love that is of a gross kind and has negative connotation attached with physical world. This ‘supreme love’ for Lord God relates to the natural affinity that is established between the creature’s own Atma, his pure conscious soul that symbolises his true ‘self’, and the Parmatma, the supreme Atma which is the cosmic universal Soul representing pure Consciousness. The grossness of the physical body has no role to play in this ‘supreme form of love’ that Bhakti requires.

It ought to be noted here that Narad refers to God as ‘in this one’—“*sā tv asmin*”. This clearly indicates that Narad is referring to the supreme reality of the Lord as being a personification of the cosmic Consciousness that is also present inside the living being as his Atma or soul. The phrase “in this one” clearly implies a form of the Lord that is adored and worshipped by the devotee himself, for the Lord has a universal form that can be adopted by the individual devotee in accordance with his likings and in a way he would prefer to worship and adore his Lord God. Narad does not teach about a specific form of the Lord God for which a spiritual aspirant must develop Bhakti; the devotee is free to choose the form of the Lord God that he would like to have devotion for.

Hence, Bhakti is a matter of having love for a form of the Lord God that is a personal choice of the Bhakta, the person who practices Bhakti. Obviously one would feel natural love for an entity that one likes in a natural way, and not for an entity that has been imposed upon him by someone else.

This natural love for Lord God is free from all desires and it does not even need any knowledge of the scriptures. It springs spontaneously in one’s heart like a fountain, and then it grows like a creeper to embrace the entire being of the creature so much so that the creature remains ever absorbed in the thoughts of the Lord, and he remains aloof from everything that is unrelated to the Lord. Obviously this is the same state of existence that is attained in the higher states of Yoga (meditation). In this transcendental state everything dissolves, and only the object of love and adoration—i.e. Lord God—remains.

Remember: All ‘love’ is not ‘Bhakti’. For instance, when we say ‘I love a book, or a sweet, or some person, or some place, or some music’, surely it is not Bhakti at all. When we say ‘I love God’ then it hints at Bhakti, but real Bhakti is when this ‘love for God’ is deep, true, sincere and honest, and not pretentious and deceitful.

A Bhakta also has deep and abiding faith in his Lord God. This faith, like the love, is also supreme in nature; it never gets diminished.

Now, it is natural for a person to love an entity that is the source of joy and happiness for him. He would love that entity only if he trusts that he would get delight and happiness by doing so. Hence, true love for God would happen only when one has firm faith that the Lord is the one who would give him ‘eternal and the highest’ form of joy, peace, happiness, bliss and beatitude. That is why the love for God has been defined as ‘param’ or supreme in this verse.

In this ‘supreme form of love’, the lover and the beloved become inseparable from one another. Well, a wise reader would immediately see the link between Bhakti and Yoga here: The main aim of Yoga is to establish oneness between the individual’s Atma, his soul that is pure consciousness, and the supreme Atma or Soul represented by the universal Cosmic Consciousness. When this happens, the practitioner of Yoga experiences ecstasy and bliss of an ethereal kind; he loses awareness of his surrounding and even of his own gross body. Similarly, a Bhakta too feels exhilarated

and ecstatic in his love for the Lord God so much so that he loses awareness of the world around him as well as of his own self.

This state of transcendental existence is drenched in bliss and ecstasy, and is therefore like a bee which remains lost in joy while drinking nectar of a flower. This is reiterated in the next verse no. 3 herein below.]

३ अमृतस्वरूपा च

3 amṛta-svarūpā ca

(3) This ‘love and devotion’ (Bhakti for Lord God) is nectarean by its inherent nature; it is like pure and undiluted nectar (that bestows eternity of bliss to the drinker). { Verily, this love and devotion for the Lord is an eternal source of bliss and joy for the Bhakta. }

[Bhakti grants bliss and joy of an immortal dimension. Like a bee which forgets about everything while it drinks the nectar of a flower, a Bhakta forgets about everything else in his love for the Lord God. Like pure nectar, Bhakti is the sweetest and the most unforgettable experience of joy, happiness, bliss and ecstasy that a person can ever have in his life. Like the bee drinking nectar of a flower, a true Bhakta would like to enjoy nothing else except the charm of Bhakti; he is enamoured with Bhakti.

A Bhakta would choose Bhakti over every other means of spiritual reward as is endorsed in the epic Ram Charit Manas, Uttar Kand, Chaupai line no. 7 that precedes Doha no. 119.

The wholesome effects of drinking this ‘spiritual nectar’ have been outlined in the next three verses.]

४ यत् लब्ध्वा पुमान् सिद्धो भवत्य् अमृतो भवति तृप्तो भवति

4 yal labdhvā pumān siddho bhavaty amṛto bhavati tṛpto bhavati

(4) On attaining that state of transcendental existence (when one has supreme devotion and love for Lord God; when one has developed true Bhakti for Lord God; when one has attained oneness with the Lord God), one achieves Siddhi (perfection in life and spiritual endeavours; perfection of the soul—“siddho bhavaty”), one becomes eternally blissful and delighted (amṛto bhavati), and one is fully contented and fulfilled (tṛpto bhavati).

[It is said here that at the climax of Bhakti, i.e. when the devotee reaches the pinnacle of devotion and love for Lord God, he acquires ‘Siddhis’. The word ‘Siddhi’ means acquisition of certain super-natural powers that entitles its possessor to do things that ordinary humans can’t. In the context of Bhakti it essentially means that a person who has achieved perfection in the practice of Bhakti becomes so much spiritually empowered that nothing remains inaccessible to him. He gains perfection in bliss, happiness, contentedness and spiritual wisdom. All his desires are automatically

fulfilled because the Lord takes care of him. From the worldly perspective, a true Bhakta is able to calmly meet all the challenges of life because he knows that the Lord God is always there to help him out. Further, he remains calm as he is not bothered about anything as long as his love for the Lord remains steady and firm.

The next reward that he gets is that he becomes ‘Amrit-like’—i.e. he becomes a fount of eternal bliss and joy; he becomes eternally happy and satisfied like someone who has tasted pure nectar and wants nothing more.

And this being so, he attains ‘eternal contentedness’—i.e. he has achieved what he had always wished to achieve. He is perfectly satiated.

So we see that these three great rewards of true Bhakti, viz. ‘attainment of Siddhi’, ‘being Amrit-like’ and ‘being fully contented’, are related to one another because all are in sync with each other.

When a devotee reaches perfection in his love and devotion for Lord God, he comes so close to the Lord God that all distinctions and distances between the two are erased. Hence, the devotee, the ‘Bhakta’, who practices ‘Bhakti’, devotion and love for Lord God, reflects the sublimely beautiful spiritual virtues of an exalted Being who has become God-realised, who has realized the supreme Truth in the form of the universal cosmic Consciousness that the Lord God represents.

This realization is a state of spiritual perfection that bestows an abiding sense of bliss and joy and peace upon the Bhakta. When this perfect state of Bhakti is reached, the Bhakta is deemed to have reached his goal in life. He attains eternal bliss and beatitude; he becomes fully contented and fulfilled with no desires left inside him.

After all, all creatures want to have perfect peace and joy in life; everyone wants that he or she should be able to enjoy complete freedom from miseries and torments that are so very natural and a part of life in this world. Once this goal is reached by practicing true and purest form of Bhakti, surely the devotee would want nothing more.

There are so many drinks available to a person to quench his thirst, and he tries all of them. But once he has tasted pure nectar, he would shun all other drinks. Likewise, a man seeks happiness and joy and peace in his life, and he tries so many methods and things to achieve them. He finds that all forms of happiness, joy and peace that he manages to get in this world are transient in nature, for none lasts for long. So once he accesses these virtues by the medium of Bhakti wherein he discovers that they are of the finest quality and ever-lasting, he surely wouldn’t let go of them.

Since this sense of happiness, joy, bliss and peace is eternal and of the purest kind, the devotee becomes fully satisfied that he has got what he had always wanted. So he becomes contented and satiated. He no longer yearns for anything better and more.

From the spiritual and metaphysical perspective, the climax of Bhakti is reached when the individual devotee becomes in the likeness of his beloved Lord God. This exalted state of existence is synonymous with self-realisation and enlightenment that leads to establishment of oneness or a union between the soul of the individual creature and the universal cosmic Soul of creation. To wit, this is also the goal of Yoga—to bring about a union between the Atma that is pure consciousness and known as the ‘self’ of an individual creature, and the Supreme Atma that is known as the Parmatma that represents the cosmic Consciousness embodied in the form of the Lord God the devotee worships and adores, for whom he has devotion and love.

So we can say that in reality Bhakti is like restoring the natural affinity, the natural sense of love and attraction that exists between two entities that are identical and inseparable from one another by their inherent nature. A simple example would illustrate this point: If we have two separate cups of water, one a small cup and another a larger one, and then pour them in a large tumbler. They would mix perfectly with each other; can anyone distinguish between them now? The two samples would perfectly gel with one another.

So likewise, a true devotee perfectly gels with the Lord God he loves when the former realizes that their real 'selves' is the Atma which is 'pure consciousness', and not their physical gross body which had separated them. When this realization dawns upon the intellect of a wise Bhakta then he has attained perfection in Bhakti. To wit, Bhakti helps to remove the artificial barrier of grossness that exists between the Bhakta and the Lord God, thereby bringing about a union of the two Souls who merge with one another immediately upon contact.

That which is gross, transient and perishable cannot be a source of eternal bliss and joy. So therefore, love of the world cannot be a source of eternal happiness as the world itself is gross, transient and perishable. Hence, when a person seeks joy and happiness from anything or anybody in this world, he fails to get eternal peace, and so he is always wanting for more. To wit, the reward that one gets by pursuing all other means to achieve his objective in life, except the path of Bhakti that leads to Lord God, is imperfect and of poor quality.

On the other hand, the Lord God who represents cosmic all-pervading Consciousness that is sublime, ethereal, eternal, unchanging and universal is a source of abiding joy and bliss. Hence, when a Bhakta aims for Lord God he gets perfection in life by way of eternal sense of bliss and beatitude, an abiding sense of joy and happiness, and a sense of eternal fulfillment and contentedness. To wit, the reward he gets by following the path of Bhakti that leads to God is perfect and of the highest quality.

Remember: True reality of the Bhakta (devotee) and the Lord God is the 'Atma' which is pure cosmic Consciousness. This Atma is an eternal entity that is inherently blissful, joyful, enlightened, contented and fulfilled. As long as the person does not realize the fact that his true 'self' is the Atma and not the gross body in which this Atma lives, he is subjected to all sorts of sorrows in life. But once he realizes this supreme and irrefutable Truth, he becomes calm and peaceful. He now knows that the true source of peace and beatitude is not outside somewhere else, but right inside him. Since this extremely exalted state of mind and intellect that leads to spiritual perfection is not possible for everyone to achieve, the easier path of Bhakti should be followed by him as this path helps him to focus his mind and his attention on a form of the same eternal Atma or pure cosmic Consciousness that appears so abstract for him, to a form that he would find easier to relate to and comprehend—i.e. the form of the Lord God that he adores and worships, a form that has a visible existence and attributes that the devotee can easily identify and relate with. But the end goal of the two paths is the same—attainment of union between the individual Atma (the Bhakta) and the supreme Atma (the Lord God) that bestows perfection and eternity.

Refer also to Ram Charit Manas, Uttar Kand, Chaupai line nos. 4-6 that precede Doha no. 119 that essentially say that Mukti, i.e. liberation and deliverance from the world and its cycle of birth and death with its accompanying horrors, comes to a Bhakta even without his asking or desiring for it.

The next verse no. 5 answers the question: What sort of contentedness or ‘tripti’ does Bhakti grant to the Bhakta?]

५ यत् प्राप्य न किञ्चिद् वाञ्छति न शोचति न द्वेषति न रमते नोत्साही भवति

5 yat prāpya na kiñcid vāñchati na śocati na dveṣṭi na ramate notsāhī bhavati

(5) Once one (i.e. the devotee) attains it (i.e. the pinnacle of Bhakti; supreme form of devotion for Lord God), one cares for nothing else, he desires nothing else. He hankers for nothing; he grieves and laments for nothing; he neither hates anything nor delights in anything; and he finds no charm or interest or enthusiasm for (i.e. not tempted by) any of the sense pleasures of this gross mundane world (as they become inconsequential for him).

[In Lord Krishna’s famed ‘Srimad Bhagvad Geeta’, Canto 12, verse no. 17, an exactly similar idea is expressed when the Lord says “He who neither rejoices nor hates, who neither grieves or delights, who has no desires whatsoever, who renounces both the good and the evil actions, and becomes fully devoted to me—verily indeed, he is very dear to me”.

This aphorism has been used by sage Valmiki when he tells Lord Ram to live in the heart of a person who desires nothing in this world but purity of love, affection and devotion for the Lord. Refer: Ram Charit Manas, Ayodhya Kand, Doha no. 131.

There was another great sage named Sarbhanga. He had offered the reward of all his penances, meditation, fire sacrifices and other religious deeds to Lord Ram, and in return asked Lord Ram to give him the boon of Bhakti as there was nothing like it for attaining spiritual fulfillment. Refer: Ram Charit Manas, Aranya Kand, Chaupai line nos. 7-8 that precede Doha no. 8.

A similar sentiment is expressed in ‘Vinai Patrika’, the wonderful Book of Prayers written by the acclaimed saint-poet Goswami Tulsidas, in verse no. 103, stanza no. 2. In brief he says—“I do not desire for anything; I do not want liberation and deliverance, nor do I want wisdom, wealth, prosperity, mystical powers and praise. The only thing I wish is to have selfless love and devotion for the holy feet of Lord Ram, and it should grow day by day.”

Such a devotee develops an exemplary level of equanimity and fortitude. “He gets angry at no one, he does not harbour animosity, ill-will or hatred for anyone in this world, he has no passions left in him, he lusts for nothing, and he has no ego and pride in him—because he sees his beloved Lord in all forms in this world, whether they are visible or invisible”. Refer: Ram Charit Manas, Uttar Kand, Doha no. 112 (b).

In Srimad Bhagvad Mahapurān, 6/12/22, sage Shukdeo (the parrot saint) has said “For a person who has dipped in the ocean of nectar symbolized by devotion and love for Lord Hari, the bestower of eternal peace, beatitude and bliss, what use would such a person have for the shallow water of the ditch.”

A realised devotee who has attained the highest level of devotion and love for Lord God is so much contented and fulfilled that he wants nothing more of anything, he longs for nothing else. He becomes extremely calm and steady in his mind so much so

that nothing would move or disturb him under any circumstance; nothing affects his sense of equanimity and stability.

This verse highlights the characteristics of the sort of ‘contentedness’ or ‘tripti’ that a devotee achieves when he has attained the highest level of devotion and love for Lord God as mentioned in the previous verse no. 4.

The joy and bliss that the devotee obtains are of such pristine quality that all the charms and attractions of this world fade away in comparison, so it is natural for him to turn a blind eye to the latter.

Does it mean that the devotee has become emotionless and stone-like, or mentally deranged? Nothing of the sort! This state is similar to the transcendental state of existence of a self-realised Yogi, an ascetic, who has attained a ‘Turiya state’ when his mind and sub-conscious remain engrossed and submerged in deriving bliss and ecstasy from the thoughts of the Atma that is pure consciousness which resides inside him as his ‘true self’, the Atma which is the same as the cosmic Consciousness that is a fountain-head of eternity and beatitude. In this state of transcendental existence, the Yogi loses all awareness of his gross physical body as well as the world around him. He looks to be in an apparent state of stupor, but it is not that—actually he is submerged in deriving joy of drinking nectar of bliss and eternity that all other mundane matters fail to disturb him. He is not at all bothered about anything; nothing provokes him; nothing attracts him or repels him; nothing excites him or subjects him to depression and dismay. He becomes exemplarily calm and peaceful.

We can understand this phenomenon by a simple example. It is like the case of a man who has partaken of a hearty meal of the choicest of delicacies, and is also assured that this food will always be available to him in future. Say, would he then want to eat any more of the ordinary food that had been his staple diet for all his earlier life? He would be so much satiated that he would harbour no thoughts for any other kind of food except the one he had been fortunate and privileged to have tasted.

Another way of looking at this is that when one’s mind and heart are overjoyed, one would also feel that his stomach is full. It is not that he has some disease but the joy so overwhelms him that it appears that that he has lost his appetite for food. To wit, when the spiritual aspirant begins to enjoy the bliss and joy that comes with having the purest and the highest form of devotion and love for Lord God, he loses his appetite for worldly charms and pleasures.

Once again, since no desires are left, there is no reason why a man would like or hate anything, any person or any situation; there is no reason for grieving at the loss of anything or delighting at acquiring it. His mind and sub-conscious have become tranquil and rested.

The next verse no. 6 further elaborates on this eclectic principle.]

६ यज् ज्ञात्वा मत्तो भवति स्तब्धो भवत्य् आत्मारामो भवति

6 yaj jñātvā matto bhavati stabdho bhavaty ātmārāmo bhavati

(6) When a person has gained knowledge of ‘it’ (i.e. when one has attained the supreme form of Bhakti, or devotion and love for Lord God that has been referred in the forgoing verses), he is so intoxicated and overwhelmed (by its unique charm and pleasure that gives a sense of eternal bliss and beatitude) that he becomes silent and still even as he begins to revel in and thoroughly enjoy the ecstasy and bliss that arises

from within his own self (i.e. from his own Atma) so much so that he remains eternally engrossed in the thoughts of his Atma, his pure conscious 'self'.

[Now it has become clear that in the final stages of Bhakti when a person has reached its climax, he attains the same state of blessed existence that a Yogi, an ascetic who practices Yoga, or meditation and contemplation, lives in. This exalted state of blessedness is equivalent to the Turiya state of existence of consciousness when a devotee becomes aware of his own true self known as the Atma. This 'Atma' is pure consciousness, and it is the same as the Supreme Atma known as the cosmic Consciousness that reveals itself in the form of the Lord God whom the devotee worships.

When the devotee has reached the higher stages of Bhakti—when he begins to so intensely love his dear Lord God with his heart and mind that he remains completely submerged in the thoughts of the Lord, and when nothing else matters to him because he has accessed the nectar that gives him a sense of sublime ecstasy, the experience of eternal bliss, peace and joy of the highest and the best order—it is then that he remains submerged in drinking this nectar of beatitude and felicity just like a bee which remains engrossed in drinking the nectar of the flower once it has found it. Never would this devotee get distracted from drinking this spiritual nectar under any provocation because his mind and heart are riveted to it.

Such a devotee then experiences the sort of ecstasy and bliss that is experienced by seasoned practitioners of meditation who meditate upon the Atma, the 'true self' that is nothing but pure consciousness. From the perspective of metaphysics as expounded in the Upanishads, this is called 'self-realisation'. In this eclectic state of transcendental existence, all grossness related to mundane existence is erased, and what remains is something that is sublime and ethereal by nature.

When the Bhakta experiences the highest level of bliss and beatitude, he becomes aware of the true meaning of 'self-realisation'. He understands that the sublime form of joy and bliss that he has achieved upon maturity of Bhakti is synonymous with the awareness of the 'self' known as the 'Atma'. This Atma is nothing but 'pure cosmic Consciousness' that is an eternal, all-knowing, all-pervading and blissful entity. So the Bhakta becomes enlightened about the metaphysical and theological Truth that the Lord God resides no where outside but right inside the inner being of all creatures—because the Lord, who is also known as the 'Parmatma', the Supreme Atma, is an embodiment of cosmic Consciousness that lives inside all living beings as their own individual Atma.

To wit, this means that the devotee realizes that the Lord God whom he had been searching for so long is, after all, so close to him that no distinction actually exists between him and the Lord he loves so much. To put it in a different way, it implies that "a self-realised, wise and enlightened Bhakta (devotee) begins to revel in his own self; he begins to enjoy his 'own self' as he realizes that the source of eternal happiness is right within him, and this realization fills him with ecstasy unbound because the source of eternal joy and sublime bliss is inherent in him".

The state of ecstasy obtained by a Bhakta who has attained the Lord and experienced his presence first hand, i.e. a Bhakta who has become 'self-realised' about his Atma as an image of the Supreme Lord, is wonderfully described in Srimad Bhagavad Mahapuran, 11/2/39-40 wherein it is said that "such a person who has attained the Lord dances in joy, singing the Lord's glorious name with a heart dissolved in ecstasy, laughing and weeping at times, screaming and remaining dumb

at other times, and generally behaving like a man possessed or a man who is mad; his behaviour transgresses all conventional norms and goes beyond understanding”.

Another place where we read about this ecstatic state of a Bhakta is found in Ram Charit Manas, Aranya Kand, Chaupai line nos. 10-15 that precede Doha no. 10 where the condition of sage Sutikshan has been described as follows—“When the sage learnt that Lord Ram was coming towards where he lived, he became extremely ecstatic so much so that he lost awareness of his own self; he forgot who he was, where he was. He could not perceive any of the directions; he could not see the path before him, for everything became blurred for him. He ran forward once and backward again on the same track; he could not understand where he was going, or where he stood, for he had lost his bearing. He sometimes danced with joy, and at other times he sang wildly, singing merrily about the glories of the Lord. Then finally, at the climax of ecstasy, he became motionless; he sat down in the middle of the path with his body thrilled to the extent that it was full of goosebumps that resembled the skin of the jack fruit.”

Say, who would like to leave such a sublime world full of eternal ecstasy and beatitude, and bargain it for a gross world of endless miseries and worries, or a world where joy and happiness are illusionary like water seen the mirage of a hot desert?

The first six Sutras till now have described the nature of devotion and the characteristics of a devotee. Now the following Sutras describe what Supreme Love for God is. Remember: A true devotee of the Lord becomes the Lord’s true lover, and this ‘love’ is of the highest quality, most refined, and absolutely sublime and ethereal in nature. There is no trace whatsoever of grossness in this form of love between the Lord and his devotee.]

७ सा न कामयमाना निरोधरूपत्वात्

7 s̄a na kāmāyamānā nirodha-rūpatvāt

(7) That true love for Lord God which devotion inspires is marked by highest form of renunciation, and therefore it is free from all desires (i.e. it is a purely selfless form of love for the sake of love itself; it is devoid of any grossness that may be associated with the word ‘love’; it is sublime, ethereal and transcendental form of love).

[The main characteristic of ‘love for God’ is that it is selfless and without any expectation. The devotee does not want any reward for his love for the Lord. Besides this, such a devotee is deemed to have renounced all sorts of attachments and attractions that are gross in nature, such as the ones that are linked to this gross world and its sense objects.

To wit, the love for God is absolutely different from the love for the material things of the world. The love for God is sublime and ethereal by its inherent nature, while the love for the world relates to the sense organs that are inherently gross by nature and inclination.

The devotee who wants to truly love the Lord God must remember that he has to have the grand spiritual virtue of ‘renunciation’ in him. He has to renounce all wants and desires of all kinds from his mind and heart for good. It is not possible to love two entities simultaneously with the same intensity, sincerity and depth of love,

especially when these two have diametrically opposite nature. One has to choose between the two. In the case of ‘Bhakti’, i.e. devotion and love directed to Lord God, it is obvious that a sincere Bhakta (devotee) will have to choose between his beloved Lord God and the world of material charms. Obviously, a wise and enlightened Bhakta would reject his love for the world, the ‘other entity’, if he wishes to be honest in his love for his beloved Lord God. This means that he will have to ‘renounce’ the world and its material charms, as well as his misplaced love for his own gross body. He must realize that both his body and the world are perishable and givers of eternal misery and grief to him, while the love for Lord God bestows him with eternal joy, bliss and peace. The choice is obvious.

In the next verse no. 8, the concept of ‘renunciation’ is elaborated further.

In Srimad Bhagvad Mahapurāṇ, 3/29/13, Lord Krishna says, “My devotee does not want any kind of reward for serving me, even if I wish to grant them to him. These rewards may be any one of the six kinds, such as Saalokya (residence in my heavenly abode), Saristhi (having powers like mine), Saamipyā (living close to me), Saarupya (having a form that is similar to my divine form), and Saaujya (final dissolution into my form to become one with me).”

In Ram Charit Manas, Uttar Kand, from Doha no. 83—to Chaupai line no. 6 that precedes Doha no. 85 we read that the crow-saint named Kaagbhusund has also refused to have any kind of reward other than having Bhakti when Lord Ram offered him all sorts of boons and asked him to choose what he would prefer. This single-minded pursuit of Bhakti, or devotion, for the Lord God so much pleased Lord Ram that he granted Kaagbhusund all the other boons as a gift to him alongside the boon of Bhakti though the saint did not want to have anything other than Bhakti.

To wit, this love for Lord God that the devotee has is a manifestation of the natural affinity that the individual’s Atma has for its primary source, the supreme Atma known as the Parmatma, the Lord God. It’s a natural bonding between the two that pulls them together just like a small piece of magnet that gets naturally and automatically pulled towards a larger magnet. Or we can say that it is like the case of the scattered pieces of iron (here represented by the individual creature) that are automatically pulled towards a magnet (here representing the Parmatma, the supreme Atma).

So, when the individual develops high love for Lord God, all other things in the world becomes meaningless and redundant, i.e. a true devotee renounces all his attractions and attachments with the material world.]

८ निरोधस् तु लोकवेदव्यापारन्यासः

8 nirodhas tu loka-veda-vyāpāra-nyāsaḥ

(8) This ‘renunciation’ (that is related to devotion and love for Lord God) indeed envisages total restraint from all activities, whether they are related to the secular world, or they are the religious activities as prescribed by the Vedas (scriptures).

[In order to focus the mind exclusively on Lord God, in order to get submerged or immersed in the thoughts of the Lord just like an ascetic involves himself in doing deep meditation and contemplation, the devotee has to do away with all causes that may require attention of his mind and distract it from its main aim in life—which is,

as far as the devotee is concerned, to focus on the Lord God and attain oneness with him.

The mind needs its full energy to concentrate on one task that is of top priority in order to do it whole-heartedly and to the best of its abilities. If a person allows himself to be involved in the activities of the world (secular activities) or any kind of religious activities (such as following the various rituals and sacraments as prescribed by the scriptures), then his mind will be left with little time and energy to focus on the main goal of the person's life—which is to attain abiding peace and happiness. This latter goal can only be achieved if the grossness and transience associated with all activities related to this gross and perishable existence are done away with, and instead of them the person involves himself in activities that are related to the spirit, the pure consciousness that is subtle, sublime, ethereal and eternal by nature. This latter form of activity that results in elevation of the 'self' and enables the doer to attain liberation and deliverance from all grossness associated with life and its inherent torments and miseries is to have Bhakti for Lord God—because the Lord is a personified form of cosmic Consciousness, one who bestows eternal peace, happiness, bliss and beatitude.

Hence, the 'supreme form of devotion for Lord God' implies complete renunciation of all activities, all dealings and all actions related to the secular world as well as to the religious field. Just like in the world where we have to pay a higher price for a better quality of any material thing that we acquire, in the spiritual world we have to pay the high price of renouncing all attachments and attractions for everything else that give comfort and pleasure, and instead focus ourselves on one single target—which is attainment of the Lord God.

To wit, put simply, if one wants to love his God, he will have to forgo his love for all other things, no matter how dear and valuable they are to him. This firmness in love for Lord God by renouncing all other things and attractions would prove that the devotee is sincere in his devotion for the Lord because he is ready to make the greatest of 'sacrifices' to attain his objective. After all, all religious activities are said to be complete only if one does some sort of 'sacrifice' at the end, even if it means doing a small fire sacrifice or making some form donation. But the reward for such 'sacrifices' are limited in their scope to this gross and perishable world. On the other hand, the 'sacrifice' by way of renunciation that is made for the sake of the Lord God will grant a reward that is eternal and supreme by nature—the reward of bliss, beatitude, felicity, peace and happiness for the devotee, and the reward of liberation, deliverance, salvation and emancipation for his soul.

It is interesting to note that in the verse the phrase "loka-veda-vyāpāra" has been used. The term "vyāpāra" literally means doing 'business or trade'. Business or trade is done to gain some benefit from any transaction. So therefore, all worldly activities, whether secular or religious, that a person does are meant to help him get some form of reward. If he does not expect to gain from them he won't do them. A person does any religious activity as prescribed by the Vedas because the Vedas tell him that he would get this or that benefit if he does them. If that reward is not got by him, or if he is not promised some certain reward for any religious activity, he would not do them. The same principle applies to all other activities related to the world. But in the case of Bhakti as in all cases related to 'true love', the lover, here meaning the devotee, does not expect any reward from his beloved, in this case the Lord God. The purest and the truest form of love is that which is free from expectations for any kind of reward. That is why it is called 'a sacrifice'; that is why it is like 'true

renunciation'. There is no 'business-like bargain' in love for Lord God; there is 'no business in the field of Bhakti'.

Now, one may ask "how is it possible to not get involved in any activity while one lives in a world where action is a part of life"; "how can one actually practice renunciation?" It has been said earlier that Bhakti includes 'doing selfless service to Lord God'; to 'do everything for the sake of the Lord and to please him'. It clearly implies that when it is said that Bhakti means total renunciation it does not mean to be idle or inaction. It means to divert the mind from the world and fix it on the Lord God so that one may single-mindedly concentrate on his spiritual objectives, without any distraction. A true devotee asks for nothing but to have love and devotion for Lord God. He need not be inactive, but the trick is to do everything as a service of the Lord, and ask for only love for the Lord. Refer: Ram Charit Manas, Ayodhya Kand, Doha no. 129 where sage Valmiki has declared that Lord Ram lives in the heart of those who want only one reward for all their deeds, secular or religious, and it is to have unwavering love and affection for the holy feet of Lord Ram.

Renunciation is vital and necessary for a spiritual aspirant who wants to attain God-realisation by the path of devotion and love ("Bhakti") for Lord God because the mind can't concentrate fully on two different things at the same time. If this situation prevails, the mind would become fidgety and start jumping from one subject to another. Hence, in order to focus on the Lord God a devotee must get rid of all sorts of worldly distractions and disturbances.

True renunciation that Bhakti demands has been further explained in next verse no. 9. Refer also to verse no. 11 herein below which specifically explains what is actually meant by this philosophy of non-involvement in deeds or 'renunciation of deeds'.]

३ तस्मिन् अनन्यता तद्विरोधिषूदासीनता च

9 tasminn ananyatā tad-virodhiṣūdāsīnatā ca

(9) Whole-hearted and single-minded devotion for the beloved Lord God, and complete indifference to everything other than God—this is the essence of true renunciation which Bhakti envisages.

[To wit, 'true renunciation' implies focusing the mind exclusively on Lord God, and to turn it away from all other pursuits that act as obstacles in it. Therefore, true devotion also includes exclusive service to Lord God. It means doing everything for the Lord God, for his sake, for his pleasure, and for attaining him.

Idleness or inaction is not true renunciation. One can do his job but still be fully devoted to Lord God. Remember: The 'renunciation' here pertains to the state of the mind, the sub-conscious and the intellect. If the mind is not attached to what one does, if the mind is not involved or engrossed or perturbed and disturbed by the activity, and is able to remain focused on the Lord God, then it is renunciation in practice. Say, what is the use of not doing anything on the pretext of doing Bhakti, but allowing the mind to roam around wildly, longing for this and that? It is cheating the world and the self!

To wit, one can continue to go about his duties in this world, he need not sit idly, but the trick is to keep the mind free from all attachments and the heart free from

all emotions and sentiments pertaining to the world and its material charms as well as to the demands of the body seeking self gratification.

The devotee should renounce all things and surrender himself to the Lord God as this makes him carefree. Then he would be able to worship the Lord and have devotion for him with a free mind. Refer to verse no. 79 of this book Narad Bhakti Sutra.

Refer: Ram Charit Manas, Aranya Kand, Chaupai line no. 2 that precedes Doha no. 36 where Lord Ram has advised Sabari that true Bhakti is when one withdraws his mind from all worldly activities and focuses it on loving Lord God and having devotion for him.

What is 'single-minded or the purest form of devotion for Lord God?' This is explained in the next verse no. 10.]

१० अन्याश्रयाणां त्यागोऽनन्यता

10 anyāśrayāṇāṃ tyāgo'nanyatā

(10) The purest and the best form of devotion for Lord God is when the devotee relies exclusively on his beloved Lord, and abandons all other support and reliance.

[True devotion for Lord God by a devotee is when the latter has no one to look forward to except his beloved Lord; he has no other support other than his God.

The word “āśraya” means a refuge, a shelter, a place where one goes for succour and solace, a resting place. Hence, true devotion envisages that for the devotee, the Lord God is the only refuge, the only support, the only place where peace and succour is to be found, the only destination and aim of life.

In Ram Charit Manas, Ayodhya Kand, Chaupai line no. 5 that precedes Doha no. 130, sage Valmiki has told Lord Ram exactly the same thing. The sage said: “Oh Lord Ram, you must live in the heart of those who have no other destination except you.”

Again the sage says, “He who abandons everything else and embraces you to his bosom, oh Lord you should live in his heart.”

In Ram Charit Manas, Aranya Kand, Chaupai line no. 5 that precedes Doha no. 36, Lord Ram has advised Sabari, the old woman devotee of the Lord, that Bhakti is to have complete and sole reliance upon the Lord God, and therefore one must remain calm and unmoved, neither feeling sorrow or worried, nor elated (because the Lord would take care of him and his worries on the one hand, and on the other hand he must not be delighted because all good things are a gift from the Lord to him and nothing that he has earned himself which could make him feel elated).

Lord Ram has explicitly endorsed this spiritual philosophy when he said, “If anyone says that he is my follower and is dependent upon me but harbours some sort of hope or support from others, say then what kind of belief does he have on me; how can he claim to be my follower or dependant?” Refer: Ram Charit Manas, Uttar Kand, Chaupai line no. 3 that precedes Doha no. 46. [A person who thinks to the contrary is an imposter; he is a hypocrite; he is a non-believer or a disbeliever.]

True devotion for God means discarding all props to support oneself; it means to rely solely on the grace, mercy and benevolence of the Lord God. In the mind of a true devotee the existence of any other Lord does not exist, so there is no question of

his expecting any support from anyone else. He regards the entire creation, the manifested and the un-manifested, as a revelation of his beloved God. His mental state is like a chaste woman who is exclusively devoted to her husband as described in Ram Charit Manas, Aranya Kand, Chaupai line no. 12 that precedes Doha no. 5 where it is said that “the best woman is one for whom no other man except her husband has any existence”.

When Parvati, the consort of Lord Shiva, did Tapa (penance) before in her early days so that she can be married to the Lord, the seven celestial sages known as Saptrishis went to test her integrity, sincerity and commitment. They tried their best to deflect her from her chosen path and deviate her from the determination to marry Shiva by pointing out so many problems she would face if she marries the Lord. Parvati’s answer set an example of single-minded dedication to one’s chosen Lord; she replied—“Lord Mahadeva (Shiva) may be a treasury of all bad qualities while other Lords such as Vishnu may be a treasure-trove of the best of qualities in existence, but oh sages I can’t help because when one begins to love someone then he is best suited for that person no matter what his drawbacks may be. [Hence, please excuse me.]” Refer: Ram Charit Manas, Baal Kand, Doha no. 80.]

She further told them, “Listen sages! It is my vow that I may be born for thousands of years and remain unmarried, but if I would ever marry then I would marry only Lord Shiva”. Refer: Ram Charit Manas, Baal Kand, Chaupai line no. 5 that precedes Doha no. 81.

In Tulsidas’ “Dohawali”, verse no. 53 it is said: “All the worldly interests as well as the spiritual interests will be taken care of by Sri Sitaram. Then say, why should and why would Tulsidas go and knock at the doors of others seeking favours?”

In “Dohawali”, verse no. 54 it is said: “When all your worldly desires and needs, as well as the final liberation and deliverance of your soul (emancipation and salvation of the Atma) can be achieved only at the one place (i.e. with Lord Ram), then it is not at all advisable and apt for you to beg at the doors of others (because that would not only prove that you are extremely stupid and greedy but would also be insulting for your beloved Lord who goes to any length to ensure your happiness, peace and welfare; it would be an outright betrayal).”

In “Dohawali”, verse no. 84 it is said: “Oh Lord Ram, the king of Kaushal! Whether good or bad, this Tulsidas is yours. If this is the truth, then his welfare is assured in all the three worlds (the heaven, the hell, and the present world where he lives at present) and the three eras or phases of time (past, present and future).”

In “Dohawali”, verse no. 138 it is said: “A person who, inspite of being learned, expects emancipation and salvation of the soul without worshipping and paying homage to Lord Ram is like an animal without a horn or tail (i.e. he has a deformed mind and corrupted intellect which has anomalous and erroneous thoughts that are in breach of the law of Nature and the well established principles of the ancient scriptures).”

In “Dohawali”, verse no. 139 it is said: “Such good fortunes as worldly riches, a full and contented home, happiness and joys, friends and compatriots, as well as parents and brothers etc. that do not naturally, cheerfully and willingly aid and inspire a person to turn towards Lord Ram's holy feet should perish.”

In “Dohawali”, verse no. 277 it is said: “Tulsidas says that he has only one source of reliance, only one source of strength, only one source of hope, and only one belief or faith (and it is in Lord Ram).

Verily, Tulsidas has become like the bird ‘Chatak’ for the sake of the dark rain-bearing cloud in the form of Lord Ram.

[The bird 'Chatak', kind of an Indian cuckoo, keeps its attention fixed on the dark rain bearing clouds during the rainy season because it is reputed to quench its thirst from the rain drops falling from it. The Chatak drinks only this rain drop falling directly from the cloud in its mouth to quench its thirst, preferring to die if the cloud does not oblige it, but does not depend upon any other source of water to survive.

Similarly, Tulsidas says that he seeks only from his beloved Lord Ram, and no one else. The analogy of the 'dark rain bearing cloud' is significant here because Lord Ram has a dark complexion that has been often compared to the colour of this cloud.]”

In Tulsidas' magnificent Book of Prayers, verse no. 174 tells us that “one should abandon contact with all those who do not love Lord Ram as if they are our greatest enemy even though such people may otherwise be very dear to us”.

११ लोकवेदेषु तदनुकूलाचरणं तद्विरोधिषूदासीनता

11 loka-vedeṣu tad-anukūlācaraṇaṁ tad-virodhiṣūdāsinatā

(11) [True service to the Lord God has been defined here.] Performance of only those deeds that please the Lord God and are agreeable to him, out of all the deeds that are regarded as secular in this world as well as those that are religious and prescribed by the scriptures (Vedas), is deemed to be doing true service to the Lord.

[This verse elaborates on the principle enunciated earlier in verse no. 8. To wit, the important point is to do deeds that please the Lord, and not doing them because they conform to the norms of society and are expected to be done, or are ordained by religious requirements or as injunctions of the scriptures.

To wit, a devotee does all that he does with the pious thought “Oh Lord, I am doing it for you exclusively.” One should restrain oneself from doing anything that is contrary to his service of the Lord; one should refrain from doing anything which does not serve the Lord or pleases him; one should be indifferent towards all things that stand between him and his beloved Lord God.

This is the spirit of 'renunciation' as propounded earlier in verse no. 8. Sitting idle is not renunciation, and likewise doing deeds for Lord God is not being involved in the deed either. One must understand the subtle hidden message of any scriptural advice in its spirit more than its literal meaning to actually benefit from it. Misinterpretation of a profound formula is usually more harmful than not understanding it at all because in the latter case the seeker would go to a wise teacher for guidance, while in the former case it would ruin him. Herein lies the importance of a wise and enlightened teacher as well. Such a teacher, the wise and enlightened and learned 'Guru', would show the light of truth to the eager disciple and lead him on the correct path to God-realisation.]

१२ भवतु निश्चयदाढ्याद् ऊर्ध्वं शास्त्ररक्षणम्

12 bhavatu niścaya-dārḍhyād ūrdhvaṁ śāstra-rakṣaṇam

(12) After having thus established an abiding and unwavering faith, love and devotion for Lord God, one should be careful not to neglect the advice of the scriptures, and therefore fine-tune his devotion in accordance to their principles so that one gets their protection and is shielded from any missteps.

[This verse is remarkable in the sense that it prevents one from thinking that the previous verses, especially nos. 8 and 11, undermine the value of the scriptures or cause disrespect to them. The idea is plain and simple—that one should follow the advice of the scriptures with proper wisdom and understanding that their intent is to bring the creature nearer to the Supreme Being and not pull him away from the latter. So merely following the scriptures in the letter without understanding their spirit and intent is like honouring the body which lacks life in it—i.e. it is like honouring a dead body which is to be avoided at all costs.

The words used in this verse are “śāstra-rakṣaṇam”. While “śāstra” means that which teaches, guides and advices, which are the functions of the scripture, the word “rakṣaṇam” means to protect, to take sanctuary with. So the phrase would have two meanings—viz. (i) One should seek the guidance of the scriptures once one has decided to renounce the world and have love and devotion for the Lord God instead, because these scriptures would then tell him the correct way to be followed so that he can easily reach his goal of God-realisation; the scriptures would point out the pitfalls to him and guide him along to success. In this, the scriptures (śāstra) extend their protection (rakṣaṇam) to the seeker by alerting him about various risks and how to overcome them. And (ii) One must protect (rakṣaṇam) the dignity of the scriptures by not neglecting them, for they are wise teachers and source of wisdom and knowledge. Verily, ‘knowledge’ is needed for attaining success in even rudimentary things in life, and therefore the scriptures that are a treasure-trove of knowledge should be given their due respect.

This fact has been endorsed in Krishna’s Geeta, Canto 16, verse no. 24 which says: “The scripture alone is your guidance to determine what should be done and what should be avoided. Knowing this, you (Arjun) should act as advised in the scriptures.”

In all sooth and without gainsay, the scriptures are like the ‘lamp that shines the light of wisdom’. Say, can anyone, no matter how wise he may be, reach his goal in pitch darkness even if he knows where the goal is? The importance of studying the scriptures, especially devotional literature, and practicing their teachings is reiterated in verse no. 76 also.

The next verse no. 13 answers the question and elaborates further on: “Why the scriptures should be followed?”]

१३ अन्यथा पातित्यशङ्कया

13 anyathā pātitya-śaṅkayā

(13) For otherwise, there is the risk of fall and failure (in the spiritual path).

[Thus, if one neglects the advice of the scriptures and thinks that he can manage things on his own, then there is the grave risk of slipping and falling midway. Remember: The path to God-realisation is very slippery and precipitous by nature.

The simplest of carelessness would make the seeker slip and fall just like a mountaineer who, driven by his excitement and bravado, tries to climb a steep mountain on his own without seeking proper guidance and training. He is bound to slip and fall to his death somewhere.

In Geeta, Canto 16, verse no. 23, Lord Krishna says: “A person who neglects the advice of the scriptures and acts in an arbitrary way in accordance with his own sweet will, due to over-jealousness and over-confidence—he will neither gain perfection in life, nor would he reach his ultimate goal of self-realisation or God-realisation, nor would gain the goal of attaining happiness in life.

Remember: The scripture is like a wise, selfless and impartial teacher, guide and moral preceptor. One definitely needs such a guide in life.

The next verse no. 14 answers the question: “How long should the scriptures be followed by a spiritual aspirant/seeker?”]

१४ लोकेऽपि तावद् एव भोजनादिव्यापारस् त्व् आशरीरधारणावधि

14 loka 'pi tāvad eva bhojanādi-vyāpāras tv ā-śārīra-dhāraṇāvadhi

(14) One should do worldly deeds and activities in accordance with the guidance of the scriptures (i.e. to comply with their injunctions) and relevant to that point of time, while such bodily functions as eating food etc. continue till death. [Put simply, one must select to do deeds that are righteous and auspicious in the eyes of the scriptures, for this will determine a person’s spiritual destiny. Of course, natural functions of the gross body such as eating food etc. do not come within this purview, for one has no control over them.]

[There are two types of actions a person’s body performs. One is the deed a person does or the action that he takes over which he has the power to decide. A person may decide to do a certain thing, or decide not to do it. A person has freedom to choose between many options in this world, to decide what to do and what not to. In all such cases, he must be guided by the advice of the scriptures. Namely, he must do things that are good and right in the eyes of the scriptures, and shun those that the scriptures advice against. For instance, trading is allowed by the scriptures as a means of livelihood, meeting the needs of this world, and for genuine commerce. But if trading involves cheating others and generating greed and exploitation, then it is not to be done.

On the other hand, bodily functions such as eating and drinking cannot be avoided and chosen against as long as a man lives. So he has no choice over them. But of course he can control what he eats and drinks.

Hence, the idea of this verse is that a wise devotee should be very careful and selective about what he does, how he acts. It is his deeds and actions over which he has freedom to choose that would determine his spiritual fate, and not the routine functions of his body over which he has no control. So while deciding what to do and how to do it, one should follow the guidelines of the scriptures so that his actions and deeds do not stand in the way of his achieving the goal of God-realisation and attaining eternal happiness in life.

Put differently, a man must be wise to fine-tune his actions and deeds to fulfill his duties and responsibilities in life in accordance with the advice of the scriptures,

but keeping in mind the necessities of time, circumstance and place where he lives. As far as bodily functions of eating and drinking are concerned, a wise devotee eats and drinks anything with the thought that such food or drink is sanctified and it is an offering to the Lord God who resides within him as his own Atma, his pure conscious soul that lives in the subtle space of his heart.

The following verses expound further on the characteristics of Bhakti.]

१५ तल्लक्षणानि वाच्यन्ते नानामतभेदात्

15 tal-lakṣaṇāni vācyante nānā-mata-bhedāt

(15) Now, ‘Bhakti’ is being defined and its unique characteristics are being enumerated (by sage Narad). This is necessary especially because of existence of diversity of opinion on the subject, the multifarious ways it has been expressed, explained and practiced, and the many scriptural advices and injunctions regarding it.

[Sage Narad accepts that there are a lot many ways in which the eclectic spiritual ‘Bhakti’ has been defined and how to practice it explained by learned sages and seers over time. They have all explained Bhakti differently, and each one of them stressed on one or the other characteristic of Bhakti and a method of practicing it that was the best in their personal view.

Though all these ways are right, but such multiplicity of advice and multifarious injunctions only go to add to the confusion amongst spiritual seekers. An ordinary devotee gets confounded regarding what Bhakti actually consists of, how it should be practiced, what are its dos and don’ts. A person who aspires to adopt the path of Bhakti to seek fulfillment of his spiritual aspirations in life and reach his objective is left high-and-dry with countless ways this principle has been explained and the many ways its practice has been advised. So therefore, some precise, clear and practical guide on Bhakti, that can be easily understood and implemented, is needed. This is the supreme and pious purpose of sage Narad in this Book.

So first he tells us about other learned teachers and how they have dealt with the subject of Bhakti, how they have expressed their views and understanding on it. Then at the end Narad gives his own advice based on his personal experiences; he defines Bhakti in his own unique and simple way.

This method is very helpful in the sense that a reader becomes informed about the different opinions on Bhakti that were expressed by so many of the wisest and the most learned of teachers that ever lived. The spiritual aspirant’s knowledge becomes wide, broad-based, comprehensive and all-inclusive. It becomes so easy for him to understand the difference between the various definitions of Bhakti and the way it is practiced. So when he goes on to read what sage Narad himself suggests about Bhakti, the spiritual aspirant is able to see why Narad’s principles are more easy for him to follow, what its unique features are, and how he can actually benefit from Narad’s method.

There is another way of looking at the question ‘why Narad quoted other Authorities on Bhakti in his own teaching on the subject?’ Well, one good point in this approach—of citing other learned Authorities on the subject of Bhakti—is that the reader gets a comprehensive view on the subject at a single place, without having to research so many thick and difficult-to-access scriptures as already stressed herein

above. The other good thing is that it tells the spiritual aspirant that all these ways of Bhakti are equally effective and important because the Authorities who had proposed them had verified their efficacy from their personal experiences. So this gives the aspirant a lot of choice to pick up a method that best suits his mental likings and aptitudes.

Then finally Narad gives his own advice—implying that he had benefited more by the method he proposes. And what is this method? He has laid it out in plain and simple terms in the beginning of his exposition on the subject: verily, it is ‘pure and true love for the Lord God’ that is called Bhakti. If we examine this simple formula we discover that ‘love’ encompasses such virtues as affection, longing, dedication, commitment, sincerity in whatever is done, faith, single-minded pursuit, remembrance of the beloved at all times of life, selfless service to the beloved, having no other reliance, no other source of solace and succour except the beloved, and so on and so forth.

Hence, a Bhakta’s life revolves around his Lord God; the Lord becomes the very purport and purpose of his existence. Verily indeed, this is true form of Bhakti that Narad proposes. Say, if a child loves its parent in this way, is it not for the parent to take special care of this child? So is the case with the Lord God: The Lord is especially careful about the destiny of his true Bhakta!

Now, ‘love’ and ‘devotion’ go hand-in-hand, are inseparable from each other, and they gel perfectly with each other just like water and milk. Just as the element of ‘love’ is crucial in the child’s eternal bonding with its parent, and the more ‘devoted’ the child is towards its parent the more the parent loves the child, so it is with the Lord and his devotee. ‘Love and devotion for Lord God’ are the crucial keys for God-realisation, according to Narad. All other methods flow from these two cardinal principles. Love and devotion help to establish harmony between the various means of doing Bhakti. None of the methods of doing Bhakti would give the desired result if the elements of love and devotion, of affection and dedication towards the Lord God are not an integral part of any such method.]

१६ पूजादिष्व् अनुराग इति पाराशर्यः

16 pūjādiṣv anurāga iti pārāsāryaḥ

(16) According to sage Veda Vyas, the son of sage Paaraashar, Bhakti (devotion) consists of developing affection in (i.e. finding interest in and enjoying) the worship of the Lord God, amongst other things.

[In this verse no. 16 as well as in verse nos. 17 and 18 that follow herein below, Sage Narad has outlined two fundamental ways in which the Lord God can be worshipped: One method is an external form of worship where the visible form or aspect of the Supreme Being is honoured, and the second method is an internal form of worship wherein the Supreme Being’s invisible and sublime form that is all-pervading and symbolized by the cosmic Consciousness is honoured.

In verse nos. 37 and 79 also, the importance of worshipping the Lord has been reiterated.

Sage Veda Vyas’ formula of worship relates to the external form of worship. A slight variant of it is sage Garga’s method given in verse no. 17 where one worships

the Lord by way developing longing to hear the Lord's stories and glories or any other thing that is associated with the Lord instead of things associated to the gross world. Both these methods are 'external forms of worship of the Lord God'. This form of worship is easier and is followed by those devotees whose mind and intellect are not sufficiently evolved or competent to follow the second method of worshipping the formless aspect of God.

The second method of worship is advised by sage Shandilya who proposes the 'internal form of worship' which is equivalent to meditation and contemplation on the 'self' known as the Atma, a sublime and ethereal entity that represents cosmic Consciousness and forms the true identity of all living beings. This form of worship is done by Yogis or ascetics, or by devotees who have a higher level of wisdom and intellect. This system requires exemplary self-control over the sense organs and mind, and it is a bit tough to implement as compared to the first system. This method of worship is stressed in verse no. 18.

Sage Veda Vyas is a legendary figure and was the most learned seer of his time. He is the one who had classified the primary text of the Vedas (original Hindu scriptures) into their present four divisions (known as Rig, Sam, Yajur and Atharva Vedas), had compiled the Upanishads (the grand philosophical treatises on spiritualism, metaphysics and theology), penned the eighteen great Purans (mythological history of the Hindus), as well as the Srimad Bhagvad Maha-Puran.

According to him, Bhakti or devotion consists of 'worshipping the Lord God'. There are other methods of practicing devotion, but Veda Vyas says it is the best method according to him.

Now, it is not said what 'form' of the Lord should be worshipped. Cleverly, Vyas left this option open—i.e. one can either worship the form of the Lord that has attributes, a form that is visible and worshipped as an image (such as a consecrated image in the temple or at home), or one can worship the invisible, cosmic and all-pervading form of the Lord as pure Consciousness. Which form should be worshipped depends upon the level of intellectual development, the aptitude and preferences of the worshipper. For an ordinary worshipper (read—'devotee'), the easy method of offering his worship and respect to the formed variant of the Lord, i.e. to an image of the Lord such as the one that is consecrated in a temple or even at home, suffices. For those who are more intellectually evolved, learned, enlightened and self-realised, the Lord is preferred to be worshipped in the form of the Atma, the cosmic Soul that stands for pure Consciousness which is boundless, without attributes, all-pervading, omnipresent and eternal. This latter devotee would see his Lord everywhere, and then whether he goes to a temple or not, whether he offers prayers to a specific form of the Lord or not, it does not matter.

So obviously, worshipping of the Lord would take different forms. For worshipping the image of the Lord God there are rituals and formal ways which are collectively called 'Puja' or 'Pooja'. This Puja can be simple or elaborate; it can be done collectively as in temple worship, or individually by a devotee at his home. It can take the form elaborate rituals and sacrifices and offerings, or it can be as simple and humble as offering of a prayer that comes straight from the devotee's heart.

The other form of worship that is done by the learned and enlightened worshipper consists of meditation and contemplation on the cosmic form of the Lord as the Parmatma, the embodiment of pure cosmic Consciousness that is all-pervading, omnipresent, invisible, attribute-less, eternal, sublime, subtle and ethereal in its essential form.

From a broader perspective, even honouring the various manifestation of Nature as trees, rivers, mountains and animals on earth, the many celestial bodies such as the sun and the moon in the sky, the elements such as the air, fire, water, earth and sky, and other such entities also come within the ambit of worshipping the Lord God as the Lord is the one who is revealed in all these forms.

Extended further, serving mankind and helping the needy is also an obvious form of worship of the Lord God as the Lord is the one who is revealed in all these various forms.

The main point to note here is that mechanical way of doing worship by way of service or rituals or sacrifices or making offerings etc., is not true form of Bhakti. What is needed is to 'love' doing them, to be 'committed to these activities', to 'do them with earnest faith and devotion'. This would be 'true Bhakti' according to sage Veda Vyas.

The aim of Bhakti is to help the devotee, the 'worshipper', come closer to the Lord he worships, the Lord for whom he has Bhakti. So only when one worships the Lord with full involvement and commitment of the mind by way of taking full interest in worshipping the Lord in any of the ways outlined in the above discussion, fully enjoying such acts and developing affection for them to the extent that one would prefer to do such things over all other demands of life—then only would one truly have Bhakti for the Lord God. This is what sage Veda Vyas says.

In this context we may see what Prahalad, who had been one of the other great devotees of Lord Vishnu, the Supreme Being, since his childhood days, says about the various forms that 'worship' takes in Srimad Bhagvat Mahapuran (7.5.23). He says:

“The essential activities related to devotion are: (1) Hearing about the Lord, (2) Chanting the Lord's glories, (3) Remembering the Lord, (4) Serving and meditating upon the Lord's holy lotus-like feet, (5) Worshipping the Lord, (6) Praying to the Lord, (7) Thinking oneself as being an eternal servant or follower of the Lord, one who is eternally obliged and committed to the Lord, (8) Becoming a fast friend of the Lord, and (9) Surrendering everything to the Lord.”

The eclectic view that 'worshipping the Lord in physical terms is an expression of Bhakti' has been endorsed by sage Valmiki in Ram Charit Manas, Ayodhya Kand, Chaupai line nos. 1-6 that precede Doha no. 129 where the sage tells Lord Ram: “Oh Lord, you live in the heart of those who offer food to you before eating it, who wear clothes after offering them to you, who bow his head before you and his teacher (whom he reveres as much as you because he has shown the worshipper the way to worship you), who offer humble prayers to you, who worship the Lord's holy feet in the company of all the members of their families, who have no reliance other than the Lord, who think that by going to the holy feet of the Lord they have visited all the holy pilgrim places, who chant your holy name, and who make oblations and sacrifices to you and offer everything to you.”]

१७ कथादिष्व् इति गर्गः

17 kathādiṣv iti gargaḥ

(17) According to the doctrine of sage Garga, Bhakti (devotion) consists of developing affection and interest for listening to the glorious stories related to the Lord God, amongst other things.

[Refer to verse nos. 55 and 80 in the context of this present verse.

This is the second way of practicing Bhakti. Sage Garga says that Bhakti includes finding interest in and enjoying hearing the many holy stories related to the Lord God, about his various manifestations, and the different ways they have been narrated and explained by learned preachers. One must develop longing to hear such glorious stories, and not get bored by them.

Listening to the divine stories of the Lord includes listening to the glories of the Lord's holy name, and enjoying reciting the Lord's name individually or in a group. This is called Japa and Kirtan respectively.

Repeated hearing of the Lord's divine stories is important as it helps to remove doubts about the Lord, his holiness and divinity, as well as to help the mind become more focused on the thoughts of the Lord and move away from the thoughts of the gross material world.

Refer: Ram Charit Manas, Ayodhya Kand, Chaupai line nos. 4-5 that precede Doha no. 128 where sage Valmiki has endorsed this view when he told Lord Ram that the Lord should live in the heart of those whose ears are like the ocean which continuously receive rivers symbolized by the divine stories of the Lord, but they never get filled—i.e. they never get tired of hearing the Lord's divine stories.

Again, the importance of hearing the divine stories of the Lord has been highlighted in Ram Charit Manas, Baal Kand, Chaupai line no. 1 that precedes Doha no. 114 where it is said that the stories related to Lord Ram are like a clap that scares away birds symbolized by doubts and confusions.

In Ram Charit Manas, Uttar Kand, Chaupai line no. 3 that precedes Doha no. 53 it is clearly stated that “those who want to cross this huge ocean symbolized by this world of life and death should use the Lord's stories as a robust boat that would take them across safely.”

These activities—i.e. hearing the Lord's stories, chanting his holy name, discussing and conversing about the Lord etc.—help the devotee develop a natural bond of love and affinity with the Lord God and focusing his otherwise wayward mind on higher spiritual goals of life. When the mind begins to enjoy such stories and revel in the joy derived from chanting the Lord's holy name, gradually it would lose interest in the temptations of the material world as it would realize that they do not give him any worthwhile happiness. On the other hand, the mind would begin to find charm in always thinking of the Lord and remaining hooked to it.

Sage Garga was the family priest and preceptor of Lord Krishna's family. It was he who had done the naming ceremony of Lord Krishna and his elder brother Balaram. A whole lineage of sages who had been his disciple early in their lives had assumed his name as their surname.

The Srimad Bhagvad Mahapuran, 1/5/22 says: “The wise men have declared that the main purpose for doing Tapa (penance and austerity), acquiring Gyan (true knowledge and enlightenment), doing Yagya (fire sacrifices), recitation of the Vedas, and making charities etc. is to develop affection for the Lord and hearing his divine glories.”

In Srimad Bhagvad Mahapuran, 10/1/4, sage Sukdeo tells king Parikshit: “Descriptions of the Lord (i.e. the Lord's glories and his divine stories) that have been preached or taught by those who are free from all material desires is the right medicine for the soul which is trapped in the cycle of birth and death. Such narrations delight the hearer's ear and the mind. Therefore, who will not like to hear the Lord's

glories and divine form except a butcher, i.e. a stupid person who wants to kill his own self and suffer his soul to the endless cycle of hellish misery?”]

१८ आत्मरत्यविरोधेनेति शाण्डिल्यः

18 ātma-raty-avirodheneti śāṇḍilyaḥ

(18) In the views of sage Shandilya, ‘Bhakti’ (devotion) is a state of sublime being that is not opposed to the joy and bliss that are derived from attainment of self-realisation (of the Atma, the soul, the pure consciousness that forms the true ‘self’ of the devotee).

[Refer also to verse no. 6 in the context of the present verse.

Sage Shandilya says that any form of devotion for Lord God can be called ‘Bhakti’ if it does not clash with or acts as an obstacle to or causes hindrance in self-realisation by the devotee. Bhakti must support the spiritual aspirant in his quest for attaining eternal peace, happiness, beatitude and bliss; it must support him to find liberation from all delusions associated with the gross existence in this mundane world; it must deliver him from all the miseries associated with the cycle of birth and death; it must lead to his ultimate emancipation and salvation. If these spiritual objectives of the soul are not achieved, Bhakti has not fructified. If these objectives are attained by the spiritual aspirant by meditating on the ‘self’ with the enlightened view that the Atma is an image of the Supreme Atma known as the Parmatma or the Lord God whom he worships and loves, then the person is practicing Bhakti by all means.

On the other hand, if the devotee practices any method of doing Bhakti but this method comes in the way of his meditation on the ‘self’ and deriving bliss from it, then such method of Bhakti would lead him nowhere, and it is not deemed to be the correct path to God-realisation, according to sage Shandilya. This way is called “ātma-raty”—to revel in the ‘self’, to enjoy the bliss originating from the ‘self’, to remain submerged in the thoughts of the ‘self’ and delight in it. But one thing must be clearly understood here—and it is that this ‘self’ refers to the pure conscious Atma of the spiritual aspirant, and not to his gross physical body as the latter is not his pure self.

The eclectic reward of devotion for Lord God and doing meditation on the Atma, the pure consciousness that resides inside the subtle space of the heart of the aspirant which forms his ‘inner-self’, are the same. Both Bhakti and meditation on the ‘self’ give a profound sense ecstasy, a sense of abiding bliss and sublime delight that cannot be measured in physical terms as they are sublime and ethereal in nature.

Thus, ‘Bhakti’ and ‘Meditation on the Self’ are the two sides of the same coin as it were.

Hence, reveling in the bliss obtained by meditation on the ‘self’, the Atma, the pure consciousness, is deemed to be doing Bhakti. The logic behind this precept is simple: The devotee has become so highly enlightened that he realizes that his pure consciousness known as the Atma is a fractional form of the Supreme Consciousness known as the Parmatma, or the Lord God, whom he worships. He understands that the Lord God, who is also known by the name of the Parmatma, the One who embodies cosmic Consciousness, resides inside all living beings as their ‘true self’ known as the

individual's Atma which is a fraction of the Cosmic Atma. So therefore, instead of worshipping the Lord anywhere outside or in any other form, he begins to concentrate his mind on worshipping and thinking of the Lord who resides right within him as his own Atma.

To wit, such a self-realised devotee begins to do 'meditation' on the inner 'self' as a method of practicing Bhakti to realize his beloved Lord God. And in this spiritual endeavour of his, he is duly rewarded when he experiences a sense of exemplary ecstasy and bliss sprouting forth from his inner-self like a fountain of sweet nectar oozing out from a hidden subterranean spring-well! This state marks the state when he has become matured in his quest for God-realisation by the path of Bhakti.

We can extend the meaning of this verse to include 'selfless service'. Refer also to verse no. 48 in this context. It is because such service gives undiluted joy to the doer of the service; he does it cheerfully and derives immense internal satisfaction by what he does. So his inner-self feels delighted and his heart feels fulfilled by such service. This selfless form of service pleases the Lord because such service pleases his 'inner-self', i.e. his Atma, and this Atma is an image of the Parmatma, the Lord God whom the devotee worships and tries to please. Obviously, by pleasing his inner-self, the devotee has pleased the Lord God who resides inside his own heart in a very subtle form as the Atma!

The Lord God is viewed at two levels by any spiritual aspirant: for the eyes of his gross physical body, the Lord is visible in the form of an image, while for the eyes of his enlightened mind and awakened intellect, the Lord is visible in a subtle form called the Atma that is present right inside his own self.

So therefore, one can worship the Lord by his physical body in any of the ways prescribed in this book, and at the same time he can also worship the Lord by his mind and intellect by contemplating upon the Lord and meditating on his invisible form as the Atma. Both these means of Bhakti must compliment each other, and not oppose each other. This is what sage Shandilya emphasizes.

A word of caution here: Such forms of Bhakti must be honest and sincere; there should be no foul-play, deceit and pretension. Remember: If one adopts any of the counterfeit methods, then he is only cheating his own self and no body else.]

१९ नारदस् तु तदर्पिताखिलाचारता तद्विस्मरणे परमव्याकुलतेति

19 nāradas tu tad-arpitākḥilācāratā tad-vismaraṇe parama-vyākulateti

(19) [Now, we shall read what sage Narad says about Bhakti himself; how he defines and interprets it.]

Narad says that to him, Bhakti implies two things—viz. (i) dedicating all actions and deeds to the Lord God, and offering everything at the altar of the Lord; and (ii) feeling an intense pain of separation from someone extremely beloved if one does not remember the Lord for even a fraction of a moment.

[Sage Narad now proposes his own formula for Bhakti. He advices two things here: (i) One, to offer all deeds selflessly to the Lord, and (ii) To love the Lord so intensely that one remembers him each moment of his existence, whether awake or asleep.

To wit, Narad says that all notions of Bhakti (devotion) are alright, but if they do not involve intense love for the Lord God, or if one does not offer everything to his Lord God, then these notions of Bhakti seem hollow.

When a person truly has devotion (Bhakti) for Lord God, then it is deemed that he truly loves the Lord, and he has truly submitted himself to the Lord, and therefore all that he has belongs to the Lord, and all that he does too belongs to the Lord. His thinking is: “Oh Lord, whatever I do with my body and its sense organs, with my power to speak, with my mind and its power to think—I offer everything to you. Indeed, I am doing everything for your sake. Nay, it is you who are getting these things done through me. So who am I, what have I done, and what reward is mine?”

In Srimad Bhagvad Geeta of Lord Krishna, Canto 9, verse no. 27, the Lord says: “Whatever you do—enjoyment (of the world etc.), penances, charity etc.—offer everything to me.”

Again, in Srimad Bhagvad Geeta, Canto 6, verse no. 47, the Lord told Arjun: “Of all the Yogis (ascetics), he who devotedly worships me with his mind focused exclusively on me is treated by me as the best ascetic.”

In Srimad Bhagvad Geeta, Canto 8, verse no. 7, the Lord says: “Therefore Arjun, remember me each moment and go on with your fight (i.e. endure with your duties in the world). With your mind and intellect focused on me and my divine form, it is sure that you will come to me (i.e. you will attain me).”

In Srimad Bhagvad Geeta, Canto 18, verse no. 65, Lord Krishna tells Arjun: “Always think of me, become my devotee, worship me, and offer your homage unto me. Thus you will come to me without fail. I promise you this because you are my very dear friend.”

It is to be noted that all these definitions or descriptions of Bhakti compliment each other; they are not exclusive and opposed to each other. By reading them, the spiritual aspirant gets a comprehensive view of Bhakti. Then he can select one or more path that he finds suitable to him. The emphasis is on devotion for Lord God in one’s deeds, thoughts and words.

But Narad stresses that the root of Bhakti lies in total self-surrender to the Lord God when he says that one should offer everything at the altar of the Lord. He has already said in verse no. 2 that Bhakti means true form of supreme love for Lord God. He elaborates now to say what kind of this love should be—verily, it should be so intense that the devotee can’t live even for a moment without the thoughts of his beloved Lord.]

२० अस्त्यु एवम् एवम्

20 asty evam evam

(20) [Narad says—] It is like this; it is indeed like this!

[Narad says that there are many more definitions and descriptions of Bhakti, and how it should be practiced, but all of them are based on the principle proposed in the previous verses.

Bhakti is a subject that is a very sublime matter of the Spirit, and one can have a multidimensional approach to it. So Narad says that though what he has said till now summarizes the essential nature of Bhakti, but one must understand that it can take

many other forms too. To clarify his point and give an example of how one should love the Lord God, Narad cites the love of the Gopis for Lord Krishna in the following verses.

The Gopis' 'love' for Lord Krishna when the Lord was a child was so exceptionally deep, intense, undiluted, honest, undistracted and endearing that it overwhelmed them and virtually possessed their entire being. To wit, the Gopis' love for Krishna represents the true form in which a devotee is expected to love his Lord God.]

२१ यथा वृजगोपिकानाम्

21 yathā vraja-gopikānām

(21) (Devotion and love for the Lord God should be—] Just like the Gopis of Vraja (Vrindavan) had (for Lord Krishna during his childhood days).

[These 'Gopis' were ordinary female householders of Vrindavan who loved Lord Krishna when he was a young child so intensely that their love for Krishna became legendary and a touchstone to measure and judge the emotion of love, affection and devotion for all times to come. The Gopis loved Krishna more than anything else in their lives. Their whole being was possessed with love for Krishna, and irrespective of their age and social standing they loved Krishna even more than they would love their own selves.

The Gopis were not scholars of any scripture, nor were they doing any kind of Yoga or Tapa (meditation or penance respectively) or any other kind of religious or spiritual practice. They were ordinary women folk of all age groups, but when they came in contact with Krishna they were so charmed and enamoured by the Lord's inherent spiritual pull, which drew all of them towards him like a magnet pulling scattered pieces of iron that rush to the magnet and cling to it involuntarily, that these Gopis became virtually possessed by Lord Krishna. They thought of nothing else but Lord Krishna; they remembered Krishna while awake and asleep; they did their daily chores nonchalantly and almost mechanically because their mind was fixed on Krishna. When the Lord grew up and left Vrindavan to move onwards in the journey of his life, first to Mathura and then onwards to Dwarka, the Gopis never forgot him all their lives. They lived like someone possessed, lost in thoughts, contemplative and pensive.

Lord Krishna knew that the way Gopis loved him was in effect a transcendental form of devotion for Lord God. It entails a life-long commitment to the Lord God one is devoted to and reveres. This sort of transcendental love never gets reduced or fades, and it is not even dependent on the physical barrier of distance between the lover and the beloved. It is because this love is transcendental in nature, and it relates to the inner-self which is an eternal entity.

Hence, Gopis' love and devotion for Lord Krishna exemplifies the way a devotee is expected to love and be devoted to his or her Lord God. A devotee may be an ordinary householder like the Gopis, he may not have even studied the scriptures or may not have a Guru (teacher or guide) to show them the path, and he will go about his routine life just like others. But internally his entire being is lost in the thoughts of

his beloved Lord God; his mind is fixed on the Lord; his heart yearns to meet the Lord; his body wishes to embrace the Lord and fall on his holy feet; his soul wishes to merge with the Lord and becomes eager to get rid of the physical body that prevents this from happening! Even a fleeting thought of separation from Krishna made the Gopis restless, but when this physical separation did come, because the Lord had to move on in life and fulfill his other obligations, the Gopis lived the rest of their lives like a person possessed by some spirit, a person whose mind had been numbed by some grave shock but who simply is unable to overcome this shock and forget the thoughts of his earlier life, or like a widow who is forced to be separated from her beloved husband by the powerful force of destiny called 'death'.

The Gopis did not chant any holy names, nor did they love Krishna and remembered him with the understanding that he was a manifestation of the Supreme Lord. They loved him just for the sake of pure and simple 'love'. This love was spontaneous and sublime by nature; it was not pretentious or a means to entertain one's self and satisfy one's innate carnal desire for sense gratification. It was a love that was holy and related to the Atma, the soul, the true self of the Gopis!

Vraj, more commonly known as Vrindavan today, was a village or a small town with simple folks, and their main occupation was agriculture and animal husbandry, especially rearing of cattle such as cows. Everyone knew his neighbour, and there was no closed door for them. A child of any house had the freedom to go to his neighbour's place, and was welcome like he was their own son. When Krishna came into the lives of these simple residents of Vrindavan, the Lord's natural spiritual charm and the aura of divinity that effused from him immediately took hold of their imagination and sub-conscious mind. The Lord's childish ways, his pranks and prattle, his naughty smile and mischievous ways endeared him exceedingly to the people so much so that whenever he went to anyone's house he was not only warmly welcomed but the householder liked that he would stay there for as long as he wanted. Both the male members and the female members of the house loved Krishna equally and dearly, but the ladies were able to express this natural affection for the Lord more vibrantly and effectively as this is the natural quality and wont of mothers. A mother is able to better express and show her natural inclination to have love and affection for a child, especially one who is as adorable as Krishna was, as compared to the father who is more reserved and conservative in such overt expressions. Hence, the love of Gopis, the female householders of Vrindavan, is cited everywhere in reference to their love for Krishna instead of the Gopas, the male members of the society.

This in brief is exactly how the Gopis loved Lord Krishna—and by example it also should be the way a devotee ought to love and be devoted to his or her Lord God. The Gopis are stellar instances of how one should be devoted to Lord God and how one should love the Lord. The Gopis are the most exalted amongst all 'lovers' of the Lord as they had sacrificed everything and their entire being on the altar of love for Lord Krishna, even if it invited some sort of ridicule and ignominy in the process.

Lord Krishna had acknowledged the Gopis' love and devotion for him in Srimad Bhagvat Mahapurana, 10/46/4-6 when he told Uddhav, his messenger to the Gopis: "They (the Gopis) have not only given their mind to me but their entire being is surrendered to me and is centered in me. For my sake they have renounced everything connected to their physical body, and have mentally taken refuge with me alone (i.e. they remember me always and are unaware what their physical bodies do). I am the highest object of their adoration and affection. Verily indeed, I am their very own 'self'! I stand alongside all who have sacrificed or given up all their interests in this world as well as the world thereafter (next life; destiny) for my sake. Oh Uddhav!

Since I am at a distance from them, they (the Gopis) live a life of numbness, of utter nonchalance and total indifference as if they were possessed by some spirit. It is because they think constantly about me; their mind is focused on my thoughts, leaving no space for any other thing so much so that even the feeling of pain eludes them. Verily Uddhav, the Gopis somehow manage to live in the belief that some day I will come to them at Vrindavan.”

Remember: The Lord is exceedingly indebted to such devotees, and he does not even know how to sufficiently reward them except to love them more than they love him on the one hand, and on the other hand calling them to him to become one with his own Self! This is clear in Srimad Bhagvat Mahapuran, 10/32/22 when Lord Krishna told the Gopis: “As a matter of fact, I cannot repay your obligation to me even by strenuous efforts that I may be able to make over a long period of time lived by a heavenly being (i.e. for countless lives involving many births; or manifestations or incarnations in different forms). Indeed, your relation with me is pure and holy; it is free from tarnish and blemish of any kind. Your mind is focused entirely upon me so much so that it has cut through the fetter that usually ties it to the world and the body. Hence, let your virtuous devotion and love for me be a shine for the world for ever to come!”

Uddhav was so impressed by the Gopis’ pure devotion for Lord Krishna that he says in Srimad Bhagvat Mahapuran, 10/47/61: “Oh my Blessed Ones (the Gopis)! Let me take rebirth as a shrub, a tree or even a creeper in Vrindavan so that I can catch or touch the dust of these blessed and lucky ladies while they roam around lost in the thoughts of their beloved Krishna, for they have so successfully walked on the path (of devotion) for Lord Krishna (that even the Lord thinks of none but them, thereby bridging the physical distance of geography that exists between the Lord and these Gopis by being united at the transcendental level of the soul). They (the Gopis) have so successfully treaded the difficult path (of God-realisation) that has been propounded by the Upanishads as they have reached their destination of Krishna Consciousness!”

In all sooth and without the least gainsay, the level of dedication, the intensity of love, the depth of devotion and the purity of thought that the Gopis had for Lord Krishna can be comprehended only by a spiritual aspirant who has reached a certain level of spiritual evolvment and exalted existence attained through awareness of the cosmic Consciousness.

The love of the Gopis for Lord Krishna is the easiest example to understand the Philosophy of Love with its profundity and depth in practical terms. True love is one that is selfless, it is a giver of joy, when one cheerfully sacrifices everything for the sake of the beloved, where there is bliss, ecstasy and elation but no trace of guilt or fear, and which is so profound and deep that with the passage of time it gets more and more robust and abiding so much so that physical distance has no meaning.

In the above discussion we have cited the example of the magnet pulling the iron pieces towards its own self. It is not the physical thing known as the magnet that attracts the iron pieces, but it is the magnet’s natural and inherent ‘magnetic field’ or quality known as ‘magnetism’ that pulls the iron pieces. This ‘magnetism’ or ‘magnetic field’ is subtle, invisible, powerful and indivisible, whereas the body of the ‘magnet’ is visible, gross and can be broken into smaller pieces.

We can’t see ‘magnetism’ but surely we know that it exists, and we also know that it is hidden somewhere subtly inside the body of the physical body of the ‘magnet’ which is visible to us. The true value of the ‘magnet’ lies in its virtue known as ‘magnetism’, and not in anything else.

Likewise, no one could visibly see the supreme cosmic Consciousness that was hidden inside the physical body of Lord Krishna; it is known as the 'Krishna Consciousness'. It was this invisible and powerful force of the Supreme Consciousness that was hidden in the body of Lord Krishna, i.e. the 'Krishna Consciousness', that pulled the individual Consciousness that was hidden in the bodies of the individual Gopis towards its own powerful Self just like the example of individual scattered iron pieces getting automatically pulled towards a powerful magnet. Therefore it is very important that one correctly and properly understands why the Gopis loved Lord Krishna, and why they were attracted to him, and why this love of the Gopis for Krishna is cited by sage Narad in the context of Bhakti for the Lord God.

Remember: Sage Narad was an exalted being and a sage who had practiced a life of total detachment and renunciation, i.e. a life of Vairagya and Sanyas, and he is credited for propounding the eclectic philosophy of Sanyas in an Upanishad named after him. This Upanishad is called 'Narad Parivarjak Upanishad', and it is the 8th Upanishad of the Atharva Veda tradition. It is beyond credulity to expect such an exalted and dispassionate sage of the stature of Narad to propose anything with an amorous tinge or taint especially when dealing with spiritual matters!

To wit, the love of the Gopis for Lord Krishna passed all the litmus tests of pure and un-adulterated love of the highest order. It was selfless love, there was no sense of guilt, the Gopis sacrificed everything at the altar of this love, it made them renounce everything else, it was deep and complete and untainted, and it became deeper and more profound with the passage of time. In all sooth and without gainsay, this is the true way a devotee should love his or her Lord God!]

२२ तत्रापि न माहात्म्यज्ञानविस्मृत्यपवादः

22 tatrāpi na mähātmya-jñāna-vismṛty-apavādaḥ

(22) But even there (i.e. in the case of the Gopis expressing their love for Lord Krishna), there is no notion of wrongdoing for they had not forgotten the greatness and the glories of the Lord.

[This is a very significant verse. It at once lays to rest wild speculations about the sort of love that the Gopis had for Lord Krishna. Was it infatuation; was it carnal desire for gratification of the senses? Absolute and resounding "No", says the exalted, self-realised, wise and selfless sage Narad.

To wit, had there been an iota of blemish or taint in the Gopis' love for Krishna, Narad would never ever have cited their example when talking about 'Bhakti' which is a subject directly related to the soul of the living being and the Supreme Soul of the creation, for Bhakti is a path that brings about spiritual bliss and fulfillment to the soul, a path that leads to eternal freedom from the cycle of birth and death, a path that provides liberation, deliverance, emancipation and salvation to the creature, a path that has been extolled even by the Vedas (original scriptures), and a pious and divine spiritual path of which Narad himself is an exponent.

So Narad emphasizes that when the Gopis loved Krishna, it was a pure form of love that spontaneously and naturally establishes an affinity between the Atma of a

Jiva, the living being, to the exalted Supreme Atma of the Lord. This affinity is natural; this bond is natural; this kinship is natural.

Narad stresses the fact that though from the perspective of the gross world the love of the Gopis for Lord Krishna seemed to be a love between two persons, but it was not a love at the plane of gross existence. It was love and affection that transcends barriers of the body and the grossness of existence. It was a sublime and ethereal form of love that inherently exists between the Jiva, the living being, and the Parmatma, the Supreme Being. It was the natural affinity between the Atma of the Gopis and their parent Atma in the form of Lord Krishna.

The following verse from the Srimad Bhagvat Mahapurān, 10/31/4 would clearly indicate that the Gopis knew who Lord Krishna actually was: “Surely you are not an ordinary son of some cowherd woman (i.e. Krishna’s mother Yashodha). You are a witness of the inner-self (heart with its emotions) and the mind (with its thoughts) of all living beings. [It is because you live inside all as their all-knowing Atma, the pure consciousness that is the true ‘self’ of all creatures.] You are adored even by the creator Brahma. Indeed, you have taken birth in the household of the Yadav clan for the purpose of protection of the world (by showing the path of Dharma, the right path that a person should lead when faced with dilemma and uncertainties in life).”

So therefore, Gopis’ love for Lord Krishna was an embodiment of Love for the Divine. It was love for pure consciousness embodied in the form of Lord Krishna. Gopis’ love for Lord Krishna is an allegory that brings to the fore the pure and practical way love for God can be expressed and practiced.]

२३ तद्विहीनं जाराणाम् इव

23 tad-vihīnaṁ jārāṇām iva

(23) Verily indeed, love for the Lord God without knowledge of the true nature and the divinity of the Lord is like love that one has for a paramour.

[Love of God without knowing the greatness of the Lord is like the gross form of love of an adulterous person, and this sort of love is profane, having nothing to do God-realisation.

Narad expressly lays to rest here any doubts one may have about why he has suggested Gopis’ love for Lord Krishna as a way to love the Lord God. For, if one loves any form of the Lord without the clear understanding that he is not loving any ordinary being but the cosmic Consciousness that is embodied in that particular form, then that love is better not done at all as it defiles the purity and the sanctity of the grand, glorious and holy institution of love itself; it tarnishes the virtue of love.

Love for God is not a gross form of expression of affection. It should be of the purest and the truest kind that originates from the heart where the Atma lives. This Atma itself is pure consciousness, and it would never endorse anything that is impure and corrupt. So, if the ‘love for the Lord God’ brings into play the Atma—if the love for the Lord is based on the natural affinity that the Atma of the individual has for the parent Atma known as the Parmatma that has been revealed in the form of the Lord God the person worships—then the worshipper is certain that his love for the Lord God is pure and spiritually fulfilling.

Even in the worldly form of love between two individuals, it is only when each of the lovers is aware of the true qualities and weaknesses of the other person that the love survives. Deceit and pretensions have no role in the field of sustained love.

If one cannot have this kind of love for the Lord God then all other forms of expression of love and affection that he may exhibit are simply pretensions to fool the world and his own self. They have no spiritual value.

Remember: Love for God and love for a paramour are as different as pure gold and a piece of iron with a golden colour.

In the context of this verse, refer to verse no. 28 of Narad Bhakti Sutra.]

२४ नास्त्य् एव तस्मिंस् तत्सुखसुखित्वम्

24 nāsty eva tasmims tat-sukha-sukhitvam

(24) In that form of love (i.e. the love for the paramour), the inherent virtue of pure love wherein the lover exults in the happiness of the beloved does not exist.

[In the purest form of love, both the lovers feel happy in the happiness of their beloved. It is a selfless kind of love. Happiness, contentedness and bliss are mutual. To wit, in the case of a person loving a paramour, he is only interested in deriving personal gratification, and is unconcerned about his lover's wishes or conveniences. In the profane kind of love that has an element of grossness in it, the lover wants to extract as much joy as he or she can from the partner, but is not at all bothered about his or her welfare.

On the other hand, true love demands total dedication and sensitivity on part of both the lovers. So, whereas the devotee serves his Lord God selflessly and submits himself totally to the Lord, keeping in mind that the pleasure of the Lord is his own pleasure, the Lord reciprocates this emotion by taking exceptional care of the devotee and ensuring that the devotee's welfare and happiness is his (Lord's) personal responsibility. This is totally unlike the love between paramours.

This said, sage Narad now expounds upon the supremacy of Bhakti as compared to other spiritual paths such as Karma (doing religious deeds), Gyan (acquisition of knowledge and enlightenment), and Yoga (meditation) in the verses that follow now.]

२५ सा तु कर्मज्ञानयोगेभ्योऽप्य् अधिकतरा

25 sā tu karma-jñāna-yogebhyo'py adhikatarā

(25) That (divine love and devotion as a spiritual practice leading to God-realisation) is a superior form of practice (or a better spiritual practice) as compared to Karma (doing religious and righteous deeds), Gyan (acquisition of true knowledge, wisdom and enlightenment about the 'self', i.e. about the pure consciousness) and Yoga (meditation as well as contemplation).

[The path of Karma, Gyan and Yoga are all conducive to God-realisation. Though they appear to be independent paths but at some point of time they coalesce into one another. It's like taking different highways to a particular city, but once one reaches that city all these highways merge into a single street or avenue that leads directly to the final destination within the city where one was planning to go. Likewise, the main purpose of engaging in Karma, Yoga and Gyan is to achieve freedom from the cycle of birth and death and attain God-realisation. And this attainment gives eternal bliss and beatitude to the spiritual aspirant; he feels the same sense of fulfillment, thrill and joy that comes when one's love for his beloved is requited. In the spiritual field this is similar to the feeling experienced by a devotee who has developed the highest degree of devotion and love for his beloved Lord God.

Now we see here in this verse that sage Narad has affirmed that the path of love and devotion for Lord God is a better path and one that is superior to all other paths such as Karma, Gyan and Yoga that one pursues for God-realisation. On the face this assertion looks inconsistent with what the scriptures say on the subject because all these paths have been prescribed by the scriptures, and therefore all of them must be equally effective and correct. But it must be carefully noted here that besides the path of Karma, Gyan and Yoga the same scriptures have also prescribed the path of love and devotion (Bhakti) for God.

So what Narad actually means is obvious here—he means that though all the paths are equally good and effective, but out of all of them it is the path of Bhakti that is the simplest and the easiest to follow for a common man who finds other means of God-realisation arduous and cumbersome, because the path of Bhakti has no hassles and it is free from the fear of failure that dog other paths.

This fact has been endorsed in Ram Charit Manas as well. We read in its Lanka Kand, Doha no. 117 where Lord Shiva tells his consort Parvati: “Oh Uma, listen. Lord Ram is not pleased by other spiritual pursuits such as doing Yoga (meditation), Japa (repetition of holy formulas), Daan (making charity), Tapa (austerity and penance), and various types of Yagyas (fire and other religious sacrifices) as much as he is pleased by the single pursuit of pure and selfless ‘love’ for the Lord God (i.e. with Bhakti).”

Again, the exalted crow-saint Kaagbhusund asserts in Ram Charit Manas, Uttar Kand, Chaupai line nos. 1-4 that precede Doha no. 115 while he was explaining the importance of Bhakti to Garud, the Mount of Lord Vishnu who had gone to him to hear spiritual discourse about Lord Ram, that: “A person who follows the path of Gyan instead of Bhakti (for God-realisation) is as stupid as a person who goes to the Aak tree (Calotropis Gigantia plant) in search of a liquid to drink even though he had the all wish-fulfilling cow called Kamdhenu present right inside his own home. Similarly, a person who abandons Bhakti and tries to find happiness elsewhere (or by following other methods) is like a fool who wishes to cross a huge ocean by attempting to swim across it instead of boarding a strong ship.”

Lord Krishna says in Srimad Bhagvat Mahapuran, 11/14/20-21 that “Neither doing meditation, nor Shankhya philosophy, nor righteousness, nor study of the Vedas, nor austerity or renunciation ever captivates me as much as Bhakti does. Verily indeed, it is only Bhakti that can enthrall me and hold me in its grasp. Sincere devotion for me is the remedy that can liberate even the most gravest of sinners and free them from the bad effects of the deeds done by them in their lives.”

Similarly, in Srimad Bhagvat Geeta, Canto 11, verse nos. 53-54, Lord Krishna tells Arjun: “You cannot see my cosmic form (as the four-armed Lord Vishnu) by the study of the Vedas, or by doing Tapa (austerity and penance), or by Daan (charity) or

doing rituals even as you see me now. [This relates to the instance when Lord Krishna gave Arjun a glimpse of his cosmic all-encompassing vast form as the Viraat Purush.] Verily indeed, I can be seen in this form only with pure and single-minded devotion. Not only seen, but my true form can be known and I can be realized by this single method of devotion.”

In the next verse no. 26, Narad gives the reason for preferring this method of ‘love and devotion for Lord God’ over other methods.]

२६ फलरूपत्वात्

26 phala-rūpatvāt

(26) (Devotion and love for Lord God, i.e. Bhakti, is superior—) Because it is in the nature of the Fruit (of all other spiritual methods; it is the culmination of the effort made for God-realisation by other spiritual paths as mentioned in verse no. 25).

[Sage Narad says that ‘devotion that is enriched by pure love of Lord God’ is the best form of spiritual practice as it leads easily and directly to God-realisation, which is the only goal of all other spiritual practices. But whereas other methods are strenuous and full of pitfalls, this path of Bhakti is hassle free and without any fear of falling.

The path of Karma gives satisfaction to the doer of righteous deeds; the path of Gyan makes a man wise and enlightened about the ‘self’ and the Atma and their pure conscious nature, and the path of Yoga helps to focus the mind on this pure consciousness so much so that the all fickleness of the mind is eliminated, it becomes calm and peaceful, and the spiritual aspirant enjoys the bliss of self-realisation. However, before the spiritual aspirant can enjoy the joy, peace, bliss and a sense of beatitude obtained at the end, he has to traverse a very difficult path full of hurdles and uncertainties. On the other hand, the path of Bhakti steers him clear of all hurdles and bumps on the way, and takes him to his desired destination in an enjoyable manner where he delights in every moment of his spiritual journey. It makes a big difference.

To wit, the experience of a sense of supreme peace, bliss, beatitude, felicity, fulfillment, joy and ecstasy that one encounters during the journey of Bhakti is not enjoyed by him if he takes other spiritual paths such as Karma, Gyan or Yoga to God-realisation, though of course these eclectic virtues are experienced by him but it is only when he has been totally successful in reaching his spiritual destination, but not earlier while he is still on these paths. And since these virtues listed herein above are what one hopes to get and aims for in all his endeavours, whether they pertain to the temporal or the spiritual world, it is safely said in this verse that “Bhakti—or the sense of total bliss, fulfillment and happiness that comes with developing love and devotion for the Lord God—is the culmination, or the ‘Fruit’, of all spiritual practices such as Karma, Gyan and Yoga”.

The aphorism stated in this verse is explicitly endorsed in Ram Charit Manas, Uttar Kand, Chaupai line nos. 4-7 that precede Doha no. 126 where Lord Shiva asserts: “Pilgrimage to holy places and other means done for self-purification, perfection or attaining expertise in meditation and contemplation (Yoga), renunciation (Viraag), acquisition of true knowledge, wisdom and enlightenment (Gyan), doing

sacred rites and religious practices (Karma and Dharma), keeping vows and doing charitable deeds (Vrat and Daan), practicing self-control and austerity (Sam and Dam), repeating holy formulas (Japa), doing various kinds of penances and fire sacrifices (Tapa and Yagya), showing compassion to all living beings (Bhut Daya), doing service to Brahmins and one's Guru, study, modesty, wisdom, good character and nobility of mind etc., and all other exemplary virtues so much extolled in the Vedas—all of them have but one fruit, and it is to have devotion for Lord Hari (the Supreme Being).”

A person engages in any religious activity to have happiness, joy and peace for himself and liberation and deliverance for his soul, but none of the multifarious methods that he adopts to achieve this goal are as effective as the path of Bhakti. For verily indeed, it is ‘Bhakti’ with its inherent element of having love and devotion for Lord God that brings the practitioner closer to his spiritual goal faster and more easily than any other method he may follow. Bhakti gives an eternal sense of joy and bliss to the tormented soul of the creature like no other method gives.

No matter which path a person follows, the elements of ‘commitment, devotion and faith’ are necessary requirements to succeed in that path. ‘Love’ and ‘devotion’ infuse enthusiasm and single-minded focus in the practice of any spiritual or even a secular discipline one follows; otherwise a person becomes bored and his interest wanes with the passage of time. Bhakti incorporates all these glorious factors that are natural to it and inherently rolled into it as its basic characteristic. Hence, Bhakti is the superior path to God-realisation.

God-realisation becomes easy by Bhakti because if one simply has love for Lord God and is devoted to him completely, then it does not matter whether he does any thing or not. He need not do elaborate sacrifices, or subject his body to great hardship by doing meditation or going to long pilgrimages, or strain his finances by making charities and giving alms, or exert in studying the tomes of scriptures that he finds difficult to understand, or do Japa and Yoga if they prevent him from attending to the grind of life that requires him to pay attention to mundane affairs of the world, and so on and so forth. In Bhakti, a person can do whatever he wants with his physical body but still love his God dearly from the core of his heart.

We observe that even in a secular world, everything that is done with devotion and love becomes beautiful and endearing as compared to a thing done without interest, commitment and enthusiasm.]

२७ ईश्वरस्याप्य् अभिमानिद्वेषित्वाद् दैन्यप्रियत्वाच् च

27 īśvarasyāpy abhimāni-dveṣitvād dainya-priyatvāc ca

(27) God (īśvara) does not like egotism and pride at all, but he certainly likes the virtues of humility and simplicity in a person.

[This verse implies that the Lord does not like any trace of negative qualities such as ego and pride in his devotee. A Bhakta is humble and submissive because he knows that he does not have the ability to reach God on the strength of his own Karma (rewards that a person gets due to the good deeds done by him), Gyan (wisdom, knowledge and expertise in spiritual matters) or Yoga (meditation and contemplation

as well as the different observations such as self-control, penance, austerity, renunciation etc. that are part of the path of spiritual attainment).

Bhakti—the path of total devotion and sincere love for the Lord God—is the only path that is favourite with the devotees of the Lord because Bhakti is a virtue that is liked by the Lord himself. Bhakti is a spiritual path that leads directly to the Lord God. Hence, it is the preferred path by all spiritual aspirants who wish to realize God.

A person who relies on his good deeds (Karma) would have some trace of pride in him, thinking “Oh, I am sure to attain freedom from the cycle of birth and death because I have accumulated sufficient religious merit by doing countless auspicious and religious deeds, such as doing so many charities, fire sacrifices, going on pilgrimage, and so on and so forth”. Similarly, a man of knowledge and wisdom also thinks “Oh, I know the correct path, I know what the Truth about life and God is, and no one can tell me better what to do and how to reach my spiritual destination”. Likewise, one who does Yoga thinks “Oh, I have practiced meditation, I do contemplation, I focus on my Atma and pure consciousness, I have been able to attain freedom from the gross body by liberating my Atma from its fetters through meditation and other means of Yoga such as breath-control, self-control over the mind and the sense organs, and so on and so forth”.

In all the above cases there is some trace of ego and pride involved imperceptibly. But a Bhakta (devotee of Lord God) knows that he is totally dependent upon the grace of the Lord God for his welfare and happiness, for he is well aware about his own limitations, he knows that he lacks the wherewithal for obtaining spiritual well-being. Therefore a Bhakta (devotee) would have no trace of ego and pride in him, and that is why he is loved by the Lord God more than a person who follows the path of Karma, Gyan or Yoga to God-realisation.

Those who follow these latter paths of Karma, Gyan and Yoga feel superior and better placed to attain liberation and deliverance, so the Lord leaves them to face their fate on the strength of their own successes. As for a person who follows the path of Bhakti, the Lord pays special attention to him because he knows that this person is totally dependent upon him, and should he fail it would be a failure of the Lord to do his duty towards his dependant!

Caution must be exercised not to misinterpret this verse to mean that the Lord God prefers total love and devotion for him over all other paths that lead to him because the Lord is biased and ego-centric in as much as he would prefer to show his grace upon someone who pampers him the most and is ready to become his servant by totally surrendering himself to God. No, it is not that at all as is clear in the above discussion.

A similar idea as expressed in this verse is expounded in Ram Charit Manas, Uttar Kand, Chaupai line nos. 5-7 that precede Doha no. 74 where the saintly-crow Kaagbhusund says: “Listen to the innate habit and natural disposition of Lord Ram: he never tolerates the negative trait of ‘Abhimaan’ (pride, ego) in his followers and subordinates (i.e. his devotees). The reason is that ‘Abhiman’ is at the root of one getting entangled in the gross mortal world of transmigration, and this negative traits causes immense and interminable suffering, grief, misery and pain to a creature. This is the reason the most merciful Lord removes this negative trait from his devotees and followers (“*sēvaka*”) immediately as the Lord has exceptional affection for them and would do everything to protect them from any harm.”

In Tulsidas’ excellent Book of Prayers, the same idea is expressed in its verse no. 101 that says: “Where else should I go to take refuge except the lotus-like feet of

Lord Ram? Who else is known in the world as the redeemer of the fallen? To whom a humble creature is as dear as he is to Lord Ram?"]

२८ तस्या ज्ञानम् एव साधनम् इत्य् एके

28 tasyā jñānam eva sādhanam ity eke

(28) Some wise men are of the view that ‘Gyan’ (gnosis; knowledge of the Truth; wisdom; enlightenment) is the only path to attain that (God-realisation; devotion for Lord God). To wit, knowledge is the means to have devotion; it is an instrument for developing devotion.

[It is surely true that knowledge is an essential ingredient to have firm devotion and love for Lord God. It is because only when one is sure about the divinity and greatness of the Lord as the redeemer and the Supreme Being will he be able to have unwavering faith in the Lord and be sincerely devoted and dedicated to him. In this context refer to verse no. 23 and its accompanying note.

To understand this principle—that one must know the ‘truth of God’ if one is expected to develop firm faith, devotion and love for the Lord God—we can take a very simple example. Suppose someone tells us to love XYZ. Our first reaction would be to know who this person is. How can one love, serve or be dedicated to someone who is not known, or is too vague to be loved, served and devoted to? May be this person XYZ is a rascal or an enemy. Who would love such a person? Hence, the identity and the good qualities of someone to be loved, served, devoted to and revered must be clearly known.

There is another point. It may be that XYZ is a very nice person in his own right; he is great, possesses excellent qualities and is learned. But suppose that inspite of all his goodness he may not be of any help or good to us; we may not derive any personal benefit by serving him or adoring him. Then will it be practical for any man to develop a natural sense of love or devotion for this gentleman known as XYZ? Obviously the answer is ‘No’.

This applies to the Lord God also. It is easy for a devotee to be faithful in his devotion and love for Lord God if he knows about the excellent attributes of his Lord, if he is certain that the Lord will stand by him in thick and thin, that the Lord would ensure freedom for him from all his worldly torments and miseries, that the Lord will give him solace and succour, that the Lord is his greatest selfless friend and redeemer.

To wit, some certified good and reassuring information is necessary for love and devotion for anyone to be steady and grow over time as well as to withstand the storm of doubt and misgivings. This basic need applies to the relationship between the devotee and his Lord God.

The more one learns about the greatness and divinity of the Lord God by acquiring knowledge about him through the hearing and study of the scriptures or from the Lord’s stories and glories as they are narrated by saints and sages, the more robust and steady would devotion and love for God become. Knowledge gives steadiness, firmness, strength of conviction, and depth of faith in the path of Bhakti for Lord God.

This principle is reiterated in Ram Charit Manas, Uttar Kand, Chaupai line nos. 7-8 that precede Doha no. 89 where it is said: “Without knowledge one would

not have sufficient level of faith and conviction for the Lord (or it would be difficult to sustain them even if one manages to develop these virtues inside him for some time). And without having faith, it is difficult to have affection for the Lord. Without faith and affection, it is impossible to have steady Bhakti or devotion for the Lord. It is like the case of lubricity caused by water for it is only a temporary thing, because as soon as the water dries up the lubricity too vanishes.”]

२९ अन्योन्याश्रयत्वम् इत्य् एके

29 anyonyāśrayatvam ity eke

(29) Other wise men are of the view that Bhakti (devotion) and Gyan (knowledge; gnosis) are dependent upon one another.

[Knowledge of anything is essential to make one’s faith and commitment to anything stable and robust. If one does not know about the destination he is headed to, if one does not know path he must take to reach this destination and its pitfalls and precautions that must be taken, if one does not know that the path as well as the destination he has chosen for himself is the best one suited for his own good, he will be overcome with uncertainty and fear. This will prove counter-productive and ruinous for him.

So knowledge of the spiritual Truth, of the reality of the Lord God, and practice of devotion should be done simultaneously as they complement each other. Remember: Devotion without sufficient knowledge would be blind faith which would certainly be open to doubting and confusion which would serve no purpose for the spiritual aspirant. A devotee must study the scriptures and acquaint himself with correct knowledge so that his spiritual path becomes free from hurdles and he can walk on it with full confidence. This fact has been highlighted in verse nos. 12-13, 23, 76.

This observation will be also be obvious and convincing when we read it with what is said in verse no. 28 herein above. Knowledge about the truth, the greatness and the power of an entity fosters and cements one’s faith, respect and devotion for that entity. Knowledge or awareness about who the object of our worship and adoration is and his or her unique virtues that had caught our attention in the first place only go to enhance and strengthen our love for the beloved; it makes love robust and sustainable. This ignites a desire to learn more about the entity loved, especially how we could benefit from our association with that entity. After all, it is a natural instinct of all living beings that they are driven by some sort of self-interest, and this applies to a spiritual aspirant as well, albeit this self-interest of his is related to the spiritual field, and not to any of the affairs of the world.

Hence, knowledge of the greatness, the holiness, the divinity and the cosmic powers of the Lord God, the knowledge that the Lord whom the spiritual aspirant worships and pays his obeisance to is the great Redeemer and the Almighty Supreme Being of creation only goes to increase the devotee’s faith, devotion and commitment to him.

This knowledge firmly establishes in the mind of the devotee that the Lord God whom he loves, worships, is devoted to and pays his obeisance to is the ‘Lord’ of this creation, he is ‘God’ who is the ‘Lord’ of all and the only Redeemer. This

knowledge instills confidence in the heart of the devotee as he moves ahead with steady steps on his spiritual journey.

For instance, when a person comes to know that the Supreme Being, the Lord God, had manifested himself in the body of Lord Ram for the good of his devotees, and that this form of the Supreme Being is easy to relate to in this world than the Lord's cosmic form known as 'Brahm' that is invisible, without attributes and beyond comprehension of the mind, then that person develops an abiding interest in Lord Ram because he realizes that the Lord represents the Supreme Being who is the ultimate receiver of his worship and homage. He begins to see Lord Ram as a redeemer of his soul, as his true spiritual friend. The Lord thus becomes the focus of his devotion and love. There are other Lords and Masters in this world whom the person meets in his life, but once he realizes that Lord Ram is the Supreme Being and his true redeemer and spiritual friend, he abandons all other Lords and Masters and dedicates himself exclusively to serving and worshipping Lord Ram. For this devotee, the 'knowledge of who Lord Ram actually is' was pivotal in his establishing firmness of faith, devotion and love for the Lord.

So whereas there are other spiritual paths for God-realisation, such as Yoga (meditation), Dhyan (contemplation), Tapa (penance and austerity), Sam and Dam (practicing self-restraint and dispassion), Vairagya (renunciation), Yagya (doing sacrifices), Daan (making charities), Dharma (leading an auspicious and righteous way of life), Karma (doing right deeds), and so on and so forth, a devotee discovers that the path of Bhakti is the easiest for him as it has next-to-nothing in the form of hassles, troubling obstacles and so many contradictory situations that create hordes of dilemmas for a spiritual aspirant, and is also free from the fear of failure.

The emphasis of this verse is that there exists a spiritual harmony between 'Gyan' that pertains to the acquisition of knowledge of the Truth, and 'Bhakti' that pertains to having faith and devotion for that Truth as it is revealed in the form of the Lord God whom the devotee loves, worships and prays to. They are complimentary to each other, and not in opposition. 'Knowledge' only adds meaning and substance to a person's spiritual endeavours in life in the form of 'devotion and love for Lord God'. The greater is the awareness of the correctness of the path chosen and its effectiveness in fulfilling one's spiritual objectives, the greater is one's commitment to and devotion towards this path. Otherwise a spiritual aspirant may fall prey to the fear of uncertainties that would deter him from walking ahead with firm and steady steps towards his spiritual destiny.

So we conclude that Gyan (knowledge) adds depth and commitment to Bhakti (devotion); and Bhakti lends beauty and charm to Gyan. To wit, Bhakti sans Gyan will be like a blind person walking on a path that he knows not where it will take him; and Gyan lacking Bhakti will be a rough, arduous, cumbersome and boring spiritual path that will be energy-sapping, easily prone to failures, and like a burden upon the soul.]

३० स्वयं फलरूपेति ब्रह्मकुमारः

30 svayaṁ phala-rūpeti brahma-kumārah

(30) According to the (mind-born) sons of the creator Brahma (who were known as Sanat Kumars and were brothers of sage Narad), it (Bhakti) is a fruit by itself; it is a complete spiritual reward in its own right.

[Refer also to verse no. 26 herein above.

The aim of all endeavours that a person engages in is to attain happiness and peace for himself, and from the spiritual perspective it is to attain eternal bliss and beatitude for his soul. Bhakti provides him both; it fulfils all his wishes from the perspective of worldly life as well as spiritual life. And so it is said that ‘Bhakti is a fruit that is complete in itself’. Other methods require some sort of sacrifice to be made by the spiritual aspirant.

For instance, if he chooses the path of Yoga (meditation) for fulfillment of his spiritual desires then he would have to lead a very strict life, adhere to all the disciplines of Yoga and fulfill all its requirements in order to have any gain. It’s a very tough path and the follower of this path will have to forgo all the basic comforts and pleasures of life. On the other hand, Bhakti is a very liberal path, a path that does not expect a person to subject himself to undue stress and hardships. It is an enjoyable path full of love and bliss. Say, when a person is given a choice between two or more ways of arriving at his chosen destination, which would he like to choose—a simple path that does not put him to unnecessary inconveniences, or a path that leaves him tired and worn-out? The same logic applies to either following the path of Bhakti or any of the other paths for spiritual attainment and God-realisation.

The observation made in this verse, that ‘Bhakti is a complete reward for spiritual endeavours’ is endorsed in Ram Charit Manas, Aranya Kand, Chaupai line nos. 2-3 that precede Doha no. 16 where Lord Ram has told Laxman, his younger brother: “I am easily influenced and mellowed by Bhakti which also grants immense joy and pleasure to my devotees. It stands by its self; it requires no other props or support; it is self-sustaining and self-sufficient. On the other hand, both Gyan (gnosis; knowledge of the true nature of God and the ‘self’ both of which are pure consciousness) and Vigyan (empirical knowledge; to be able to discern between the formed and unformed variants of the Lord God) depend upon Bhakti (in the sense that unless one is deeply interested in and devoted to his spiritual path, one would not take much trouble to acquire Gyan and have Vigyan of the Lord God as it would be too much of a bother for him)”.

‘Bhakti’ stands for love of Lord God. This love is spontaneous and it represents the natural pull that exists between the devotee’s Atma, his pure conscious soul, and the Supreme Atma or the cosmic Consciousness embodied in the form of the Lord God the devotee loves and worships. As has been explained earlier by the example of the magnet and its magnetism where the magnet attracts countless iron pieces towards its own self without the need of any other external powers or force to do so, this love and devotion that develops between the devotee and the Lord God is natural and spontaneous. It does not need anything of power to support it. While on the other hand, Gyan needs a lot of diligence and study of the scriptures, as well as a lot of concentration upon the Atma in order to be successful and being convinced of the actual existence of God.]

३१—३२ राजगृहभोजनादिषु तथैव दृष्टत्वात्
न तेन राजपरितोषः क्षुच्छान्तिर् वा

31-32 rāja-gr̥ha-bhojanādiṣu tathaiva dr̥ṣṭatvāt (31)

na tena rāja-paritoṣaḥ kṣuc-chāntir vā (32)

(31-32) This principle is observed in practice in the dinner that is served in the royal household of a king. (31)

The knowledge (of the cook as to how a dish is prepared) will neither please the king nor satisfy his hunger. (32)

[This example is very interesting. It fits in well with what has been said earlier in verse nos. 29 and 30. We shall now proceed to examine these two verses from different angles as follows:-

(a) A cook of the royal kitchen may be an expert in his field, but what matters is not his culinary knowledge but how he actually prepares and serves the dish to the king that would please the king. Similarly, the cook's knowledge of the way a dish is prepared and served won't satisfy his own hunger unless he actually eats it.

If the cook, or for that matter any other member of the royal household, actually wants to get the king's favour, he would serve the food to the king with great show of respect and cheerfulness so much so that the king feels that his servant is eager to serve him with sincerity and pleasure. Towards this end the cook should also know the preferences of taste of the king, his likes and dislikes, so that he can prepare such food that would automatically please the king.

Even if the king is not hungry, but if the food of his choice is placed before him with due affection on the part of the cook to ensure that the king does not go hungry, then it usually happens that the king would eat some of it because the very sight of his favourite dish would stoke his latent hunger which might have been subdued due to some worry of the state. Obviously, such a cook will become the king's favourite. He will gradually come close to the king and gain his trust and attention. To wit, a servant can get into the good books of his lord and master if he serves the latter faithfully, diligently, with due affection and without deceit. If a servant is eager to serve his master or lord selflessly and to ensure that the latter's happiness is taken care of then it is sure that this servant will be preferred over others who are also employed by the lord or the master. In return to the servant's faithful and dedicated service, the king, the lord or the master will be mindful that this servant is well looked after.

In the example cited above it will be observed that it won't matter to the king if his favourite servant is an expert in some technical field or not as long as the servant knows the king's likings, if he knows what pleases the king and how to keep him in good humour, and if he is available at the beck-and-call of the king and cheerfully serves him even if it means personal discomfort to the servant.

So we find that the two things—knowledge of the king's habits and preferences, as well as the servant's desire to serve the king faithfully, diligently and cheerfully—are what helps to develop a special bonding between the king and his servant. But mere possession of some technical knowledge, or any knowledge other than about the king's preferences, his likes and dislikes, his habits and nature, do not play any direct pivotal role in the establishment of an enduring bond between the king and his servant. At the most, if the servant has some especial quality in him, he will

find a place in the king's retinue of servants, but the king's actual favour depends on different issues as pointed out herein above.

The same principle applies to Bhakti and Gyan vis-à-vis the devotee and his relationship with the Lord God. If the devotee loves his Lord God and serves him diligently, devotedly and selflessly then the latter would develop a kind spot in his heart for the former. Similarly, if the devotee knows only one thing, that his well-wisher is his Lord God and no one else in this world, then his devotion and love for the latter would be firm and sincere. So 'knowledge of the Lord God' and 'devotion for the Lord God' surely go hand in hand, but at the same time mere knowledge is not enough if there is no devotion involved in this relationship!

So we see that the above explanation fits in well with the principle propounded in verse no. 29 herein above—which says that “knowledge as well as devotion and love for Lord God go hand-in-hand, and are dependent upon each other”. It also fits in well with what has been said in verse no. 30 that “that devotion and love for the Lord God is self-sufficient to please the latter”.

(b) One other way of reading these two verses is as follows: “A king is not happy by merely having knowledge of how his palace was built. Similarly, a man's appetite is not satisfied by just looking at the food or having knowledge of how it is prepared or about its ingredients.”

To wit, technical knowledge of how the palace was constructed is of no use to the king; what matters to him is how he enjoys living inside it. He loves his palace for its own sake because it is his own living area. Similarly, mere metaphysical and theological knowledge does not give satisfaction to a spiritual aspirant as much as the bliss obtained by having love and devotion for the Lord God does.

Again, just like knowledge of food or its taste won't satisfy hunger unless the food is eaten, knowledge of God is useless till one experiences the bliss and beatitude that comes with God-realisation.

(c) There is another way of interpreting these two verse nos. 31-32. Suppose a person is invited to dinner by the king. This is a great honour in its own right as far as the person is concerned. Obviously the king will not invite someone towards whom he has not been favourably inclined to come inside the palace and sit with him for dinner. It does not matter then who cooks the food, what kind of food it is, and how it is served. So 'knowledge' becomes redundant. What is important is the 'affection' or the 'personal attraction or affinity' that has for some reason sprouted between the king and the invitee. May be it was some special service the person had done directly to the king, or may be the king had observed that this particular person is very devoted and loyal to him and has been serving him indirectly by his actions and words.

As far as the person is concerned, the knowledge of what dish is being served or how it was cooked is absolutely immaterial and irrelevant. What matters for him is that the king is favourably inclined towards him; the king is his friend. And for the king, what matters is the person's loyalty and devotion for him and not the level of knowledge or the wealth that the person has.

So therefore, what matters to the Lord God is that his devotee has affection and devotion for him, and what matters to the devotee is that his Lord God loves him and cares for him! All other knowledge becomes redundant and irrelevant.

Refer Srimad Bhagvat Geeta, Canto 9, verse nos. 29 where Lord Krishna says: “I am present in all living beings in a universal manner (in the form of their Atma, the pure consciousness known as their true self). All are equally dear to me; I hate none

nor favour anyone. However, those who worship me with dedication, they live in my heart and I in theirs (i.e. they experience my presence in the subtle space of their heart in the form of bliss that sprouts from self-realisation, for it is me who is revealed in this blessed form—and therefore all physical distances between my ardent devotee and me are erased).”

Remember: Mere knowledge of the ingredients of a meal, no matter how tasty it may be, won't satisfy hunger; it is only when we actually eat that meal that the pangs of hunger are satisfied. A hungry man would relish even an ordinary meal as compared to a man who is already bloated, for the latter won't enjoy a spoon of a dish no matter how delicious it is. To wit, a spiritual aspirant who is eager to reach his spiritual destination, who wishes to attain his Lord God, will enjoy having devotion and love for the Lord instead of getting involved in studying huge tomes of scriptures to gain metaphysical and theological knowledge.

(d) The most important point to be noted in the above discussion is that knowledge, service, devotion and love for the Lord God are all equally important and have a role to play in the beginning, for they all help the spiritual aspirant to reach his destination. But ultimately it is the bliss and ecstasy that is experienced by realizing the Lord in the form of the 'self' known as the Atma of the aspirant himself that is more important for him. Once God-realisation and self-realisation fructifies, knowledge and other accessories become redundant and irrelevant for the devotee, for now he begins to revel in the joy of loving his beloved Lord. The idea is to warn that mere intellectual pursuit is not enough in the spiritual path if one lacks devotion and commitment to it.

Remember: All the water in a mighty river won't produce electricity if it were not contained in a dam and then concentrated at a focal point which turns the dynamo that actually produces the electricity. So therefore, all the body of knowledge, all study of metaphysics, theology and religion, all the efforts made to pursue different methods for one's spiritual evolverment, and all the reading of the scriptural tomes—every thing is useless if a person can't attain God-realisation with its attendant bliss, joy, beatitude and felicity.]

३३ अस्मात् सैव ग्राह्या मुमुक्षुभिः

33 asmāt saiva grāhyā mumukṣubhiḥ

(33) Therefore, those who aspire to attain complete liberation and deliverance for themselves (from worldly bondages; those who wish to attain emancipation and salvation for their soul—known as “Moksha”, and to become God-realised so that they can attain eternal beatitude and felicity)—verily indeed, they ought to (exclusively) adopt the path of devotion and love (Bhakti) for the Lord God. [To wit, Bhakti is the best path prescribed for a spiritual aspirant out of the numerous paths described in the scriptures.]

[In the context of this verse, refer to verse no. 81 of this book Narad Bhakti Sutra which explicitly reiterates this fundamental spiritual truth.

Bhakti is the spiritual path that would help the aspirant to find liberation and deliverance from all the fetters that shackle their soul to this mundane gross world—

because Bhakti leads them to God-realisation, which effectively means that they have become 'self-realised'. This is because once they attain a spiritual stature that elevates them to the same plane of existence where the Lord God exists they come to realize that it is a transcendental state of existence of the pure Consciousness. This 'pure Consciousness' is a universal, cosmic, all-pervading and an eternal entity that exists in the form of the Atma of the individual living being, in this case the 'devotee', as well as in the form of the Parmatma, the supreme Atma that is embodied in the form of the Lord God. No distinction or differentiation actually exists between the Atma and the Parmatma except that the former is revealed in the form of the countless creatures in this creation while the latter is revealed in the form of the one and the only Lord God.

So the Bhakta, the devotee, comes to understand the true meaning of God-realisation: i.e. that 'he' is not the gross physical body that has to endure all the torments associated with the cycle of birth and death, but 'he' is actually the pure conscious Atma that is a counterpart of the Parmatma, the Lord God 'he' so much loves and reveres. To wit, the devotee begins to love his 'own self' because he realizes that the latter is actually a revelation of the Lord God whom he loves so much. In this state of transcendental existence, all differences and all distances between the two are erased.

Hence upon God-realisation the devotee frees himself from all the fetters of spiritual delusions and ignorance. He finds liberation from the world inasmuch as the world and its material charms no longer seem attractive to him and they no longer bind him in fetters of temptations; he derives no joy and comfort and pleasure in this world; he loses complete interest in this world. On the other hand, he begins to revel in the bliss and ecstasy of 'God-realisation' that translates into his being 'self-realised' and 'freed from all delusions and ignorance' pertaining to life in this gross perishable and mundane world.

Refer: Ram Charit Manas, Uttar Kand, Chaupai line nos. 3-4 that precede Doha no. 119 that says: "The Vedas, the Tantras and the wise sages have declared that the supreme state of transcendental existence is very difficult to obtain. But by worshipping Lord Ram, the same state of supreme bliss, beatitude and felicity comes without even asking for it."]

३४ तस्याः साधनानि गायन्त्य् आचार्याः

34 tasyāḥ sādhanāni gāyanty ācāryāḥ

(34) [In the following verses we read about the various means or ways by practicing which a Bhakta (devotee) can achieve success in Bhakti (devotion).]

The (different) learned teachers and scholars of this field ("ācāryāḥ" #) have enumerated (literally 'sung'; "gāyanty"*) the various ways or means by which one can achieve success in Bhakti¹.

[#The word "ācāryāḥ" means a learned teacher or a scholar in some field who knows his field well and himself practices what he preaches. The life of such a teacher is an example by itself. The disciple finds it easy to follow the path advocated by the teacher because he can see how to actually practice it in life. Further, the disciple is

easy to be persuaded because he can witness the grand virtues of the path preached by his teacher as he can see its rewards first hand.

*These learned teachers have “sung” (gāyanty) the various paths of Bhakti. The word “sung” means that they enjoyed very much telling others about this eclectic spiritual path and the sense of ecstasy that they experienced themselves. So they enjoy recalling their own experiences in this field and rejoice that they are able to share them with others so that they too can derive the same joy and beatitude over time. They never get tired of helping others in this noble path; they would cheerfully hand-hold others in this spiritual field.

¹Sage Narad has extolled the essential virtues and characteristics of Bhakti till now and has affirmed that it is superior to the path of Gyan (acquisition of spiritual knowledge by various means, such as study of the scriptures etc.) and Karma (doing righteous deeds and getting involved in religious activities to attain one’s spiritual objectives). Refer to verse nos. 15-20, 28-30, and 33.

Now he tells us how Bhakti can be practiced in life. He enumerates the various ways by which Bhakti or devotion and love for the Lord God can sprout and be developed in one’s bosom. For this he cites learned teachers and scholars who were well-versed in this field and had extensive experience of how to be successful in Bhakti. Their methods or advice can be used as standards in this field.

It ought to be noted here that ‘love’ is an important constituent or factor of Bhakti, and ‘love’ sprouts spontaneously in the bosom of the lover for the beloved. Love need not be learnt through any text book, nor does it have any fixed system that is to be followed. But the problem of developing ‘pure devotional love for the Lord God’ that arises in the spiritual field is because the Atma, the ‘self’ of the living being, has been conditioned to think and behave in a particular way for many generations through the cycle of birth and death. For example, the creature is naturally attracted towards the charms and pleasures of the gross mundane world and its material things, and he begins to love the world instinctively. But if he is told to renounce this natural sense of love which also gratifies his sense organs, he will find it very difficult. Water has a natural tendency to go downhill or it flows easily on an even ground, but to move uphill on a slope almost impossible for it in the natural way. The only means to make this happen is to pull it up by some force.

This is what is meant here. It is easy for a creature to have, or develop, a sense of love for self gratification and attraction for the material things of this world which are easy for him to acquire, but it is quite difficult for him to love an entity that seems far from him and does not give immediate gratification to his sense organs, such as is the case with Lord God. Though of course the stupid creature forgets that the sense of joy and pleasure that he derives in loving and being devoted to the gross world are transient and lacking in substance, that they keep him trapped in an endless cycle of birth and death and its whirlpool of miseries and grief, while if the same effort is made to develop love and affection for the Lord God and one pursues this path with due devotion and commitment then the rewards are astounding, and the quality of bliss and happiness got are unmatched as they are of a divine and sublime nature.

It is this latter path of love and devotion for the Lord God (known as Bhakti) that Narad talks about now. He tells us how to follow this path and practice Bhakti. It is called “Bhakti Saadhana”, the ‘practice of devotion for the Lord God’.

The ‘conditioned soul’ has to make an effort and practice a new method which it is not accustomed to in order to change its natural habits and inclinations. Therein

comes the importance of guidance by learned and experienced teachers in the field of Bhakti—they show the creature the practical way to practice Bhakti as a means of attaining God-realisation and spiritual fulfillment with its attendant bliss and beatitude after breaking free from the fetters of attachment to the gross mundane world with its material charms.

One cannot follow two paths at the same time. Is it not said: “if a person has a leg in one boat and the other leg in another boat, then he is bound to sink midstream”. So therefore, if one wishes to follow Bhakti then he must renounce the world. This fact is clearly stressed in the next verse no. 35.]

३५ तत् तु विषयत्यागात् सङ्गत्यागाच्च

35 tat tu viṣaya-tyāgāt saṅga-tyāgāc ca

(35) That Bhakti is successfully accomplished by (physically) renouncing worldly objects and attachment with them (at the emotional and intellectual level; the level involving both the heart and the mind). [To wit, Bhakti has to be practiced with due diligence, sincerity and commitment if it is to be successful.]

[Refer also to verse no. 55 also in this context.

As has been noted in the discussion of verse no. 34 herein above, a creature has a natural habit of associating himself with the world and its sense objects. The pure self of a Jiva, the creature, is the Atma, his soul that is pure consciousness. This ‘self’ of the creature is a fount of joy, bliss and love as it is pure consciousness and an image of the supreme Self that represents cosmic Consciousness embodied in the form of the Lord God. But this natural fount of joy, bliss and love has become choked by its association with a world that is gross by its inherent nature and a fount of miseries and grief. But the creature becomes so engrossed in this world by deriving superficial pleasure from its sense objects that it forgets that there lies another source that would give him eternal sense of happiness and bliss. Once the creature is made aware of this source by a learned teacher, and he sees first hand how the teacher experiences a steady flow of joy and bliss by following this path, he (the creature) would be motivated to emulate it himself. He realizes that his love for the world and its material objects have so vitiated the environment for him that unless he completely abandons it there is no chance or hope of attaining abiding peace and happiness.

To begin with, the creature feels enjoyment in the material world, so he loves it and becomes devoted to it. But once he learns that there is a better source of enjoyment that gives sustainable rewards, and better still, that this enjoyment is sublime by nature as compared to the enjoyment of the world which is gross by nature, the creature would then be automatically motivated to pursue the latter path. So the creature would abandon his attachment with the world, and instead follow the spiritual path of God-realisation.

Towards this end of God-realisation he must turn away from the world and its illusionary charm, to stop his association with them—i.e. practice renunciation. To wit, he must stop loving the world; he must stop being devoted to the world in order to fulfill the needs of his instincts for self-gratification of his sense organs. This is to be done at the physical level of the body as well as the mental and emotional level.

It is important to divert the mind away from world and towards the Lord God if one wishes to experience the sense of exceptional bliss and beatitude that is attained by manifestation of the Divine Being.

The mind cannot work with full capacity on two things at the same time. So it is only when it is free from the world that it can concentrate on the Divine aspect of life symbolized by Bhakti.

It is said in Srimad Bhagvat Mahapuran, 11/14/27: “The mind of a person dwelling on the objects of the world gets hooked or attached with them, while the mind of a person who contemplates upon me (Lord God) gets absorbed in my thoughts and attains nearness with me.” The mind gets attached with whatever it is thinking. If it thinks of the world it gets attached to the world; if it thinks of the Lord God it gets attached with the Lord.

In the epic Mahabharat, Shanti Parva, 162/17 it is said: “Renunciation means both the physical abandonment of the objects of enjoyment in this world and stop being associated with them at the mental level.”

In Ram Charit Manas, Ayodhya Kand, Chaupai line no. 8 that precedes Doha no. 324 it is said: “The blessed ones are those who are exclusively devoted to Lord Ram and renounce all attractions for material wealth and its splendorous charm as if it was vomit.”

A person can't say that he seriously thinks of one thing while his mind is focused on something else. So therefore, once a person honestly renounces the world, his mind would learn to be disassociated with it too. Both these two things go hand-in-hand.

The supreme form of Bhakti is total renunciation of the world and its sense objects, and diversion of the efforts of the mind to contemplating on the Lord God who represents the Truth and the pure Consciousness. The objects of the senses in the world are those that attract their respective sense organs of the body, such as the ear which likes to hear pleasant sounds, the nose that likes to smell fragrant things, the tongue that likes to taste sweet things, the eyes that like to see charming things, and the skin that derives pleasure by touching sensual things. So therefore, as has been stressed in the beginning of this present verse, one must totally disassociate oneself from all these things not only at the physical level but at the mental level as well if one wants to have true Bhakti established inside the bosom. The reason is that if only the physical body and its sense organs are restrained from getting attracted and attached to their respective objects in the external world but the mind still remains hooked to them then it is as good as doing nothing. This situation would only increase the longing for these objects, and result in unwarranted stress and endless restlessness. But if the mind is trained to renounce these objects and the heart is trained not to get emotionally involved in them, then a deep sense of tranquility and bliss prevails, which situation is conducive to Bhakti. This renunciation cleanses the inner-self of the spiritual aspirant and prepares it to give space to Bhakti. Two opposite things can't co-exist, like darkness and light are incompatible with each other.

It is said that renunciation is practiced at two levels—one where the person completely eschews the world and everything associated with it both externally as well as internally, and the other where he continues to do his work in the world normally at the external level of the body but be dispassionate internally. The second method is prescribed for those who can't completely do away with their worldly obligations, such as a householder (refer: verse nos. 61-62), but it is obviously a very difficult proposition in practice and an extremely mentally exhausting way to spiritual attainment. The mind can't do two things simultaneously with the same degree of

attention and sincerity; if forced to do so it would become restless and lose its peace and balance. No matter how hard one tries to be dispassionate and neutral while living amidst worldly turmoil and constant demands of countless responsibilities that drain his energy and time, he will not be able to do so. If one truly wants eternal peace and supreme bliss for himself then he must exclusively focus on devotion for the Lord God by completely renouncing the world altogether, for the mind can't do two things at the same time (verse nos. 35, 48, 60, 79).]

३६ अव्यावृत्तभजनात्

36 avyāvṛttabhajanāt

(36) [True 'Bhakti' or devotion for the Lord God and 'Vairagya' or renunciation of the world can be successfully done by—] Continuous and uninterrupted 'Bhajan' (which acts as an aide to development of Bhakti).

[What is "Bhajan"? This term has a broad meaning and includes the following: it is the remembrance of the Lord and singing his glories; it is chanting or repeating his divine name; it is adoring the Lord, praising him and worshipping him; it is keeping the mind fixed on the Lord God and driving all other thoughts away. To wit, one must ceaselessly think of the Lord God by focusing his mind on the Lord's form, glories, name, attributes, mysteries, mystical powers, divinity, and listening to his stories that narrate the many deeds done by the Lord during his many manifestations. So we see that 'Bhajan' takes many practical forms.

In the beginning, Bhajan is to be employed as a means to attain success in Bhakti—because it helps a devotee to remove his mind from all other things and train it to think of the Lord God exclusively. Later on when success has been achieved, then Bhajan becomes a natural habit for the devotee—for he remembers the Lord God every moment of his existence, and revels in the bliss and joy derived from this remembrance.

It is said in Ram Charit Manas, Uttar Kand, Doha no. 122: "It may be remotely possible to extract clarified butter (known as Ghee) by churning water, or oil by crushing sand particles (like one can extract oil by crushing the seeds of sesame or any other oil-bearing plant)—but it is absolutely impossible to cross this vast and intractable ocean-like world of transmigration without worshipping (and having devotion for) Lord Hari (i.e. Lord Ram). This is an inviolable principle, and there is no exception to it."

Therefore, the practice of doing Bhajan is indispensable for success in Bhakti.

And, how should Bhajan be done? Lord Krishna told Arjun in Srimad Bhagvat Geeta, Canto 8, verse no. 14: "Listen Arjun! A Yogi (practitioner of meditation and contemplation) who always thinks of me in an uninterrupted way, who focuses his mind exclusively upon me, is sure to find me as I become easily attainable by him (i.e. I reveal myself to him in my sublime form as 'pure consciousness' that is perceivable only at the subtle level of the mind)."

It is said in sage Patanjali's classic treatise on Yoga, called Yoga Darshan, 1/14, that "Success in any practice is possible if it is done regularly and with due commitment and faith for a long period of time".

Even in the world it is observed that a person achieves success in any work by regular and diligent practice even though that work may seem very daunting to him in the beginning. Practice makes a man perfect in any thing. What seems an effort in the beginning becomes a means of joy by practice. So likewise, Bhajan becomes a source of extreme joy and pleasure as time passes.

In the context of this verse that deals with the theme of “Bhajan”, refer also to verse no. 79.]

३७ लोकेऽपि भगवद्गुणश्रवणकीर्तनात्

37 loka 'pi bhagavad-guṇa-śravaṇa-kīrtanāt

(37) [This verse lists some of the other ways by which ‘Bhajan’ can be done for attaining success in ‘Bhakti’. Independently also, the methods enumerated in this verse are all useful and effective means to attain success in ‘Bhakti’.]

Even if one has to live in the world (because it may not be possible for him to completely renounce it for various practical reasons) then also one can (a) listen to the great glories of the Lord God and his divine attributes, and (b) at the same time one can sing or recite about these glories and divine attributes of the Lord (in order to achieve success in Bhakti).

[Here, more methods are listed. It would be noted that the two methods advised here—viz. ‘listening’ and ‘reciting’ the glories of the Lord God and his divine attributes—are an extension of the concept of doing ‘Bhajan’ as described in the previous verse no. 36.

Whereas verse no. 35 is more focused on doing meditation and contemplation on the Lord God at the subtle level of the mind, the present verse no. 36 says that if such a high degree of concentration of the mind is not possible for a spiritual aspirant amid the world he lives in then still he need not despair for there is another easier and practical method available for him. He can listen and speak about the glories and divinity of the Lord God even while remaining engaged in the affairs of his daily life. No need to shut himself up to do meditation and contemplation; if he listens to the glories of the Lord God and speaks about the Lord whenever he gets the time and opportunity then also his mind would slowly begin to think of the Lord in the long run. It is surely and certainly better than letting the mind enjoy listening to and talking about the world and its sense objects. The more the mind hears and talks about the Lord God and less about the world and its deluding charms, the more and more it would be diverted to the Lord in a very gradual and subtle way. This is because the sub-conscious level of the mind is directly affected by what the mind thinks at the conscious level of existence. It is this sub-conscious level of the mind that is the data bank of the creature, it is the library which stores all vital information that play a pivotal role in determining how the mind actually works during its conscious interaction with the world. If this store of information, i.e. the sub-conscious, stores positive thoughts such as those related to spiritualism and the Lord God, then the mind would have a positive bank of information to refer to and act upon its advice. By and by, the entire personality of the person undergoes a subtle change—from being a person immersed in the lowly affairs of the gross perishable world and fettered to it so

much so that his soul is destined to be doomed, he rises to being an exalted and liberated person who is spiritually elevated and headed towards God-realisation with its attendant bliss and beatitude.

A similar idea is expressed in Ram Charit Manas, Baal Kand, Chaupai line nos. 2, 4-7 that precede Doha no. 113 that say: “Those who have not heard the glories of Lord Ram, their ears are noting but dark holes where snakes live. Those who do not bow their heads before their Guru (spiritual teacher) and Lord Hari (Lord God), their heads are like a bitter guard. Those who do not establish Bhakti for the Lord in their hearts, their lives are worthless and no better than corpses. Those who do not sing the glories of Lord Ram, their tongues are like those of frogs (who croak meaninglessly). Those whose hearts do not exult upon hearing the stories of the Lord and his glories, such hearts stubborn and emotionless are like hard stone.”

Further it is said in Ram Charit Manas, Baal Kand, Chaupai line nos. 3-4 that precede Doha no. 119 that: “If a man utters the holy name of the Lord even under compulsion or when he is in a helpless state, then also the horrifying effects of sins committed by him over countless previous lives are made null and void (i.e. they are all neutralized). Similarly, those who remember the Lord God, they are able to cross this mundane existence as easily as one steps over a small, shallow depression made on the ground by a cow’s hoof.”

In Srimad Bhagvat Mahapuran, 11/26/29, the Lord says: “Those who listen to my divine glories, sing them and enjoy them heartily, verily, they show respect to me. Such people are deemed to be devoted to me; they acquire devotion for me.”

In Srimad Bhagvad Geeta, Canto 10, verse no. 9, Lord Krishna says: “A devotee who has surrendered himself and his life to me, who has his mind fixed upon me, who speaks of me and enlightens others about me—such a devotee remains contented; he takes delight in me and he abides in me (i.e. in remembering me and talking about me he finds the greatest of joy and contentedness).”

The underlying idea is that the devotee should feel the presence of his Lord God everywhere, at all moments of his existence, in everything he sees, does and speaks about.

In the context of what has been said in the present verse, refer to verse no. 80 which also reiterates this view.]

३८ मुख्यतस् तु महत्कृपयैव भगवत्कृपालेशाद् वा

38 mukhyatas tu mahat-kṛpayaiva bhagavat-kṛpā-leśād vā

(38) [So then, how is this eclectic spiritual state obtained? This verse answers this question.]

This is achieved by the grace and blessings of other realized souls, or by the divine grace and blessings of the Lord God himself.

[So it is necessary to get the blessings of one’s seniors if one were to succeed in one’s spiritual endeavours. It is equally important to seek the Lord’s divine blessings as this blessing is revealed in the form of the blessings of great and pious souls. This is because these pious and self-realised souls have themselves become an embodiment of the Lord God; they are an image of the Lord and are in his likeness.

Even in a secular world it is observed that a student who finds favour with his teacher progresses well in his chosen field of study because the teacher takes special personal interest in his mentoring. The same thing applies in the spiritual field as well. If the devotee finds a good and helpful teacher then his spiritual journey becomes all the more easy and enjoyable as he has a friendly help to guide him along, to help him remove his doubts and hand-hold him if he falters or falls somewhere. This is what is meant here when it is said that “grace and blessings of realized souls as well as of the Lord God helps a devotee to attain success in Bhakti”.

A similar idea is expressed in Ram Charit Manas, Sundar Kand, Doha no. 4 where it is said: “Dear son! On one end of the scale can be put all the pleasures and comforts of heaven and the bliss of self-realisation, but all of them will be outweighed by the moment of joy obtained on communion with saints.”

Again in Ram Charit Manas, Uttar Kand, Chaupai line no. 5 that precedes Doha no. 46 it is said that: “It is true that Bhakti is a mine of all blessings and independent from all other spiritual virtues (i.e. it does not depend upon other virtues to become effective and glorified). However, it can be attained only by the communion of saints.”

In Ram Charit Manas, Uttar Kand, Chanda line nos. 11-12 that precede Doha no. 130 it is said how the grace of the Lord can grant eternal peace and beatitude to even the most humble person when Tulsidas talks about himself as follows: “Oh Tulsidas! There is no Lord greater than Lord Ram, for even his tiny grace has granted eternal peace and beatitude to this stupid and dull-witted fellow known as Tulsidas who is good for nothing.”

We read in Ram Charit Manas, Uttar Kand, Chaupai line no. 11 that precedes Doha no. 120 that: “Bhakti is like a self-illuminated gem that has revealed itself in this world (for the spiritual welfare of all the living beings). But it can only be accessed by the grace of Lord Ram (i.e. by the blessings of the Lord God himself).”

Refer to the next two verses, nos. 39-40, in the context of what has been said in the present verse.]

३९ महत्सङ्गस् तु दुर्लभोऽगम्योऽमोघश् च

39 mahatsaṅgas tu durlabho'gamyo'moghaś ca

(39) To come in contact with great, pious and self-realised souls (saints) is indeed difficult. Even if one comes in such contact, it is difficult to know and comprehend them fully, though it is true that such communion with saints has an infallible effect.

[In this world it is very difficult to find persons who are truly and honestly pious and saintly, though of course one would easily find imposters and false-saints. Persons of a righteous nature, who live an exemplary life of virtuousness and selflessness, who are extremely pious and devoted to God, are a rare breed in a world full of deceit, pretensions and selfishness. They are like real diamonds that are priceless but rare to find.

Even if by some good fortune one comes across such holy men, it becomes very difficult to recognize them as they lead a very humble and unpretentious life. Genuine saints would not show-off themselves and never disclose their spiritual prowess, making it extremely difficult to know who they are because such true saints

rarely exhibit external signs of saintliness, piety and self-realisation. On the other hand, imposters and con-men don holy garb, behave as if they are the most righteous persons on earth, talk of the scriptures and preach their philosophy, and have no compunctions in declaring themselves as God-men. Such false saints do not practice what they preach. But their expertise in show and pomp is so polished that a simple-hearted person easily falls prey to them, thinking them to be saintly persons though they are hypocrites and cheats.

But in case a person is fortunate enough to come in contact with true saints, then this contact has an infallible positive effect on him. The aura of divinity, holiness and spiritualism that radiates out from true saints is very infectious, and it directly influences the hidden spark of these qualities that are latent in every person—because the ‘true self’ of all living beings is their Atma, their soul which is pure consciousness, and not their gross external body. The strength spiritual energy radiating out from true saints is so powerful that it immediately influences a similar source of spiritual energy that is present in its neighbourhood inside the body of an ordinary person. Though these two sources of spiritual energy, viz. the one residing in the bosom of the saint and the other in the bosom of the ordinary person, are inherently the same and of equal strength, but the one inside the saint has been ignited and made splendid while that in the ordinary person is still dormant and surrounded by a thick veil of spiritual darkness. So when the two sources of spiritual energy come close to each other, their natural affinity helps the dormant one to spring forth and light up. On the other hand, closeness with crooks and pretenders only add more soot over the already dark veil that covers the spiritual spark that lies dormant in the person.

Another example will make the point clear as to how the communion with saints goes to ignite the latent spiritual spark in a person: Suppose a man is sleeping in a dark room with curtains drawn over the window. When he wakes up the next day when it is sunlight outside but the curtains remain drawn over the windows, he won't know that there is day. It is only when this curtain is drawn back by someone will he see the light of the day. Similarly, a man remains surrounded in a dark veil of spiritual ignorance till he meets saints who show him the light of Truth and help to ignite the spark of spiritualism in him by removing the dark veil of ignorance that had covered his inner-self till then.

As has been said in verse no. 38 herein above, this ‘good fortune of coming into contact with saints is made possible by the grace of the Lord God’. So a wise seeker should pray to the Lord to give him this ‘good fortune’. The Lord would help his devotee from falling prey to false saints because some imperceptible sixth sense would immediately alert him that the person whom he thinks to be a saintly soul is actually a pretender; so be wary of him.

Verily indeed and without gainsay, communion with true saints would produce a momentous result in the spiritual realm for the aspirant; this communion is extremely fruitful, potent and effective. A devotee of the Lord must understand that it is his dear Lord God who has made this possible for him so as to pave the way for his eternal happiness and freedom from worldly torments. So he would thank his Lord God for this grace and munificence of his. This fact is stressed in the next verse no. 40.]

४० लभ्यतेऽपि तत्कृपयैव

40 labhyate'pi tatkr̥payaiva

(40) This good fortune (of contact and communion with true saints and pious souls) is possible only by the grace of the Lord God.

[Refer to verse no. 38 also in this context.

This truth is endorsed in Ram Charit Manas, Sundar Kand, Chaupai line no. 4 that precedes Doha no. 7 where Vibhishan, the brother Ravana, the demon king of Lanka, tells Hanuman who was sent by Lord Ram to search for Sita: “Listen Hanuman! Now I am sure that Lord Ram has been very merciful upon me as it is not possible to meet a saint (of your exalted stature) without the Lord’s grace.”

This verse subtly implies that communion with saints and the spiritual rewards that accrue due to it, and the grace of the Lord God, are dependent upon each other. When a spiritual aspirant comes in contact with saints he realizes what ‘grace of God’ actually means in life; he can witness this grace manifesting itself in the life of such saints. He also then realizes how the Lord has been graceful upon him that he has had the good fortune to meet such saints, instead of fake ones.

The exceptional spiritual warmth and joy as well as the state of blissfulness in which saints live are unique to them. The reason is that such saints are self-realised and God-realised, which means that they have become a living embodiments of the Lord God himself. Now, the next verse endorses this truth.]

४१ तस्मिंस् तज्जने भेदाभावात्

41 tasmir̥s tajjane bhedābhāvāt

(41) It is because there is no distinction between the Lord God and his devotee.

[Here, the term ‘devotee’ applies to the true saint and a pious soul. The true saint is one who has become ‘self-realised’. To wit, he has become aware that his true self is not his physical gross body but his Atma which is pure consciousness known as the soul. This Atma of his is a fraction or an image of the Great Atma known as the Parmatma or the Lord God. This Parmatma is an embodiment of cosmic Consciousness that is characterized by being an eternal entity that is blissful, all-knowing, all-pervading, virtuous and righteous; it is as splendid as the sun where there is no trace of darkness symbolizing delusions and ignorance.

So therefore, the true saint himself becomes an embodiment of pure Consciousness, or in other words he becomes a personified form of the Lord God. That is why as soon as an aspirant comes in contact with a saint, a natural sense of affection and respect arises in his heart for the latter. And that is also why service rendered unto such saints is service rendered unto God himself.

It is said in Ram Charit Manas, Ayodhya Kand, Chaupai line no. 7 that precedes Doha no. 218 in connection with Bharat’s devotion for Lord Ram: “Is there anyone as dear as Bharat is for Lord Ram, for the name of the Lord is always on the lips of Bharat, and at the same time the Lord always remembers Bharat.”

In Srimad Bhagvat Mahapurān, 9/4/68, the Lord himself says: “Pious and holy souls (saints) are like my heart (i.e. most dear to me), and I am the most beloved of

those whose hearts are pious and righteous. Such souls do not recognize anything or anyone other than me, and I too do not know anyone except them. [To wit, we love each other dearly.]”

Srimad Bhagvat Geeta, Canto 9, verse no. 29, Lord Krishna says: “They who worship me with devotion, abide in me. And I too reveal myself in them.”

Such realized saints feel so spiritually enlightened and blessed that they become ecstatic and blissful even as they experience the revelation of the Lord God within themselves in the form of their ‘self’ known as the Atma which is nothing but pure Consciousness.

The obvious benefit of contact with saints is that they immediately make the spiritual aspirant see what God-realisation actually means. This single factor motivates him to pursue this path devotedly so that he too can enjoy its feeling of blessedness and beatitude.

In the context of this present verse no. 41, refer also to verse no. 70 of this book Narad Bhakti Sutra.]

४२ तद् एव साध्यतां तद् एव साध्यताम्

42 tad eva sādhyatām tad eva sādhyatām

(42) (Therefore—) One must strive to have that association (i.e. one must make all-out efforts to establish contact with self-realised, God-realised, pious and holy saints). Indeed, one must endeavour to have this association alone (in order to succeed in one’s spiritual efforts).

[The previous verse nos. 38 and 41 clearly stress the importance of establishing contact with truly self-realised and God-realised saints. This communion helps a spiritual aspirant in practical terms as these holy souls act as a guide for him, helping him in his spiritual efforts by showing him the correct path and removing all doubts and hurdles encountered on the way. The life and practices of these holy men act as a living example for the spiritual aspirant to follow, for he can witness spiritualism working in practice. They are his selfless friends and guides who would never lead him astray due to some vested self-interest.]

४३ दुःसङ्गं सर्वथैव त्याज्यः

43 duḥsaṅgaṁ sarvathaiva tyājyaḥ

(43) [Now in the following verses, sage Narad warns a spiritual aspirant about the various dangers and pitfalls that are to be avoided at all costs.]

One must be careful to avoid bad company at all costs; evil association is to be completely renounced (forthwith if possible, or as soon as practically possible).

[If good company is conducive to spiritual progress, then obviously bad company would have an opposite effect just like light and darkness can't co-exist. Bad or evil company is good for no one, but it is especially to be avoided by a traveler on the path of spiritualism.

While good company motivates a person to be good in life and aim for higher goals of life, bad company sucks him down in the vortex of sin, corruption and perversions of all denominations. Good company is uplifting, while evil company is degrading for the soul.

It is said in Ram Charit Manas, Sundar Kand, Chaupai line no. 7 that precedes Doha no. 46, Lord Ram tells Vibhishan, the brother of Ravana, the demon king of Lanka, that: "Brother Vibhishan! It is better to live in hell than in the company of evil people. Let the Creator not give anyone bad company to anyone (because it is the worst kind of curse and condemnation for a creature)."

Hence, the first step for a spiritual aspirant is to shun bad company. If this is not done then it is useless to seek good company because the negative effects of bad company will eclipse any benefit granted by good company.

Bad company takes our mind away from our spiritual goals; it corrupts our thoughts, deeds and words. Instead of freeing us from our spiritual miseries, bad company only ties us down more firmly to the endless cycle of grief and torments associated with life in this world.

Why should one avoid bad company? This question is answered now in the following verse.]

४४ कामक्रोधमोहस्मृतिभ्रमशुद्धिनाशसर्वनाशकारणत्वात्

44 kāma-krodha-moha-smṛti-bhramśa-buddhi-nāśa-sarva-nāśa-kāraṇatvāt

(44) (Bad company is to be avoided as—) It is the cause of lust and passions, of anger, of infatuations and desires, of delusions of the mind and confusions of memory as well as corruption of the intellect and the loss of reasoning that lead to lack of discrimination—all of which, either individually or in different combinations, lead to a person's complete ruin.

[This verse points out that if a man keeps bad company he would be under a tremendous pressure of his peers to do what they do. It is practically seen around us that if a person joins a group of people who smoke then no matter how hard he tries he would one day start smoking himself. So therefore, if a man keeps bad company where his compatriots indulge in the world and its sense objects then he is bound to get this infection himself.

Remember: Indulgences of any kind are inimical to a person's spiritual welfare and should be avoided by the length of a long barge-pole; they should be completely abandoned. Their negative consequences and fatal influences may not be apparent immediately, but like a slow-acting poison they eat into the moral fiber of a person and make him hollow from the inside.

It ought to be noted here that the list of spiritually destructive factors given in this verse are also to be found in Lord Krishna's 'Srimad Bhagvat Geeta', Canto 2.

In Srimad Bhagvat Geeta, Canto 2, verse nos. 62-63 we read that: "A man who dwells on the sense objects in this world would naturally develop attachment for

them; from this arises a longing or infatuation for them; and when these desires remain unfulfilled they create anger and recklessness of the mind; this leads to loss of discrimination and reasoning as the mind gets confused and deluded. Like a drunk man, this moral and spiritual downslide ends with complete ruin for the concerned person.”

Lust, passion, anger, infatuation, desire, delusions, confusions, corruption and irrationality—all of these are grave diseases for the soul. They lead to blurring of the mind and confusion of the intellect so that the individual is unable to decide what is good for him and what is bad. It is like the case of a man who starts taking drugs because they give him immediate relief from the many existential problems he faces in life. But he becomes so addicted to these drugs that at a later stage when he discovers that they are playing havoc with his health he is unable to abandon them easily; he is trapped in a vicious cycle. Meanwhile, the drugs ruin his body and hasten his death.

Similarly, if a man is not careful in the beginning itself then the negative qualities mentioned herein above take hold of him and drag him down the precipice of ruin.

This verse describes beautifully the steps that lead to a person’s ruin. First he has a desire and longs to have something in this world. Then he becomes passionate about it and gets infatuated with the thing desired. Unable to quench his thirst for having enough of it, he becomes angry. Anger leads to loss of mind and discrimination; he cannot decide what action is good for his future and what is ruinous. Like a rudderless ship, he becomes adrift, and frustration takes a firm hold on him, leading to further delusions and more confusions. Exhausted and hallucinating, he finally sinks into the bottomless pit from which ironically he had always wanted to get out. Such a man fails to achieve the main goal of life—which is to attain freedom from the cycle of delusions and confusions that hinder attainment of liberation and deliverance from the cycle of birth and death, to attain emancipation and salvation for the soul that leads to eternal peace, bliss, beatitude and felicity. The great philosopher and exponent of Advaitya Vedanta, Adi Shankaracharya, has called such ruin ‘sarva-naasha’—i.e. ‘complete ruin’.

Hence, a person who indulges in the world and its sense objects is moving away from his spiritual goal of life. Mere doing rituals and pretensions of having devotion for the Lord God and worshipping him would mean nothing, and it is only cheating one’s own self.]

४५ तरङ्गिता अपीमे सङ्गात् समुद्रायन्ति

45 taraṅgitā apīme saṅgāt samudrāyanti

(45) Though these negative things (such as lust, desire, anger etc.) appear to be mere ripples (i.e. small and inconsequential) in the beginning, yet they gradually build up (in evil company to) assume the form of huge waves of miseries and torments (that overwhelm a person).

[In the beginning a person thinks that he will be able to overcome lust and desire and anger when he wants so; that they are merely a passing phase in his life. But they are like small ripples on the surface of the ocean that coalesce with one another and are

gradually whipped up by strong gusts of wind to form huge walls of waves that gather strength and may eventually overturn even sturdy ships.

A small infection that may seem ordinary and innocuous in the beginning may prove fatal if one does not take proper care of it. Similarly, a small and apparently harmless fire lit near a bunch of firewood may be fanned by strong winds to light up into a mighty fireball. Likewise, these evil things (worldly enjoyments, longing, anger, mental confusions etc., as well their root cause in the form of evil company) that look trifling in the beginning may slowly build up into a horrible storm that would uproot the tree and make it fall (i.e. they would lead to complete ruin of the person and undermine his spiritual welfare).

These negative qualities surround the person from all sides like an octopus encircling its prey, and then they gradually overwhelm him and suck out whatever goodness that may still persists inside him. The web of worldly delusions is called “Maya”. It is like this octopus with its tentacles. It is also like a whirlpool found in the ocean that sucks everything that falls in the vortex of its rapidly churning waters.

It is well nigh impossible to escape this “Maya”. The next verse no. 46 tells us how to successfully do it.]

४६ कस् तरति कस् तरति मायां यः सङ्गं त्यजति यो महानुभावं सेवते निर्ममो भवति

46 kas tarati kas tarati māyām yaḥ saṅgaṁ tyajati yo mahānubhāvaṁ sevate nirmamo bhavati

(46) [Question:-] Who can cross this vast ocean of delusions known as ‘Maya’; who can ever cross it (because it is so difficult to do so)?

[Answer:-] He who renounces all attachments with the sense objects of the world, he who keeps company of wise saintly persons and serves them, and he who abandons all sense of possession and the attitude of my and mine (with respect to all the things in this world)—he alone is able to cross this vast ocean representing ‘Maya’.

[If one wishes to swim across an ordinary river he has to push the water behind him by using his hands and legs; then only will he move forward. By practice he can even swim against the current if tries strong enough. Otherwise he would be swept with the current downstream.

Similarly, if one wishes to overcome spiritual delusions and confusions then he must make diligent efforts towards this goal. What steps must he take? This verse guides him: He must first of all detach himself from the world of sense objects and their temptations. He must keep company of wise, realized, pious and saintly persons who would show him the way forward, remove his doubts, and who themselves act as a living example for him to emulate. Detachment from worldly objects would be fruitful only when the aspirant stops thinking that such and such thing belongs to him, that it is his. This is obvious: as long as he continues to think that a particular thing belongs to him, that it is his, the sense of renunciation is not there at all. Further, possession causes worry and anxiety as the person is concerned about the safety of his possessions. He would wish to not only secure it but also to enhance its value by more additions. This leads to desires and infatuation. Failure to fulfill these desires lead to anger and frustration.

The chain of delusions called Maya is so vicious and powerful that it may be easy to escape a whirlpool but well nigh impossible to break free from the grip of Maya. But still there is hope for a sincere spiritual aspirant—he can break free from the tentacles of this octopus-like Maya and swim safely across the symbolic ocean with its vicious whirlpools of delusions and confusions by following the guideline laid down in this verse.

In Ram Charit Manas, Aranya Kand, Chaupai line no. 2 that precedes Doha no. 15, there is an aphorism on Maya, and it says: “The feeling of ‘Me’ and ‘Mine’, or ‘I’ and ‘My’, as well as ‘You’ and ‘Yours’ is called Maya”. It is this concept of ‘me and mine’, of ‘I and my’, and of ‘you and yours’ that is the cause of all attachment and ill-will in this world. A man who has freed himself from this illusion is really a spiritually free man.

Though one has to use his own limbs and make effort to swim across the river, yet he would need help from expert swimmers to learn the skills to successfully do so, and in cases of emergency to ask them to hold his hand to prevent him from sinking. Likewise, though it is true that a spiritual aspirant has to make efforts himself to overcome the negative effects of Maya, but company of wise and learned saints would surely help him to succeed in his efforts by giving him good advice and correct guidance, and when needed even hand-holding him so that he does not slip and fall down. These saints act as a sturdy barge or boat, and their company is equivalent to a layman who knows nothing about swimming being easily able to cross a river aboard it.

Lord Krishna has cited this example in Srimad Bhagvat Mahapurān, 11/26/32, when he says: “Even as a strong bark of a tree that floats on the surface (of the water in a river or ocean) is a resort for those who are on the verge of drowning, persons who are pious, saintly, wise, enlightened and self-realised, who have attained perfection of the soul and peace of mind, are like a buoy for those who are finding themselves sucked in the vast ocean of mundane existence.”

Again, in Srimad Bhagvat Mahapurān, 11/26/31, the Lord says: “For a person who suffers from cold and the fear of darkness and ghosts, nearness to a fire is of great comfort. Similarly, for a person suffering from the fear of mundane existence and the endless cycle of birth and death, the company of pious and holy saints helps him to remove his doubts and delusions, and grants him peace of mind.”

The greatest impediment in one’s spiritual progress is to be attached to any material thing of the senses in this world, to have a sense of possession of something. This diverts the mind from its true goal as it keeps it busy with the thing possessed. One begins to be attached with his possessions, worrying about it and always thinking how to safeguard it and enhance its value and size. First there is the craze of possessing something, then comes the sense of belonging—that it belongs to ‘me’, as well as the sense of possession—that it is ‘mine’; I own it. This is called “Mamtaa”—i.e. attachment, infatuation and longing. If one has Mamtaa in him, one cannot be completely free at the emotional level to pursue his spiritual goal; there cannot be true renunciation in the presence of counter elements such as attachments, longings and infatuations. All efforts to swim across a mighty river would fail if one has a heavy weight tied around his neck, for sooner rather than latter he would be so exhausted that he would give up and prefer to die.

To wit, this verse advises a spiritual aspirant to give up the sense of attachment as well as possessiveness.

There is a marvelous verse no. 8 of ‘Nitishatakam’ of the great king-turned-ascetic known as Bhartrihari which stresses on the importance of having good

company of saints. It says: “When I got a little knowledge, I thought I know everything; I was blinded like a wild elephant run amok. When I came in contact with wise persons I realized how foolish I was.”]

४७ यो विविक्तस्थानं सेवते यो लोकबन्धम् उन्मूलयति निस्त्रैगुण्यो भवति यो योगक्षेमं त्यजति

47 yo vivikta-sthānaṁ sevate yo lokabandham unmūlayati nistraiguṇyo bhavati yo yoga-kṣemaṁ tyajati

(47) [Sage Narad further elaborates as to how one can overcome the influences of Maya.]

He who retires to a solitary place and renounces all his attachments and relationships with the material world and its sense objects (i.e. he who finds joy in living away from the humdrum affairs of mundane life and the material world full of temptations), he who becomes free from the influences of the three Gunas (i.e. he who has become neutral and calm by overcoming the influences of emotional reactions; he who remains unruffled under all circumstances and provocations), he who has no desire to acquire anything to sustain himself, and then get over-worked about the safety of his acquisitions—verily, such a person can be said to have overcome Maya.

[This verse is an extension of verse no. 46 where it has already been said that renunciation is the key to overcome Maya.

Living in a solitary place does not mean going to the forest or entering a cave. Say, what is the use of retiring to a forest or a cave if the mind is still hitched to the material world and its deluding sense of pleasure and comfort. The main idea is that a seeker of spiritual peace and bliss should live in a place that is free from evil influences. And the best place is one’s own heart, for if there is no peace internally then no matter where one goes he will never find peace at all. It is the inner-self that has to be a secluded place because it is what actually matters, and not so much the external world in which a person has to live due to compulsions of birth and circumstances. If a man has sufficiently strong will power and is wise and enlightened enough, then he can easily manage to neglect the outside world while being at peace with himself internally. This is the subtle meaning of this verse.

To wit, it means one has to remain totally detached from the external world, and be at peace with one’s own self internally. This will come automatically if one practices renunciation in the true sense—because he won’t feel bothered by what is happening around him; he would be able to maintain his internal calm even while living amidst the hustle and bustle of life. Though it seems quite difficult to do so in the beginning, but a little practice would make it happen. One can say that it is like living in a perpetual state of meditation. This eclectic state of mind helps a spiritual aspirant focus on the greater goals of life instead of remaining perpetually trapped in the turmoil of mundane existence. A solitary life gives an aspirant time to reflect and introspect. The greatest benefit of this way of life is that the spiritual aspirant gets an opportunity to come face to face with his own ‘self’, which is his Atma that is pure consciousness. There is no disturbance from the outside world.

The spiritual aspirant soon realizes how much peace and bliss is there in this way of life of renunciation and seclusion. He also realizes that the actual needs of life are extremely few, and it is a waste of time and energy in acquiring countless things that are of no real use to him. The very basic needs of life are few and available in abundance, and the true devotee must have faith in his Lord God that he would take care of them. Once this conviction takes a firm root in the mind and heart of the aspirant, there would be no need for him to pursue this world.

Such a man would not get entangled in the world and its delusions.

There are three Gunas that are referred to in this verse: these are Sata Guna, Raja Guna and Tama Guna. The 'Guna' is the inherent quality or virtue in all living beings. The 'Sata Guna' is the best quality, the 'Tama Guna' is the worst, and the 'Raja Guna' is in between them. A combination of these three Gunas decides the personality of a person and how he would behave or react in a given situation. To become neutral it is important to rise above the influences of these three Gunas.

The Lord has assured his devotees that if they renounce their attachment with and dependence on this world, if they think only of the Lord and worship him selflessly, then the Lord would take personal care of all their needs—refer: Srimad Bhagvad Geeta, Canto 9, verse no. 22.]

४८ यः कर्मफलं कर्माणि सन्यस्यति ततो निर्द्वन्द्वो भवति

48 yaḥ karma-phalaṁ karmāṇi sanyasyati tato nirdvandvo bhavati

(48) [To attain abiding internal peace, happiness and calmness—] One has to abandon all the fruits of one's actions (i.e. one should do deeds selflessly and without expecting anything in return). Not only this, it is still better not to get involved in ego-centric deeds at all. This principle helps a spiritual aspirant to be free from the turmoil created by the pair of opposites and their attendant torments and perplexities. Such a (wise and enlightened) person surely overcomes Maya.

[If one is not worried about the result of his deeds, if one does his deeds as a matter of his duty and service to the Lord God, then sure enough he will have no anxiety or worry in his mind. The opposites of success and failure, of gain and loss, of pleasure and pain, of joy and sorrow, of having fame and good name or ignominy and bad name—nothing would upset his inner sense of tranquility. Hence, he would be uninfluenced either by adversities or by favourable circumstances; he would be able to maintain his calm and poise. He would not be deluded and perturbed; he would have no enemy or friend; all things and all circumstances would be equal for him. Nothing would be possessed by him as he has not done anything to acquire it, nor would he lose anything as nothing belongs to him in the first place. To wit, he will be beyond the grasp of 'Maya'; he would have transcended Maya and its ubiquitous influence.

In Srimad Bhagvat Geeta, Canto 2, verse nos. 45-46, Lord Krishna tells Arjun: "Oh Arjun! The Vedas (scriptures) describe the evolution of this world as a manifestation of the varied forms of the three primary Gunas (Sata Guna, Raja Guna and Tama Guna). So you must rise above enjoyment of these deluding forms as they are illusive and not the real enjoyment for the soul. Rise above the pairs of opposites that are associated with this delusory world—such as for instance, the pair of pain and

pleasure, as they are destabilising for your internal peace. Instead, establish yourself in a state that is eternal and stable—i.e. in the state that is identified with pure consciousness, as this state is equivalent to God-hood. You should be absolutely immune to the sense of worldly possessions, the desire for them as well as from the worry to preserve them. Practice self-control. The purpose of the Vedas is served for a person who understands their purport.”

This world is driven by actions. No one can sit idle, and it is not advisable to do so either. The trick is that one should do deeds selflessly, without any sense of attachment to them and their results, and as a duty and service to the Lord God. In this context, refer to the previous verse nos. 8 and 19 of ‘Narad Bhakti Sutra’.

We can take the example of a fruit-bearing tree. This tree gives us sweet fruits, shade and shelter, but expects nothing in return. But everyone praises such a tree.]

४९ यो वेदान् अपि सन्यस्यति केवलम् अविच्छिन्नानुरागं लभते

49 yo vedān api sanyasyati kevalam avicchinnānurāgaṁ labhate

(49) [In this verse it is emphasized that the scriptures are meant only as a means to show the correct path; they are guides and teachers. They are a medium to attain one’s goal; they are not a goal in themselves. So, mere scholarship in their text, without actually implementing them in practice and benefiting from their teaching, is a futile exercise.]

Nay, one should even abandon the Vedas, and instead inculcate undiluted and uninterrupted love and affection (for Lord God) (to gain or achieve one’s spiritual objective).

[The main objective for a devotee—and the main theme of this book ‘Narad Bhakti Sutra’—is to attain oneness with his beloved Lord God by the path of devotion and love. The Vedas show him the way to achieve this goal. So once this knowledge is gained and all doubts removed, the Vedas become redundant. True form of renunciation includes renunciation of a sense of scholarship of the Vedas as well. This is not at all meant to insult the scriptures or undermine their importance and holiness, but it is merely to stress that one should be focused on his main objective rather than be distracted by the countless things he encounters on the path towards this goal, though of course one should be thankful to the Vedas for showing him the correct and the true path and goal of life.

The same idea is expressed in one of the Upanishads called ‘Amritbindu Upanishad’. In its verse no. 18 it is said that: “A wise person should abandon or discard the Vedas (i.e. their texts) after studying them thoroughly and understanding their teaching. It is just like the case of a person who discards the husk after removing the rice grains from it.”

It ought to be noted that in the previous verse no. 12 it has been advised that one should follow the scriptures, such as the Vedas. When read with the present verse no. 49 it would be clear that the idea is to first study the scriptures, gain their knowledge, and then move on from there.

There is a verse in ‘Vivekchudamani’, verse no. 59, which says: “If one studies the scriptures but fail to realize the Truth revealed in them, then you have not

read them; your effort has been wasted. On the other hand, if one has realized the Supreme Truth, then the scriptures would have fulfilled their purpose, and therefore they become redundant.”

To wit, the Vedas, or for that matter any text, are like a vehicle that one takes to reach one’s chosen destination. Once that destination is reached, one steps out of the vehicle and leaves it behind. So therefore, one should study the scriptures, gain knowledge from them, and then move on.]

५० स तरति स तरति लोकांस् तारयति

50 sa tarati sa tarati lokāms tārayati

(50) Verily indeed, such a person (who practices the principles laid down in the previous verses herein above) surely crosses over; he definitely crosses over (the influences of Maya as well as the cycle of transmigration with its attendant miseries and torments). He not only crosses himself, but also helps others to cross over alongside him. [To wit, such a person has delivered his own self from the vast ocean-like world of Maya, and at the same time those who follow him, his teaching and example, are also delivered from it.]

[The question ‘who overcomes Maya’ raised in verse no. 46, has been answered till this verse no. 50.

Earlier it has been said that the company of saints helps a spiritual aspirant to reach his goal as they act as a guide and example for him. This verse no. 50 reiterates this principle when it says that such persons who have inculcated spiritual qualities in themselves not only cross over this world of Maya personally but they help others who are associated with them to cross over too. Refer verse nos. 39, 41-42.

In verse no. 49 it is said that the ultimate goal of the study of the scriptures is to have love for the Lord God as this is the easiest and the best way to have eternal sense of happiness, bliss and peace. Now in the following verses, more is explained on the form that the ‘love for the Lord God’ takes.]

५१ अनिर्वचनीयं प्रेमस्वरूपम्

51 anirvacanīyaṁ premasvarūpam

(51) The nature of supreme form of love for Lord God is indescribable.

[Love cannot be described in words; it is beyond the inherent limitations that any form of language has. In fact, Lord God is a personified form of undiluted and purest form of love. Just as it is not possible to describe the Lord God in words, so it is also impossible to describe what love consists of. To wit, to love God is to identify one’s self with him.

Love that can be expressed in words is superficial and a worldly form of love, such as that which is expressed between two human lovers. Love for the Lord God has no expression. It is a matter of experience; something that is felt and enjoyed

without expression. It has a purely sublime form of existence, and it goes beyond the mundane and the gross forms of emotions or sentiments.

This verse means that the purest form of love and affection is that which exists between a devotee and his Lord God, and it is so divine, subtle and sublime that it cannot be expressed in words. At best it can be said that it is only experienced by the devotee himself.

In Ram Charit Manas, Sundar Kand, Chaupai line nos. 6-7 that precede Doha no. 15, Lord Ram has given a hint of this sort of love when he talks about his love for his divine consort Sita. He says: “Dear, the cord of love that binds you and me is known only to my soul, and my soul abides with you. Understand what my love for you is through this aphorism.” Hence, the love that exists between a devotee and his Lord God is known to them alone, and no third party can have any idea of an iota of it.

Remember: The heart has no tongue, and the tongue has no heart. The heart can't speak what it feels or experiences, while the tongue can't feel love like the way it feels the taste food. This is reiterated in the next verse no. 52 herein below.

In the context of this verse that deals with the true form of 'love for Lord God', refer also to previous verse nos. 19-25 and 33.]

५२ मूकास्वादनवत्

52 mūkāsvādanavat

(52) Therefore, an attempt to describe what 'true love' is, is similar to asking a dumb man to describe the taste of food he has eaten.

[Just like a dumb man can't describe the taste of food he has relished so much, the purest form of love and affection can't be described in words. The truest and the purest kind of love is spontaneous, all-pervasive, fathomless, sublime, ethereal, eternal, selfless and indescribable by nature. We shall read more about it in verse no. 54 herein below.

A similar idea is expressed in the Taittiriya Upanishad, 2/9/1. This is the 2nd Upanishad of the Krishna Yajur Veda tradition. It says: “The faculty of speech returns empty as it is unable to describe the Supreme Reality and Truth after a self-realised person has witnessed it.”

Verily indeed, true love is when the lover and the beloved become one and inseparable from each other. To wit, true love means that the devotee and the Lord God become one and inseparable.]

५३ प्रकाश्यते ववापि पात्रे

53 prakāśyate kvāpi pātre

(53) However, this sublime and purest form of love does manifest itself occasionally in some rare person who is well-qualified for it.

[This exalted person will be self-realised and enlightened; indeed he would be God-realised. He would abide in a subtle world of pure consciousness, a world that is sublime and subtle, and is vastly different from this gross mundane world of material objects. He experiences bliss and beatitude that are inherent to the Atma, the pure conscious soul, which is his true identity. This Atma of his is an image of the supreme cosmic Atma known as the Parmatma. This 'Parmatma' is another name of the Lord God.

So in essence this verse refers to a fortunate person who has realized his inseparable identity with the Lord God whom he loves so much. This realization fills him with an eternal and abounding sense of joy, happiness, bliss, beatitude and felicity that radiates out of him like the light from a glow-worm. He is surrounded by a halo of divinity and holiness because he has become one with the Supreme Lord God himself. All human beings do not reach this eclectic state of spiritual awakening when an individual can experience oneness with the Supreme Being.

Refer to verse no. 67 in the context of this present verse no. 53.

In the next verse no. 54 we will read about the attributes of this purest kind of love for Lord God.]

५४ गुणरहितं कामनारहितं प्रतिक्षणवर्धमानम् अविच्छिन्नं सूक्ष्मतरम् अनुभवरूपम्

54 guṇarahitaṁ kāmanārahitaṁ pratikṣaṇavardhamānam avicchinnam
sūkṣmataram anubhavarūpam

(54) [This verse enumerates the special qualities of true love.]

(i) True form of love has no specific attributes as it is indescribable and transcendental by its inherent nature. (ii) It has no desires or expectations (as it is selfless). (iii) It increases every moment (and nothing can diminish its intensity which grows by the passage of time). (iv) It is everlasting and abiding (and does not fade away over time). (v) It is extremely sublime, subtle and ethereal in nature. (vi) And it is a matter of (spontaneous) experience (and not something that can be described and limited in words).

[We read here that there are six special virtues of true and pure form of love.

The first virtue is that true love is absolutely pure, and therefore it is untainted by any of the three Gunas that determine the basic nature of this mortal world. These three Gunas are Sata Guna (the best of the three qualities), Tama Guna (the worst of the three qualities) and Raja Guna (that lies somewhere between the two extremes). The entire world is driven by the effects of these three Gunas, in their different combinations and permutations, on the nature and character of all living beings. True love is transcendental by nature, and hence it goes beyond the purview of these three Gunas as well. In the context of love for the Lord God it is clear that when a devotee reaches a certain level of realization he would understand that there exists no difference between him and the Lord. Since the Lord is beyond any attributes, anything related to him is also beyond attributes. Hence, love for the Lord God is also beyond attributes.

The second virtue is that true love does not expect any reward; the true lover does not expect anything from his or her beloved. It is completely and absolutely selfless. This applies to both the lover as well as the beloved. Remember: Just as it

takes to hands to clap, love also is a two-way highway that needs reciprocity to attain supreme bliss and happiness. But this reciprocity does not mean expectations, for it should be spontaneous. To wit, the love between the devotee and the Lord God is mutual and spontaneous; it is selfless and dedicated.

The third virtue is that true love goes on increasing by time. The devotee loves his Lord God selflessly, and not to fulfill any of his wants, whether such wants pertain to this mundane world or to the spiritual world. The devotee does not love his Lord God for any quality or virtue that the Lord possesses. He simply loves the Lord for the sake of love. As he comes closer to the Lord, his love and affection grows in depth and strength. It becomes more intense with the passage of time. This love for the Lord God is not adversely affected by any adverse situation or any negative thing that the devotee is told about the Lord by his detractors. He takes such negative things as a test of the trueness of his love for the Lord. It is not like the case when a person begins to love someone as he feels that he has to gain from his association with the other person; this kind of love is not sustainable because as soon as his expectations are not met or when they are fulfilled, in either case the love begins to wane.

The fourth virtue of love is that it is everlasting. This fits in well with the third and the second virtues. Since true love is pure and selfless, since it is spontaneous and transcendental in nature, since there is no expectation in this love and it is not dependent upon fulfillment of some vested interests, it not only grows stronger and deeper with the passage of time but also overcomes all adversities and hurdles. So it assumes an everlasting nature. To wit, once the devotee begins to love his Lord God, nothing can stop him. It becomes an abiding relationship that is directly related to his heart. This is an irreversible process.

The fifth virtue of true love is that it is extremely sublime, subtle and ethereal by its very nature. Remember: This is not a worldly love-affair between two individuals who are attracted towards each other due to physical reasons; it is not lust and passion. This love is for the Lord God who is purity and truth personified. There is no conceit and pretensions with the Lord. The Lord is the Master of this world who does not condone negativity and ill-character. Therefore, the love for the Lord is bound to be of the purest and the truest kind, love that relates directly to the heart where the Atma or the soul resides. This Atma is pure consciousness and a personified form of the supreme Consciousness represented by the Lord God. A love that relates to the Atma and the Parmatma (i.e. the love between the devotee and his Lord God respectively) is as sublime, subtle and ethereal in its nature as the Atma and the Parmatma are.

And finally, the sixth virtue of true love is that it is a matter of spontaneous experience, and not something that can be described and limited in words. This virtue sums up all the previous virtues. One cannot see the Atma which is pure consciousness, but one can definitely experience the bliss that comes with the realization or awareness of this Atma. Further, as has been said earlier in the fifth virtue, the love for the Lord God is sublime, subtle and ethereal by nature, and therefore it is only an experience that cannot be expressed in words. This fact is clearly mentioned in verse no. 52 which cites the example of a dumb man to illustrate this point. A devotee is so overwhelmed by the experience of bliss, beatitude and felicity once he realizes the Lord that even if he had tried to explain his feelings he would have failed. It is like the case of a bee drinking nectar from a flower; this bee is oblivious to everything else. Even if it gets burnt, it would not be aware of it. A man scorched by the desert heat and on the verge of death cannot explain the joy he finds upon discovering cool water of an oasis even if he wishes to do so, as he is simply

numbed by this life-giving experience. So is the case with true love for the Lord God—the feeling of ecstasy and elation is so overwhelming that the devotee can experience it himself but cannot share it with other by the means of words.]

५५ तत् प्राप्य तद् एवावलोकयति तद् एव शृणोति तद् एव भाषयति तद् एव चिन्तयति

55 tat prāpya tad evāvalokayati tad eva śṛṇoti tad eva bhāṣayati tad eva cintayati

(55) When the devotee realizes (attains; acquires) that supreme form of love for Lord God, he sees nothing else, he hears nothing else, he speaks of nothing else, and he thinks of nothing else.

[Refer also to verse nos. 17, 35, 66-67 and 80 also in this context.

Simply put, the present verse no. 55 means that the experience of ecstasy and bliss that comes with having love for Lord God is so overwhelming that the devotee is numbed and made speechless. It is like the case of a bee drinking nectar from a flower; this bee is oblivious to everything else. Even if it gets burnt, it would not be aware of it.

When the devotee has attained the supreme form of love for the Lord God, his individuality and emotions cease to exist just like the case of a river after it has fallen into the ocean.

It is also like the case of a thirsty man accessing an oasis having a source of cool, sweet and refreshing water in a dry and hot desert. When this person enjoys the bliss that comes when he quenches his burning thirst, he would not be concerned with anything else. Playing music to his ears, or offering the most delectable dishes to tempt his tongue, or a waft of cool breeze to caress his skin—nothing works for him as much as the bliss derived from as simple an exercise as drinking plain water.

In the truest form of love that the devotee has for his beloved Lord God, all the sense organs of perception are involved. He ‘sees’ nothing but his Lord everywhere—implying that the organ of sight, the eye, is involved. He ‘hears’ nothing but the Lord all around him—implying that the organ of hearing, the ear, is involved. He ‘speaks of nothing but the Lord—implying that the organ of speech, the tongue, is involved. And he ‘thinks’ of nothing but the Lord—implying that the mind itself is also deeply involved. To wit, this ‘love for Lord God’ becomes a sort of meditation for a devotee, and hence the bliss derived from this love is alike the bliss derived by an ascetic upon self-realisation when he has reached the climax of meditation called the ‘Turiya State’. This is the state of transcendental existence when the ascetic experiences the presence of pure consciousness. The devotee too experiences the same consciousness when he evolves in his love for the Lord God because the Lord is a personified form of supreme cosmic Consciousness.

To wit, the feeling ecstasy, bliss, beatitude and felicity felt when devotee develops true love for his Lord God, a love that is nectar-like, is as intense as the divine experience obtained by an ascetic when he becomes self-realised, i.e. when he experiences the presence of the pure consciousness in his inner-self. Immersed in this supreme experience of bliss and joy, the devotee would naturally not want to talk about, see or hear anything else.

This eclectic spiritual idea is succinctly expressed in the Chandogya Upanishad of the Sam Veda, in Canto 7, section 24, verse no. 1, when it says that: “Where one does not see anyone else, does not listen to anyone else, does not know anyone else—verily, that state of existence is ‘infinite’ (i.e. it is synonymous with Brahm, the cosmic Consciousness which is infinite). On the other hand, when one sees another, hears another, knows another—then it is a finite existence (that corresponds to this mortal world). Verily, that which is ‘infinite’ is eternal and constant, while that which is ‘finite’ is mortal and transient.”

Hence, worldly love is a finite form of love because it relates to the world that is itself finite and perishable. On the other hand, love for Lord God is infinite because the Lord himself is infinite and eternal.

Just like in the case of meditation where the concept of time and distance vanish, so is also the case of true love where the concept of the past and the future has no relevance for the lover. The lover and the beloved live in the present, and this present is perpetual for them as they are always lost in each other’s thoughts. To wit, there is no distance between the devotee and the Lord God, and for all practical purposes they become one—refer verse no. 41.

Up till this point, sage Narad has laid out the salient features of the supreme form of love. Now he goes on to tell us what constitutes the secondary or a lower form of love.]

७६ गौणी त्रिधा गुणभेदाद् आर्तादिभेदाद् वा

56 gauṇī tridhā guṇa-bhedād ārtādibhedād vā

(56) [As opposed to the supreme form of love that is independent of the effects of the three Gunas, there is a lower or a secondary form of love that is affected by the three Gunas.]

There is a secondary form of love, and it is of three kinds depending upon the mental disposition and attitude of the individual devotee, which in turn depend upon the influences of the three fundamental Gunas on the devotee.

[Earlier we have read in verse nos. 47 and 54 that true form of love for the Lord God is one that is not affected or influenced by the three Gunas. These three Gunas or fundamental qualities in the world are known as (i) Sata Guna, (ii) Raja Guna, and (iii) Tama Guna. The Sata Guna is the best quality that relates to the divine virtues of the Atma. The Tama Guna is the grossest quality that relates to mundane world of sense objects. The Raja Guna lies somewhere in between, and it acts as a balancing factor. The dominance of the Sata Guna in a man would make him pious and holy; the Tama Guna would make him evil and corrupt; and the Raja Guna would determine which way he goes. A combination of all these three Gunas and the different ratios in which they are present in any individual would determine the nature, character and personality of a person.

A highly wise, enlightened and self-realised person rises above the influence of these three Gunas, but an ordinary person is subjected to their influences. The ‘secondary form of love’ that is being referred to in this verse is that which is influenced by the effects of these three Gunas working together in varying permutations and combinations in different individuals. Since this secondary love is

tainted by the Gunas, it loses its primary pristine form of purity, sublimity, holiness and truthfulness; it becomes a tainted or conditioned or twisted form of love.

The three Gunas acting in different ratios determine the nature and character of a person. If the Sata Guna is dominant, the person will be inclined to be noble and righteous. If the Tama Guna is dominant, he would be evil and pervert and tempted towards the material enjoyment of the world. The Raja Guna would determine a person's actions and deeds depending upon the ratio of these two Gunas present in him. Love that is generated in the heart of a person in this corrupted environment is not free to determine its own course; it will be swayed one or the other way. It's like the case of the flame of a candle left in the open wind—at best it feels fortunate that it is able to keep itself alight, but it is never steady and keeps on flickering and swaying from side to side every moment of its uncertain existence. On the other hand, true love is like the flame of a candle protected by a glass chimney; the flame is erect and steady.

The secondary form of love for the Lord God comes under three categories as follows:

(i) Satwic Devotion or Love for Lord God: This devotion is the result of the dominance of Sata Guna in a person. Here, the devotee loves his Lord God with the aim of getting the Lord's blessing to destroy his sins as well as having protection of the Lord from their horrible consequences. He offers his actions to the Lord as a means of service, and worships the Lord as a religious and moral duty. Refer: Srimad Bhagvat Mahapuran, 3/29/10.

(ii) Rajsic Devotion or Love for Lord God: This devotion is the result of the dominance of Raja Guna in a person. Here, the devotee undertakes worship so that the Lord blesses him with worldly gains and enjoyments. He loves the Lord because the Lord would fulfill his desires easily. The devotee is mindful of his duties and even takes care of doing them properly and righteously, but the aim is to gain worldly possessions and gains. This obviously is not true form of spiritual devotion for Lord God. Refer: Srimad Bhagvat Mahapuran, 3/29/9.

(iii) Tamsic Devotion or Love for Lord God: In this form of devotion, the devotee offers his worship to the Lord God so that he can settle scores with his enemies, or to get the Lord's blessings to uphold his hypocrisy and ego. This is the worst kind of devotion. Refer: Srimad Bhagvat Mahapuran, 3/29/8.

In all these three forms of devotion for the Lord God, there is a desire to have something in return for offering of worship. The worshipper has a sense of expectation from the Lord, and hence none of them is true devotion or true love for Lord God. As long as the devotee feels that the Lord is answering his prayers and fulfilling his wishes, he would continue to offer worship to the Lord, but if he finds that some other deity is more easily appeased then he would switch loyalties and worship some other God.

Further, in these forms of worship there is a sense of distinction between the devotee who offers worship, and the Lord who accepts this worship. It is easily distinguished from true love where this distinction vanishes.

One point is to be noted in this connection. Even though this secondary form of worship or devotion is not the ideal way to have love for the Lord God, but it is still better than not doing anything at all. It is just like the case of one imbibing some kind of goodness while being in the company of saints even if he is merely doing routine chores for them and is least bothered in improving himself or learning something from these saints. To wit, worshipping the Lord in any manner whatsoever is bound to have some positive effects on the devotee. To start with for instance, he would at least

spare some time in thinking of the Lord; he would be conscious of not doing anything that is so unrighteous that it offends the Lord. Although this is not the direct route to God-realisation, but at least it is a round-about path to the same goal!

Out of the three ways of worshipping the Lord mentioned herein above, the ‘Satwic devotion’ is by far the best. We shall read about it in the next verse no. 57.]

५७ उत्तरस्माद् उत्तरस्मात् पूर्वपूर्वो श्रेयाय भवति

57 uttarasmād uttarasmāt pūrva-pūrvo śreyāya bhavati

(57) The three types of Bhakti (devotion) mentioned herein above (in the previous verse no. 56) are beneficial for the devotee in the reverse order.

[To wit, out of the three form of devotion mentioned in verse no. 56, the best form is the one that is called ‘Satwic Bhakti’, which is followed by ‘Rajasic Bhakti’, and lastly the ‘Tamsic Bhakti’.

If we extend this verse to include the purest form of Bhakti or devotion for Lord God that has been elaborately described earlier from verse no. 1 to verse no. 55, then it is deemed to be the best form of Bhakti for Lord God, one that supersedes the three forms mentioned in verse no. 56.]

५८ अन्यस्मात् सौलभ्यं भक्तौ

58 anyasmāt saulabhyaṁ bhaktau

(58) [Lauding the path of Bhakti, sage Narad says—] Bhakti (devotion) for Lord God is the easiest and the best of all means to attain the Lord (or become God-realised).

[Refer to verse no. 33 and 81 also in the context of the present verse.

The scriptures have described many and varied paths by which one can attain spiritual bliss and beatitude as well as liberation and deliverance for his soul. Some of these paths are ‘Yoga’, the path of meditation, ‘Dhyan’, the path of contemplation, ‘Japa’ or repetition of the Lord’s holy name, ‘Yagya’, the path of doing sacrifices, ‘Karma’, the path of doing righteous deeds, ‘Dharma’, the path of righteous and auspicious living, ‘Gyan’, the path of knowledge, and so on. In this context, refer to verse no. 25.

This fact is explicitly mentioned in Ram Charit Manas, Uttar Kand, Chaupai line no. 1 that precedes Doha no. 46 where Lord Ram has declared: “Say, which path is so easy as compared to the path of Bhakti which requires no effort as is the need for doing Yoga (meditation), Yagya (sacrifices), Japa (repetition of holy Mantras), Tapa (austerities and penances), Upwaas (fasting) etc.”

Refer also to Ram Charit Manas, Uttar Kand, Chaupai line nos. 1-5 that precede Doha no. 45 where Lord Ram says: “If one wants to experience the joy and beatitude of heavenly existence right here in this world, then Bhakti is the easiest way for him to achieve this goal. There are other ways too, such as the path of Gyan (knowledge), but all of them are cumbersome and besotted with difficulties. Even if

someone succeeds in them, he is still not as dear to me as he who follows the path of Bhakti. Remember: Bhakti is an independent path that leads one to freedom from all troubles.”

Bhakti invariably leads to immediate bliss and peace. This is endorsed in Ram Charit Manas, Uttar Kand, Doha no. 46 where Lord Ram says: “The ecstatic sense of bliss and beatitude that accompanies Bhakti when it reaches its climax is experienced by those who have achieved this eclectic state of spiritual attainment.”

A similar idea is expressed in Srimad Bhagvat Geeta, Canto 5, verse no. 29 where Lord Krishna says: “I am a selfless friend of all living beings. Anyone who comes to know me this way gets immediately rewarded by way of attaining peace.”

In Srimad Bhagvat Geeta, Canto 8, verse no. 14, Krishna tells Arjun: “Oh Arjun! He who remembers me always without fail, I am easily attained by him. This is why ascetics endeavour to remember or meditate upon me always.”

In Srimad Bhagvat Geeta, Canto 18, verse no. 66, Krishna assures: “Don’t worry. I will free you from all sins and their consequences. I will give you emancipation and salvation, and ensure eternal bliss and beatitude for your soul.”

A similar idea is expressed in many places in Ram Charit Manas of Goswami Tulsidas. We can cite just one instance here, for example. In its Uttar Kand, Doha no. 87, Lord Ram tells the crow Kaagbhushund that: “Any living being who has devotion for me, and who serves me selflessly and without deceit and pretension, is most dear to me. Indeed and without gainsay, I declare that my devotee is very dear to me, like my own self.”

In Ram Charit Manas, Uttar Kand, Chaupai line nos. 9-10 that precede Doha no. 86, Lord Ram says: “If the creator Brahma has no devotion for me in his heart, then I would treat him like I treat all other living beings who are all dear to me. Yet, if a living being has devotion for me then I have a special soft corner in my heart for him though he may be very lowly.”]

५९ प्रमाणान्तरस्यानपेक्षत्वात् स्वयं प्रमाणत्वात्

59 pramāṇāntarasyaṅapekṣatvāt svayaṁ pramāṇatvāt

(59) Bhakti (devotion for Lord God that incorporates the virtue of love and affection) is complete in itself. It does not depend upon any other thing to prove its effectiveness or usefulness. It is a proof in itself; it is independent and self-evident. It is a testimonial in itself; it does not require any endorsements.

[All other spiritual methods have different milestones that indicate the level of success that a practitioner has achieved while pursuing that particular path. But Bhakti that incorporates such virtues as devotion and love for Lord God is so comprehensive and self-evident that its results become immediately apparent. It is because the devotee begins to feel a sense of contentment and freedom from worries as soon as he develops Bhakti for Lord God as he is now confident that the Lord God is there to look after him. This gives him immense peace and joy.

Just like light of the flame of a candle does not need any other source of light to illuminate it, the feeling of spirituality and blessedness that comes with Bhakti is self-generated and independent of any other things. To wit, Bhakti does not need

props to support it. A devotee does not need a certificate to prove that he loves his Lord God; even if the world won't believe him, it matters not to him in the least.

What is the evidence of Bhakti; how can one know that Bhakti has developed in his heart; what is its best manifestation? This is answered in the next verse no. 60.]

६० शान्तिरूपात् परमानन्दरूपाच्च

60 śāntirūpāt paramānandarūpāc ca

(60) It (Bhakti) is revealed in the form of supreme peace, bliss, beatitude and felicity. It is also akin to the attainment of supreme state of transcendental existence that is synonymous with pure Consciousness.

[To wit, Bhakti represents the best fruit one can hope to get by pursuing any spiritual path, and it is to attain eternal sense of spiritual bliss, peace, beatitude and felicity. These are the characteristic features of the Lord God who himself represents pure cosmic Consciousness. Hence, as soon as a devotee develops Bhakti and begins to experience these above virtues evolving spontaneously right inside his own self, he realizes that he has attained his beloved Lord God, who by the way is always present in his own heart in the form of his Atma.

The devotee feels supremely blessed and God-realised. It is this kind of devotee that sage Narad refers to in verse no. 53 earlier. A God-realised devotee is a personified form of bliss and peace like the Lord God himself.

In the next set of verses sage Narad tells about the way Bhakti, or devotion for the Lord God, can be practiced in day-to-day life by an ordinary person. He also outlines the obstacles or impediments that one encounters in this spiritual way of life.]

६१ लोकहानौ चिन्ता न कार्या निवेदितात्मलोकवेदत्वात्

61 lokahānau cintā na kāryā niveditātma-loka-vedatvāt

(61) A true devotee should not worry or get anxious at all about worldly losses (or gains for that matter) because he has surrendered himself to the beloved and sacred Lord of his heart to whom he has offered not only himself but all the fruits of his deeds and actions.

[In this context, refer to the previous verse nos. 34-35, 46-48, and verse no. 62 that follows herein below. A true devotee is one who has complete faith in his Lord God, who has completely and sincerely surrendered himself as well as all his deeds and action to his Lord God. So therefore, he does not feel that any result produced by his deeds or actions taken by him belong to him, and that even if there is a material loss he need not worry about it as the Lord would take full care of him.

He believes that nothing belongs to him; he is merely a servant of the Lord and is doing what is ordained or expected or commanded of him to do. Just like a faithful servant carries out the orders of his Master or Lord dispassionately and

emotionlessly, the devotee goes about the affairs of his life in a neutral, detached and dispassionate manner.

This feeling, when it takes a firm hold in the heart and mind of a person, will obviously instill confidence in him, and make him stable, peaceful and calm from within.

Remember: Devotion for Lord God and love for him unfolds an umbrella over the believer's head, protecting him from the heat and rain symbolised by the countless miseries, torments and troubles of this gross mortal world, as well as securing his spiritual destiny.

The idea in this verse is further elaborated in the next verse no. 62 that essentially says that so long as one does not have the good fortune to develop a high level of spiritual awareness he should continue to live normally in life, but with a caveat—and it is that he should surrender all the results of his deeds and actions to Lord God; he must think that he is not doing anything for himself but for the Lord God, and that the Lord would take care of him. A devotee's life should be disciplined and ordered. This attitude will free him from all anxieties, worries, fears and consternations. His heart and mind will find eternal rest. That indeed is the greatest achievement for any human being. After all, what is the good of having the crown of the world over one's head if one can't sleep peacefully at night?]

६२ न तत्सिद्धौ लोकव्यावहारो हेयः किन्तु फलत्यागस् तत्साधनं च कार्यम् एव

62 na tatsiddhau lokavyāvahāro heyaḥ kintu phalatyāgas tatsādhanam ca kāryam eva

(62) But till the time purest form of devotion and love for the Lord God takes a firm root and becomes steady and robust in the inner-self of a spiritual aspirant, he should not abandon or renounce worldly activities. But what should be kept in mind is that one renounces or disassociates himself from the result of his activities. In this way he should continue to practice devotion and love for the Lord God.

[It is abundantly clear that verse no. 62 reiterates what has already been said in verse no. 61 herein above. The plain and simple idea is that as long as one does not have the good fortune to develop a high level of devotion for Lord God, he should be careful to follow at least one principle in life—and it is that while he continues to live life normally and goes about doing his duties, he must remember to surrender all the results of his deeds and actions to the Lord God. He must not get attached to his deeds by way of thinking that he is doing anything for gain; he must think that he is not doing anything for himself but for the sake of his Lord God of whom he is only a servant.

This attitude will help the spiritual aspirant become free from the burden of having to bear the consequences of his deeds, whether good or bad. As time passes, all the consequences of his past deeds would be consumed by way of sufferings he encounters during the course of his life in this world, and if he does not accumulate any newer burden of consequences of any deed then surely he would be freed from the baggage of 'Karma'—the baggage of 'deeds and their consequences' that act as a drag on the Atma or the 'pure self' of any creature that prevents his final liberation from the cycle of birth and death. The result is that his spiritual journey forward

becomes light and joyful. It's like a passenger who travels light as compared to one who drags along a heavy suitcase full of his worldly belongings that he will not actually need during the journey but had carried them along out of sheer habit of keeping his possession with him.

A wise devotee is one who keeps in mind the doctrine that devotion for the Lord God does not mean running away from the world and not doing one's ordained duties and upholding one's responsibilities. Instead of absconding and abdicating from one's moral responsibilities it is better to follow the principles laid down in these verses: that one should live like an ordinary man and do one's ordained duties, but do them dispassionately, do them as a service to his Master and Lord, and surrender himself as well as the result of his deeds to this Master and Lord.

Remember: A wise and enlightened devotee must understand that the way outlined in verse nos. 61 and 62 is the correct and proper way to practice Bhakti.]

६३ स्त्रीधननास्तिकचरित्रं न श्रवणीयम्

63 strī-dhana-nāstika-caritraṃ na śravaṇīyam

(63) [Extending further on the concept of 'not getting attached to the world while living in it', sage Narad says—]

One must not pay attention to any talk about anything related to women, wealth, atheists and enemies (for such talk would only create agitation for the mind and the heart which a devotee is trying to keep calm and blissful, and such talk would distract him from his spiritual goal in life).

[In the context of what has been said in this present verse no. 63, refer to the previous verse nos. 43-45 where we read that a devotee should avoid bad or evil company at all costs because it is the greatest impediment in spiritual progress. This verse no. 63 along with the verses that follow herein below give us some more reasons why evil company ought to be avoided.

Refer also to verse nos. 27, 35 and 55 where the need for total renunciation of the world and worldly things is emphasized for success in Bhakti. As has been noted in the commentary appended to verse no. 55, the mind needs to be focused on the Lord God if a devotee wishes to sincerely attain oneness with the Lord. Women, wealth and debates with non-believers only vex the spirit and disturb the concentration of the mind.

Talking or discussion about women and wealth cannot keep one dispassionate, and it is opposite to the philosophy of keeping one's self detached from the world. Similarly, non-believers are like enemies for a devotee, and arguing with them would not only be a fruitless exercise but it would also create unnecessary ill-will, doubts and perplexities for the soul. If one becomes uncertain about his goal and the path taken to reach that goal, the journey becomes full of worries and anxieties. That is why company of atheists is to be avoided at all costs.

Talks of women and wealth give rise to longing, passion and greed, while talking with non-believers lead to confusion and doubts, and even a mention of one's enemy creates anger. All these factors are counter-productive for a devotee. All such people who talk about worldly matters such as women and wealth, as well as those who denounce the Lord God, ridicule him and undermine his supremacy and

authority, are to be treated like arch enemies by a devotee. He should be wary of them; they are definitely not his friends and would feel very happy when he falls from his path.]

६४ अभिमानदम्भादिकं त्याज्यम्

64 abhimāna-dambhādikaṁ tyājyam

(64) [Other things that should be assiduously avoided by a devotee are the following—]

Pride, ego, vanity and hypocrisy and other such negativities (abhimāna-dambhādikaṁ) should be abandoned by all means (because these negative qualities act as impediments in one's spiritual evolvment and progress).

[The devotee should be careful to be humble, simple-hearted and unpretentious. The Lord God does not like hypocrites and proud people. Pride, ego, haughtiness, vanity etc. are evil forces that pull the devotee down from his exalted position. Even in the secular world, these qualities are looked down upon; no one would praise a man who has these negativities in him.

Earlier we have learnt in verse nos. 43-45 that evil or bad company should be avoided at all costs. This verse gives us one more reason why we should do so. Evil people have the negative qualities mentioned here, and if one keeps contact with them one would be influenced by these negative traits. Other negative traits of evil persons have been enumerated in verse no. 63 herein above.

A devotee is a saintly person, and these negative qualities are not the characters of saints. The excellent virtues of saints and the negative qualities of non-saints have been enumerated by Lord Ram in detail in Ram Charit Manas, Uttar Kand, from Chaupai line no. 6 that precedes Doha no. 37—to Doha no. 41.

These and other negative qualities are dominant during the present era known as Kaliyug. This has been reiterated by the crow-saint Kaagbhusund while he was describing the effects of Kaliyug to Garud in Ram Charit Manas, Uttar Kand, from Chaupai line no. 8 that precedes Doha no. 97—to Doha no. 102.]

६५ तद् अर्पिताखिलाचारः सन् कामक्रोधाभिमानादिकं तस्मिन् एव करणीयम्

65 tad arpitākṣhilācāraḥ san kāma-krodhābhimānādikaṁ tasminn eva karaṇīyam

(65) After having surrendered everything (including one's own self as well as the deeds done and their results) to the Lord God, if any trace of negativity such as desire, anger, pride etc. still linger in a person then he should also offer them to the Lord.

[Surrendering to the Lord God and offering everything to him means 'complete and unconditional surrender, and offering the good as well as the bad to the Lord God, keeping nothing with oneself'. If this is practiced in a wholesome manner then it would entail surrendering both the good and the bad to the Lord. When the scriptures

say “surrender yourself and your deeds and their results to the Lord God” they mean not only the positive things but negative things as well.

Remember: The Lord God is not like a selfish worldly Master who would eye his servant’s assets only, or is interested in extracting service only from his servant. The Lord knows fully well that no living is perfect, and so when he accepts someone he accepts him with all his goodness and badness. If surrendering means total surrender and renunciation of all claims to anything by the person who surrenders before the Lord, then it enjoins upon the Lord to accept everything lock stock and barrel. The Lord would go a step forward, and not backward—i.e. once he accepts a devotee he also accept to bear the burden of sins and evil qualities of his devotee. This is why the Lord is called so magnanimous, benevolent, kind, graceful, obliging, merciful and compassionate.

We read in Ram Charit Manas, Sundar Kand, from Chaupai line no. 8 that precedes Doha no. 43—to Chaupai line no. 8 that precedes Doha no. 44 that Lord Ram has told his ministers that he would welcome and accept Vibhishan, the younger brother of Ravana, the demon king of Lanka and the arch enemy of the Lord, even if he (Vibhishan) is evil, for it is sure that anyone who comes to surrender himself before the Lord is deemed to have absolved himself of all sins and cleaned all negative qualities that may have been present in him earlier, for no sooner does a person come in contact with the Lord than all the evils and vices vanish from him.”]

६६ त्रिरूपभङ्गपूर्वकं नित्यदास्यनित्यकान्ताभजनात्मकं प्रेम कार्यं प्रेमैव कार्यम्

66 tri-rūpa-bhaṅga-pūrvakam nitya-dāsya-nitya-kāntā-bhajanātmakam prema kāryam premaiva kāryam

(66) True form of love and devotion for the Lord God is one that transcends the three factors that govern all relationships in this world. One must love and serve his Lord God for the sake of love and service alone, without any other factor interfering in this relationship. No other factor has any role to play in this relationship.

{This verse can be read as follows also: True form of love and devotion for the Lord God is one that transcends the influences of the three kinds of Gunas (Sata, Raja and Tama)# that govern all relationships in this world. One must love and serve his Lord God for the sake of love and service alone, without any other factor interfering in this relationship. }

[#Refer verse nos. 47, 54-55 in the context of this verse no. 66.

The devotee’s relationship with his beloved Lord God is purely based on love and devotion. No other thing has any role to play in it. Two examples are cited here to explain the difference between a devotee’s relationship with the Lord God and all other forms of relationships that exist in this world.

One is that which exists between a master and his servant, and the other which exists between a wife and her husband. Now let us examine these two relationships and see the difference between them and the one that exists between the devotee and the Lord.

In the first example, there is a person who is a ‘master’ and another who is a ‘servant’. They are two independent individuals. The servant serves his master and the master receives his service, and whether the servant says it or not but there is some

hidden expectation of a reward that becomes due by the virtue of this service. A servant will always be a servant, and the master will always be a master, and the two can't be exchange their status. But in the case of a devotee and his Lord God, no such distinction exists, for true devotion and love brings them so close to each other that all distinctions cease and they become one and indistinguishable—refer verse no. 41. Besides this, in this love between the devotee and the Lord God there is no desire for any reward of any kind because the devotee feels fully fulfilled; it is love and devotion for their own sake. In this context, refer verse nos. 4, 7, 54-55.

In the case of the master and the servant, service done by the latter unto the former is not an end in itself, but it is a mean to achieve some objective, some work or job that is to be done by the servant for and on behalf of the master. But in the case of a devotee and the Lord God, devotion and love between the two is an end in itself; there is no expectation—refer verse no. 26.

The same thing applies to the relationship between a husband and his wife. They may indeed love each other, but there is some subtle form of expectation that does exist between the two. A husband and wife are two independent individuals, they have their own priorities. But in the case of the devotee and the Lord God, all distinctions cease to exist, and therefore all expectations also cease to exist. The Lord God becomes the life and breath and the soul of the devotee; and the Lord treats the devotee in the same manner.

True form of love is enduring and independent of all factors and influences. For example, a master may become annoyed with his servant if the latter does not obey his command or serves him properly. The servant too would lose his enthusiasm in serving his master if he feels he is being neglected and sidelined, that the master is not paying due attention to his efforts and sufficiently rewarding him, or that he favours someone else. But in the case of the devotee and the Lord God, this situation never develops—and it *should not* develop.

A husband loves his wife and vice versa, but often they may fight with each other over some trifling issue that may snowball into some major disaster. In the case of the devotee and the Lord God, this situation does not arise—and it *should not* arise either.

It is because in the case of all worldly relationships the factor of self-interest does come into play, whether it is acknowledged or not. But in the case of the Lord and his devotee, their mutual love for each other is free from any conditions. It is pure and simple love for the sake of love itself. A hint of how this love works in practice is given by citing the example of the Gopis and Lord Krishna in verse nos. 21-22 of Narad Bhakti Sutra.

How a true devotee should love and serve his Lord God, who is also his Master, and exult in this relationship, is beautifully brought out by Goswami Tulsidas in his epic Ram Charit Manas, Baal Kand, Doha no. 28-b when he says: “Everyone says that I am a servant of Lord Ram, and I too feel glad to hear and say this. It is the glory of the Lord that he gladly accepts that a fellow like me (who is so humble and ordinary) is his servant.”

Similar emotions are expressed by Tulsidas in his classic ‘Kavitawali’ (a version of the epic story of the Ramayana written in poetry form), Uttar Kand, verse no. 107.

Now, let us read what is said in ‘Kavitawali’, Uttar Kand, verse no. 107: “I have no caste and neither do I wish to find out about the caste of others. No one is of any use to me and neither do I wish to be of any use to others. My entire destiny (Lok-Parlok) and existence is in the hands of Lord Ram.

Tulsidas has the only reliance and succour in the name of Sri Ram. The people are utterly foolish—they do not understand that the ‘Gotra’ (race, caste) of the servant is the same as that of his master. I do not bother whether I am called a saint or not, or whether I am called good or bad. Whatever and howsoever I am, I belong to Sri Ram. Am I lying at the doorstep of anybody? Why are the people so much bothered about who I am, what my caste is, whether I am good or bad? Why don’t they mind their own business?

{Tulsidas laments that the people are more concerned about which class of the society a person belongs to, or what his calling or status in the society is, or how learned he is, etc. Tulsidas wonders, ‘How does it matter?’

If a man does not have devotion and love for Lord Sri Ram than his taking birth in a high caste, or being extremely successful in life by acquiring fame and money, or being very learned in the scriptures so much so that he might know them forwards and backwards—all these and such other achievements are null and void Tulsidas says that though he has none of the worldly achievements a man usually yearns for, he still considers himself extremely successful and fulfilled because he has sincere and abiding devotion and love for Lord Ram. For him nothing else matters.”}]

६७ भक्ता एकान्तिनो मुख्याः

67 bhaktā ekāntino mukhyāḥ

(67) Verily indeed and without gainsay, this form of single-minded love and devotion for Lord God (as described herein above in verse no. 66) is deemed to the best and the purest kind of Bhakti.

And therefore, the devotee who has this single-minded Bhakti in him, or who has pinpointed his mind and heart to develop this exclusive kind of Bhakti, and who has only one aim in life and it is to have pure form of Bhakti for the Lord God, such a devotee indeed becomes an exalted and pre-eminent person himself.

[Refer verse nos. 53-55 in this context. This kind of Bhakti is rare to attain, and once it is attained by the rare devotee, its existence becomes self-evident in the behaviour and attitude of that exalted person; he becomes pre-eminent. A divine halo surrounds him; he exhibits the characteristics of the Lord God himself as he becomes one with the Lord. This is because the glory, the divinity and the holy shine of the Lord begins to reflect in his own ‘self’ which is ‘pure consciousness’ known as the Atma.]

६८ कण्ठावरोधरोमाशुभिः परस्परं लपमानाः पावयन्ति कुलानि पृथिवीं च

68 kaṅṭhāvarodha-romāśrubhiḥ parasparaṁ lapamānāḥ pāvayanti kulāni pṛthivīm ca

(68) [Glorifying such exalted devotees, sage Narad says—] Such exalted and God-realised devotees (as mentioned in verse no. 68) become so highly emotional when talking with each that their throats get choked with emotion, their bodies become thrilled (and have goose bumps), tears (of joy) flow down their eyes, and they speak

in broken words (because they become so ecstatic that they fail to find words to express themselves coherently and articulately).

Such rare devotees are indeed extremely fortunate and blessed themselves, and at the same time they sanctify their own families as well as the earth itself by their presence on it.

[Here, Narad has praised true devotees of the Lord God and essentially says that the devotee of the Lord is so lost in the thoughts of the Lord and remains ever submerged in the memory of the Lord that he loses awareness of his own self. They are not only extremely blessed themselves but their mere presence blesses all those around them.

A similar idea is expressed in Srimad Bhagvat Mahapurāṇ, 11/14/24 where the Lord says: “A person who is fully devoted to me, who speaks with a voice choked in emotions, whose heart melts with affection for me and my memory, who weeps incessantly (because he always remembers me and longs to meet me; who feels sad at his separation from me even for a moment), who laughs and sings and dances in ecstasy whenever he remembers me (and my worldly plays and tricks)—verily indeed, such a person blesses the whole world by his presence in it.”

When sage Sutikshan came to know that Lord Ram was coming to meet him, his condition was similar to the one described in this verse. It is narrated in Ram Charit Manas, Aranya Kand, Chaupai line nos. 10-15 that precede Doha no. 10 which say: “When the sage realized that the Lord is coming his way, he became exhilarated and ecstatic with joy. The illustrious sage became numbed with a surge of love for the Lord inside his being. It is indeed impossible to describe his emotional, mental and physical condition. He could not see the direction or the path on which he was going, as all sense of orientation was lost on him. He did not know who he was and where he was going. He started walking forwards and backwards like an intoxicated man. Sometimes he danced, and at other times he sang merrily the glories of the Lord. Finally, he sat down motionless in the middle of the path with a body thrilled, his bristling hairs standing on their ends, and the skin full of goose bumps like the skin of the jack fruit.”

Lord Shiva, the most enlightened of the Gods, has also endorsed this view in Ram Charit Manas, Uttar Kand, Doha no. 127 where he tells his consort Uma: “Listen Uma. Blessed is the family and honoured is the world in which an exalted and an illustrious devotee of Lord Ram (a personified form of the Supreme Being) is born.”

The next verse no. 69 further glorifies such devotees.]

६९ तीर्थोऽकुर्वन्ति तीर्थानि सुकर्मोऽकुर्वन्ति कर्माणि सच्छास्त्रीकुर्वन्ति शास्त्राणि

69 tīrthī-kurvanti tīrthāni su-karmī-kurvanti karmāṇi sac-chāstrī-kurvanti śāstrāṇi

(69) Such devotees sanctify even the holy places of pilgrimage (known as ‘Tirtha’) by their presence in them (because their aura of holiness and divinity neutralizes any traces of sinfulness and worldly vices that are normally prevalent in such places).

They add glory to the principle of doing deeds and taking actions which are an invariable part of life in this world (i.e. whatever such exalted devotees do can be safely emulated by others as the deeds done by devotees are deemed to be holy and in accordance with the sanctity of the scriptures).

And finally, they also lend authority to the scriptures themselves (because their lives are living examples of what the scriptures teach and mean).

[Three points are noted here. Places of pilgrimage are not free from worldly corruption. But when true devotees of the Lord live there, they lend their own holiness and divinity to the place. Whatever sinfulness and vices that may be present in such places, they are rendered ineffective by the presence of the Lord's devotee there. When a pilgrim visits such places he would meet saintly persons and devotees of the Lord God, and this would have a positive spiritual impact upon the pilgrim. Merely taking bath in rivers and performing rituals are of no use if the inner-self is not cleansed and the right path is not known. This is made possible by the presence of saintly devotees in holy places. This is an extension of what has been already said in the previous verse no. 68 about the devotees blessing the earth by their presence.

The second point is about deeds and actions. A true devotee would always act righteously and conscientiously. He will be mindful of the fact that whatever he does is a service to the Lord God and an offering on his part to the Lord. So he is always careful that his deeds and actions are not tainted, as a tainted thing can't be offered to the Lord God. This means that his life as a whole becomes sanctified and holy; every action and deed of his will inherently and involuntarily be in accordance with the sanction of the scriptures even though he may not be specifically conscious of it. In fact, the actions and deeds of a true devotee of the Lord God would be an example for others to emulate as they would not only make him fulfilled and contented but also bring him closer to the Lord God.

In the same vein, the life and deeds of devotees are living examples of the teaching of the scriptures. If one were to verify the truthfulness of the words of the scriptures and see them practiced and bearing fruits, he would not have a better example than the devotee to satisfy his quest.

Srimad Bhagvat Mahapuran, 4/30/37 it is said that: "How can someone who wants to find freedom from the fear of transmigration not welcome the meeting with pious souls who are the devotees of the Lord, and who go from place to place with the intention of purifying these places (with the touch of the dust of their feet) and blessing other souls (by their communion)."

Again, it is said by Yudishistir to Vidura in Srimad Bhagvat Mahapuran, 1/13/10 that: "Oh Lord! Devotees of God who are like you are not only holy themselves but they also revive the holiness of the so-called sacred places (that have become polluted by the contact of sinful persons), for verily indeed such devotees represent the supreme Lord Vishnu himself as the Lord resides in their hearts."

We read in Ram Charit Manas, Baal Kand, Chaupai line no. 7 that precedes Doha no. 2 that: "The groups of exalted saints and sages are like living pilgrimage places on earth. Nay, the places where they live also become a holy place."

Refer to verse no. 71 herein below in the context of what has been said in this present verse no. 69.]

७० तन्मयाः

70 tanmayāḥ

(70) Verily indeed, such exalted devotees of the Lord God (as the ones referred to in the previous verses) are completely and absolutely absorbed or engrossed in the thoughts of the Lord (and that is why they lose awareness of themselves and the world surrounding them, and instead they live in an ethereal world marked by profound ecstasy, bliss and blessedness as specifically narrated in verse no. 68).

[In the context of this verse, refer to the earlier verse nos. 41 and 68.

We have already read about the transcendental state of the mind and the sublime level of emotions that are so characteristic of God-realised devotees in verse no. 68. The present verse gives us the reason why they appear to behave in the odd manner that they exhibit. It is because they don't live at a humdrum plane of gross existence in which other mortal humans live; they live at a plane of existence which is much above and far beyond this plane, and therefore a common man can't comprehend their behaviour because he has never ever experienced such an exalted existence.

These blessed devotees remain perpetually submerged in the thoughts and memory of their beloved Lord God; at one moment they would weep and at the other moment they would laugh, oblivious of the world and the people surrounding them. Worldly people think that they have gone out of their heads, that they have lost their senses; but it is not that at all. Worldly people simply can't understand or fathom the depth of the huge ocean of love for the Lord God that has erupted inside their heart, with its heaving waves completely drowning them and overwhelming their entire existence.

Just as the river that falls into the ocean becomes one with the ocean and as vast and fathomless as the latter, and after this merger it becomes impossible to separate the river from the ocean, so likewise these blessed and God-realised devotees too become one with and inseparable from the Supreme Being, and they attain an eclectic state of existence that is at once eternally blissful, ethereal, sublime and beyond understanding.

They become God-saturated; they are embodiments of the Lord God. The next verse no. 71 describes the impact of such holy souls.]

७१ मोदन्ते पितरो नृत्यन्ति देवताः सनाथा चेयं भूर् भवति

71 modante pitaro nṛtyanti devatāḥ sa-nāthā ceyam bhūr bhavati

(71) The ancestors of such blessed devotees of the Lord God rejoice that one of their descendents has attained such an exalted level of spiritual existence that makes their entire lineage fulfilled and honoured.

Likewise, even the Gods and other exalted Beings dance in joy and exult when they find that a soul (i.e. the devotee) has attained success in becoming self-and-God realized (and has qualified to join them to enhance the glory of their community).

And the earth feels elated that it has been blessed by a noble soul who has sanctified its dust and has made it a holy place to live in.

[In this context, refer to the earlier verse no. 69.

Here, the term 'ancestors' refers not only to the forefathers of a saintly devotee but to the whole of mankind, and by extension to the whole of the world. To wit,

everyone feels happy that they have at least some good person in their midst who is their true and selfless friend and guide, to whom he can turn to for advice and help in difficult situations, for otherwise he would find himself marooned and friendless in a world that is full of selfishness and is driven by vested interests, deceit and corruptions.

Saintly souls affect entire generations, and their influence is felt far and wide. When sinful people create a burden for the earth and its inhabitants, when evil forces cause torments and horrors for the world and its creatures, saints and holy souls help to restore order and a sense of propriety and righteousness to the general disorderliness and perversion that pervades everywhere. They help to balance the negativity in the world with their own positive virtues. They act as the light of the candle that would help remove the all-pervading darkness that creates fear in the heart of all living beings.

Verily indeed, they act as the soothing balm for a creature who is suffering from spiritual miseries and torments in this world dominated by countless delusions, doubts, confusions and consternations. They act as the best friend and guide for all, showing them the correct path and helping them extricate themselves from the dark pit in which they find themselves fallen.

They are like the life-giving rain for the spiritual welfare of the creatures of this world, because otherwise this world would be like a parched and barren place full of thorns due to the all-pervading presence of sins, vices and evil qualities everywhere.

This unique quality of saintly souls that their advent is for the general good of the world has been highlighted in Ram Charit Manas, Uttar Kand, Chaupai line no. 21 that precedes Doha no. 121 where it is said that: “The rise of saints and those with saintly nature gives joy to the whole world just like the rising of the full moon because it removes the fear of darkness in the night.”

The glory of devotees of the Lord God and how they make their families and the world honoured by their presence in their midst has been expressly stated by Lord Shiva, the most enlightened of the Gods, in Ram Charit Manas, Uttar Kand, Doha no. 127 where he tells his consort Uma: “Listen Uma. Blessed is the family and honoured is the world in which an exalted and an illustrious devotee of Lord Ram (the personified form of the Supreme Being) is born.”

The next two Sutras, i.e. verse nos. 72-73, describe the nature and characters of such God-realised devotees and holy souls.]

७२ नास्ति तेषु जातिविद्यारूपकुलधनक्रियादिभेदः

72 nāsti teṣu jāti-vidyā-rūpa-kula-dhana-kriyādi-bhedaḥ

(72) Those who have reached the state of spiritual perfect-ness and the highest level of realization of the Truth, they practice exemplary level of equanimity and non-distinction. For them, there is no distinction based on caste, religion, culture, physical features of beauty or ugliness, family and wealth, or vocation and profession etc.

[To wit, truly self-realised and God-realised souls see their Lord God everywhere. They are aware of the fact that this physical body is not the true identity of a person, but that it is the pure conscious soul which is a person’s true self and identity. This

soul is also called the Atma. This Atma, which is pure consciousness, is the same in all living beings, and it is an eternal and universal entity that is independent from the gross physical body of all living beings. Since the Atma is the true ‘self’ of a living being as opposed to the gross body, and this Atma is the same in all of them, there is no cause to differentiate between two persons based on their caste, religion or family.

According to the principles of metaphysics, the world and everything related to it are perishable and gross. External occupations that a person engages in are due to the cumulative effects of his past deeds that condition his soul to think and behave in a particular way and engage in a particular vocation or profession that would fit in with the temperament that the person has inherited from his past. But that is not the ‘true nature of his Atma’—because the Atma is neutral and holy as it is pure cosmic Consciousness; the Atma is eternally fulfilled and contented, and it does not want to get involved in anything related to the gross world. The Atma has no likes and dislikes; the Atma does not distinguish between this and that.

Actually it is the deluded mind, aided and abetted by the sense organs of the gross body wishing self-gratification, that prevail upon a person and sufficiently delude him to make distinctions between two imaginary things in this world—such as this is mine and that is your; this is beautiful and that is ugly; this is gain and that is loss; this is making me happy and that makes my unhappy. For a self-realised soul, no such thing exists.

Hence, a person who has become enlightened and self-realised, i.e. a devotee who has attained God-realisation, is free from such gross considerations pertaining to this gross world as the concept of ‘this and that’—for there is no such thing for him. He would see uniformity in this world and remain calm and unruffled because he sees his Lord God everywhere in this world instead of the grossness of the world that creates so much diversity and a sense of distinction and differentiation.

The Lord recognizes only one relationship, he adores only one quality in a person—and it is that of devotion and love. Nothing else matters for him. Since the Lord’s true devotee is one like him, it follows that the devotee too does not distinguish between anybody based on worldly considerations or criterions. We read about this at two places in Ram Charit Manas as follows:-

(a) Aranya Kand, Chaupai line nos. 4-6 that precede Doha no. 35 where Lord Ram told Sabari: “Listen oh noble lady! I know of only one relationship—and it is of Bhakti (devotion). High Caste, society, family, kith and kin, clan, religion, honour, wealth, strength, power and authority, qualities, abilities and skills—none of them matter to me, and if a person does not have the virtue of Bhakti in him he is no good to me like a cloud that has no rain in it.”

(b) Uttar Kand, Chaupai line nos. 1-4 that precede Doha no. 127 where Lord Shiva concludes by saying: “A person who has devotion for Lord Ram’s holy feet, if he worships the Lord’s holy feet and has reverence for them then he is deemed to be all-knowing and omniscient, is said to possess excellent virtues and character, is regarded as most wise, realised and an expert in all spiritual knowledge and skills, is like an ornament of the world as he is the most exalted and an enlightened being, is very munificent and generous as he is a bestower of knowledge and can grant blessings upon others, is a follower of the auspicious path of righteousness, probity, propriety, and noble conduct and thought, and is regarded as a saviour of his entire clan and race. (1-2)

A person who worships Lord Ram sincerely, without pretensions or deceit, and with a pure inner-self is regarded as being an expert in spiritual principles as well as the most wise and enlightened soul in this field.

Verily indeed, such a person is deemed to be well-versed in the essence of the Vedas as he understands correctly and fully the meaning and objective of their teaching.

Forsooth, such a person is perfect in learning and knowledge, and hence a perfect seer; he is most sagacious and erudite.

And he is so steadfast in his belief and faith that he is not affected by his detractors, or deflected from his path by delusions and confusions. (3-4)”

Why is there no distinction or differentiation? This is answered in the next verse no. 73.]

७३ यतस् तदीयाः

73 yatas tadīyāḥ

(73) All of them (i.e. all the creatures; all living beings; all the devotees; the entire creation for that matter) belong to him (the Lord God) alone (and to no one else). That is why there is no distinction or differentiation (between any two entities).

[As has been explained in the note appended to the previous verse no.72, the God-realised devotee is also one who is self-realised, one who has known the truth of the ‘self’, one who has experienced the presence of the Atma within himself as well as everywhere outside, who understands the fact that this Atma is a manifestation of the all pervading and eternal cosmic Consciousness that has also revealed its self in the form of the Supreme Lord whom the devotee worships and loves so much, and that this creation is a revelation of the Lord himself, that everything that exists is one or the other form of the same Lord God.

This spiritual awareness and eclectic understanding erases all causes of distinction or differentiation for an enlightened devotee. He begins to see his Lord in each unit of creation. Say, when this Truth dawns upon his mental horizon, where is the scope for thinking that this thing is different from that thing?

To wit, for a God-realised soul, everything is a revelation of the same Atma or the cosmic Consciousness that has also manifested in the divine form of the Lord God; that everything is an image of his Lord God who is one and non-dual.

External appearances are misleading just like the sight of the presence of water in the mirage seen in a hot desert. An apparently illiterate person may be spiritually highly evolved as compared to a scholar. A poor man may be exemplarily noble and charitable in his heart as compared to a selfish miser who may have huge wealth locked up in the cellar that would perish one day or eaten by termites and worms. So a wise devotee does not judge a person by his physical appearances or how he behaves in this world—for such things may hide the truth.

The verses that now follow herein below lay down further guidelines to be adhered to by true devotees of God.]

७४ वादो नावलम्ब्यः

74 vādo nāvalambyaḥ

(74) A true devotee must not get involved in controversies and engage in arguments.

[This principle helps the devotee avoid vexations of the spirit. Debates and arguments create perplexities and confusions as to what is true and what is not. Controversies enhance animosity and ill-will, and they rob the inner-self of peace and happiness.

The devotee must understand that this world is full of delusions and full of contradictions. So if he allows himself to be sucked in its vortex voluntarily then he will be responsible for all the woes such involvement would create for him, and he will find it extremely difficult to come out of it later on. He must understand that his goal in life is different, that it is to break free from the cycle of delusions and contradictions instead of getting sucked deeper into it. So one must be wise and act wisely by avoiding all arguments and debates regarding contradictory things pertaining to the gross and delusory world and its equally gross and delusory affairs.

A person who engages in arguments and debates thinks that he has a better or superior knowledge of any given subject than the other person who opposes him, and that he will be able to defeat him in logic. This creates a sense of pride and arrogance in that person, and these qualities are not liked by the Lord God at all, for the Lord loves the virtues of humility and simplicity in his devotees. Refer verse no. 27. Thus, mindful of this factor, the devotee shuns all sorts of arguments to prove his point of view on any subject.

Remember: Arguments and debates have no end; one can go on arguing and debating on any subject without reaching any conclusion. So therefore, what is the use of creating unnecessary vexations for the spirit; why would any rational man create a situation that would churn the surface of the otherwise tranquil ocean to create a mighty wave that has the potential of rocking his own boat symbolized by the peace of heart and stability of mind?

The Brahm-Sutra verse no. 1/1/11 states that: “Argument does not establish anything”.

Similarly, Vedanta Sutra, verse no. 2/1/11, says: “Logical reasoning is inconclusive.”

In Kathopanishad, 1/2/9, it is said that: “That essence (spiritual Truth; pure Consciousness) cannot be attained through arguments and logic.” This Upanishad is the 1st one amongst the Upanishads of the Krishna Yajur Veda tradition.

We read in Ram Charit Manas, Lanka Kand, Chaupai line no. 2 that precedes Doha no. 74 that: “Those who understand the Truth about Lord Ram (the personified form of the Supreme Lord), adore him, without engaging in any arguments.”

The crow-saint Kaagbhusund tells Garud, the celestial mount of Lord Vishnu, in Ram Charit Manas, Uttar Kand, Doha no. 90 that: “Those who are wise and have a stable mind abhor all sorts of arguments and doubting while they adore and worship Lord Ram who is a fount of mercy and compassion, and who gives joy to all.”

The next verse no. 75 explains these points further.]

७५ बाहुल्यावकाशत्वाद् अनियतत्वाच् च

75 bāhulyāvakaśatvād aniyatatvāc ca

(75) There can be endless views on any given subject, and no certain conclusion can be reached. So arguments and debates leading to controversies are best avoided.

[This verse explains why one should not engage in arguments and debates. Refer to the note appended to the previous verse no. 74 which has already explained this principle elaborately.

The world is a vast place full of diverse things, and endless permutations and combinations of these things. So it is well nigh impossible to prove any one thing conclusively. A wise man should be focused on his goal; he should aim at reaching his destination within the limited time he has in his hands before death comes calling. Scholarship and worldly acclaim will not liberate his soul from the quagmire in which it has found itself if the person does not listen to the sane advice given by wise and enlightened saints and sages as is done by sage Narad in his present 'Book of Spiritual Advice' known as the "Bhakti Sutras". Narad Bhakti Sutra.

In Srimad Bhagvat Geeta, Canto 3, verse no. 31, Lord Krishna says: "Those who follow my teaching without arguing and raising petty objections will have supreme knowledge of the Truth."

It is said in Kaivalya Upanishad, 1/ 2, that: "Know the Truth by contemplation, faith and devotion. These are necessary, while nothing else is. If one does not follow this advice, one would be completely lost."

But does this injunction means that one should stop thinking and become blind? The next verse no. 76 addresses this question.]

७६ भक्तिशास्त्राणि मननीयानि तद्बोधककर्माणि करणीयानि

76 bhakti-śāstrāṇi mananīyāni tad-bodhaka-karmāṇi karaṇīyāni

(76) Books or sacred scriptures that deal with the virtue of Bhakti (devotion and love for Lord God) should be studied and reflected upon, and their teachings followed diligently.

[One must study devotional literature and follow their instructions in practical life. The message contained in devotional books should be correctly understood and followed in life. These books will show a spiritual aspirant the path to God-realisation, how to actually achieve this goal in life, and warn him of the different pitfalls that he may encounter on the way as well as give him advice on how to overcome them. These books also highlight the characters of exalted devotees of the Lord God, which in turn helps others to seek such persons for guidance.

One must be careful to avoid reading books that refute the existence of God and give endless arguments in favour of this idea. This will create doubts and confusions in the mind of a devotee which would lead him astray and fall from his path. This situation would be the same as the one referred to in verse nos. 74-75 where it is said that a devotee should not get involved in arguments and debates as it leads to the vexation of the spirit and cause endless delusions.

A wise person would read them personally, listen to discourses given on them by wise teachers, and consult saints to remove any trace of doubt that he may still have. These books are conducive to one's spiritual growth.

In the context of this verse, refer to the earlier verse no. 12 which also lays emphasis on the study of scriptures to acquire correct knowledge about devotion.

There are many such books on the theme of devotion for Lord God, such as the present book Narad Bhakti Sutra. Then there are others, such as the Shandilya Bhakti Sutra, the Ramayan (that narrates the life and times of Lord Ram who was an incarnation of the Supreme Being), Lord Krishna's Srimad Bhagvad Geeta, Srimad Bhagvad Mahapurān, etc.

In the next verse no. 77, sage Narad says that one must embark on this spiritual journey forthwith, without waiting any further and procrastinating. Perhaps he was addressing a category of people who can't decide what to do.]

७७ सुखदुःखेच्छालाभादित्यक्ते काले प्रतीक्षमाणे क्षणार्धम् अपि व्यर्थं न नेयम्

77 sukha-duḥkhecchā-lābhādi-tyakte kāle pratīkṣamāṇe kṣaṇārdham api vyartham na neyam

(77) One must not waste even a fleeting moment in embarking on the path of devotion and love for Lord God in the hope that at some point of time in the future he would be able to follow this spiritual path easily when he is able to overcome the emotions of joys and sorrows, of pleasures and pain, and is also able to renounce all desires for worldly gain, etc. in a natural way.

[A person should not wait for some good or right opportunity that he thinks would come in the future that would help him to walk on the path of devotion and love for Lord God easily. He is warned here that such chance may never come at all.

This world is transient and perishable, life is transient and momentary. Similarly, the world is an endless ocean of wants and temptations, and they will never end; renunciation may never come if one does not renounce now and here. So that distant dream of a good and right opportunity when one would start practicing devotion for Lord God may never materialize at all.

One must start doing good work immediately without wasting any time. So this verse essentially says that a wise person is one who would start on his spiritual journey right at the moment when this thought comes to him. He must not waste time and think that he would first engage in quenching his thirst for enjoyment of the world and then once he is satisfied it would be easy for him to renounce this world and follow the path of devotion and spiritualism as this path needs renunciation as a basic step for which he is not prepared at the moment. That utopian opportunity when he will have complete renunciation of the world with a burning eagerness in his heart to find the Lord God by having love and devotion for him will always elude him if he thinks he should wait for it. The best time to have devotion and love for Lord God is right *now*!]

७८ अहिंसासत्यशौचदयास्तिक्त्यादिवारिऱ्याणि परिपालनीयानि

78 ahimsā-satya-śauca-dayāstikyādi-cāritryāṇi paripālaniyāni

(78) A spiritual aspirant (i.e. a devotee) should inculcate noble virtues in him and practice an auspicious and righteous way of life. For instance, he must diligently practice an exemplary level of non-violence and non-injury to others in all its forms (direct or indirect), truthfulness and honesty (at all levels of existence), cleanliness and purity (internal and external), mercy and compassion (for all the creatures), firm faith in the Lord God, virtuousness of character, etc.

[Reading spiritual books, keeping company of saints, renouncing the world, worshipping the Lord God and other spiritual ways of life would have a naturally purifying effect upon a devotee. But he must also be careful to note the special characteristic features of a holy person enumerated in this verse as they act as milestones that would tell him how much success he has obtained in his spiritual path.

It would be noted that all these virtues are naturally present in a saintly person. Lord Ram has himself lauded them in Ram Charit Manas, (i) Aranya Kand, from Chaupai line no. 6 that precedes Doha no. 44—to Chaupai line no. 8 that precedes Doha no. 46, and (ii) Uttar Kand, Chaupai line no. 6 that precedes Doha no. 37—to Doha no. 38.

The virtues listed in this verse are the inner qualities in a person that would make him a true devotee of the Lord God, and an embodiment of the Lord himself. These qualities are the noble values one honours in life and should pursue; they are the virtues one should inculcate in his own inner self; he should imbibe them so that they become a part of his personal character.

These practices help a spiritual aspirant to thoroughly clean his inner-self. Now, the next question is: What should one do when the mind and the inner-self has become calm and purified, and hence is now ready to welcome the Lord God and have devotion for him? This is answered in the next verse no. 79.]

७९ सर्वदा सर्वभावेन निश्चिन्तैर् भगवान् एव भजनीयः

79 sarvadā sarva-bhāvena niścintair bhagavān eva bhajanīyaḥ

(79) Once the inner-self has become calm and purified, one becomes free from all anxieties regarding everything pertaining to the world and its sense objects. Thus, being carefree from worries, one should focus one's attention exclusively to having devotion for the Lord God and worshipping him.

[In the context of what has been said in this verse, refer to the previous verse nos. 7-10, 16-17, 33, 37 and 48 also. The reward for such single-minded worship is highlighted in verse no. 80 that follows herein below.

When true renunciation sprouts and takes a firm root in a devotee's inner-being, he is now ready to devote himself full-time to worshipping his beloved Lord God. This 'worshipping' takes the form of love and remembrance of the Lord, singing the Lord's divine glories, remaining submerged in the thoughts of the Lord, doing selfless service to the Lord, and surrendering all fruits of one's actions and deeds to him. All these means of worshipping the Lord have been discussed earlier in different verses.

For a person who has known the truth of the Lord God, there is nothing better than worshipping the Lord with his entire being, for this gives him eternal joy and delight unbound.

There is an excellent verse in Ram Charit Manas, Sundar Kand which pointedly reiterates this spiritual truth. In its Chaupai line no. 3 that precedes Doha no. 34, Lord Shiva tells his consort Uma: “Listen Uma! Those who know the true nature of Lord Ram (who is a personified form of the Supreme Being), they think of nothing else but worshipping the Lord (by way of having unwavering and deepest form of devotion and love for the Lord).”

Lord Krishna says in Srimad Bhagvat Geeta, Canto 18, verse nos. 65-66: “Surrender (give) your mind to me, have devotion for me, worship me and bow (pay respect) to me. If you do it, you will certainly come to me and me alone. I promise you this, for then you will be exceptionally dear to me. Surrender all your duties to me who am the Supreme Lord of the world, and become carefree by taking refuge with me. Don’t worry then for I will take care of you and free you of all your sins.”]

८० स कीर्त्यमानः शीघ्रम् एवाविर्भवत्य् अनुभावयति भक्तान्

80 sa kīrtiyamānaḥ śīghram evāvirbhavaty anubhāvayati bhaktān

(80) When the devotee invokes the divine glories of the Lord God (remembers the Lord, recites his glories and holy name), the Lord reveals himself immediately to him. The blessed devotee feels the divine presence of the Lord God always near and inside himself.

[Refer to verse nos. 17, 37 and 55 in this context.

In the previous verse no. 79 it has been said that a devotee should worship the Lord sincerely after having renounced everything else. If he does so then the Lord promises him that he will manifest himself before him without delay.

We read in Ram Charit Manas, Baal Kand, Chaupai line nos. 1-2 that precede Doha no. 116 that: “There is no difference between the Lord’s two forms, one with attributes (Saguna) and the other without attributes (Nirguna)—so assert great sages and seers. But the invisible form of the Lord that has no attributes becomes visible to a devotee because the Lord reveals himself due to the devotee’s love for him and his wish to see the Lord in a physical form.”

A true devotee has only one wish, and it is to have unwavering devotion for the Lord God. His only prayer is that the Lord should abide in his heart forever. Refer: Ram Charit Manas, Aranya Kand, Chaupai line no. 21 that precedes Doha no. 11 where sage Sutikshan has made this request to Lord Ram.

A devotee who worships the Lord after abandoning all other hopes and desires is promised by the Lord that such a devotee is very dear to him and the Lord loves him from the core of his heart. To wit, the Lord would therefore reside in the heart of such a devotee and be always close to him—refer Ram Charit Manas, (i) Ayodhya Kand, Doha nos. 129, 130 and 131, as well as (ii) Uttar Kand, Doha no. 87.

In verse nos. 7, 9, 10-11 of Canto 10 in Srimad Bhagvat Geeta, Lord Krishna also reiterates the same thing. In verse no. 7 the Lord says: “Those who know my supreme reality and divinity get established in me because they would develop unfaltering devotion for me.” In verse no. 9 he says: “A devotee who has surrendered

himself and his life to me, who has his mind fixed upon me, who speaks of me and enlightens others about me—such a devotee remains contented, he takes delight in me and he abides in me (i.e. in remembering me and talking about me he finds the greatest of joy and contentedness).” In verse no. 10 the Lord enjoins: “Those who are united with me by practice of meditation, those who worship me with love and devotion, I grant them wisdom by which they come to me.” In verse no. 11 the Lord says: “I bless such devotees by showering my grace upon them and reside in their hearts. This removes the darkness of ignorance from their inner-self, and I grant them with the light of enlightenment.”

We have read in verse no. 34 that learned teachers have enumerated a number of ways by which devotion for Lord God can be practiced. The verses that follow enumerate these virtues. Let us recapitulate these spiritual virtues quickly now. To become God-realised and attain eternal blessedness that accompanies this spiritual achievement, a devotee should follow certain spiritual disciplines. Some of them are listed here in brief:-

(i) Practice renunciation and self-restraint (verse nos. 7-10, 35, 48); (ii) worship the Lord God, always remember him and sing his divine glories (verse nos. 16-17, 19, 36, 37, 55, 77, 79-80); (iii) have company of saintly persons and avoid evil company (verse nos. 38, 42-44, 63); (iv) overcome anger, desires, infatuations, confusions, doubts and irrational thinking (verse no. 44); (v) overcome attachment (verse no. 46); (vi) rise above the effects of the three types of Gunas and thus become neutral and stable (verse no. 47); (vii) renounce the fruits of deeds and actions and offer everything to the Lord (verse nos. 11,19, 48); (viii) develop the purest form of love for Lord God, a love that is not conditioned by any factor, a love that is eternal and spontaneous (verse nos. 19—21, 54-55, 66); (ix) to completely surrender to the Lord God and leave everything to him (verse nos. 35, 61, 65); (x) overcome pride, ego, haughtiness and hypocrisy etc. (verse no. 64); (xi) not get involved in debates, controversies and arguments (verse no. 75); (xii) study and practice the teaching of devotional books (verse no. 76); (xiii) practice non-violence, compassion, truthfulness, purity and faith (verse no. 78); (xiv) practice humility and simplicity (verse no. 27); (xv) acquire knowledge and devotion simultaneously as they complement each other, for devotion without knowledge would be blind faith which would certainly be open to doubting and confusion as well as the fear of fall (verse nos. 12-13, 23, 29); (xvi) avoid women, wealth and atheists (verse no. 63); (xvii) remember the Lord God every moment of life (verse nos. 68, 70).]

८१ त्रिसत्यस्य भक्तिर् एव गरीयसी भक्तिर् एव गरीयसी

81 trisatyasya bhaktir eva gariyasī bhaktir eva gariyasī

(81) It is a universal and unequivocal truth that in all the three worlds, in all the three planes of time, in all the three phases of life (viz. the past, the present, and the future)—there is nothing better than having Bhakti (devotion) for the Lord God. Bhakti is indeed the best means for spiritual welfare that a person should accept; Bhakti is surely the best means for a person to accept for his spiritual welfare; Bhakti alone is the best means that a person should accept for his spiritual welfare.

[Refer also to the previous verse nos. 33, 58 and 79 that say that Bhakti is the best of all spiritual practices.

The word “*trisyasya*” means ‘a truth that is repeated three times to stress that there is no doubt about its authenticity and veracity’. It is like an oath taken in a court of law to emphasize that what has been said is the absolute and the only truth, that there is no but and ifs in it.

It also means ‘a truth that stands good in all the three phases or aspects of existence’, such as the past, the present and the future.

An observation is done at three levels—the physical level of one’s personal observation, the oral level when one hears of it from someone else who speaks about it, and the mental level when one analyses anything to decide the authenticity and veracity of what has been observed personally and heard being spoken about by others. In the case of Bhakti, all the three levels of observations endorse the fact there is nothing better than Bhakti for a person’s spiritual welfare.

There is one more very interesting interpretation of the word “*trisyasya*” appearing in the text. It means ‘an entity that is true in all the three phases of existence and time—the past, the present and the future’. What is that entity? The obvious answer is: ‘the Supreme Being’, the ‘Lord God’, the ‘Lord of the World’, ‘the Brahm’, the ‘Cosmic Consciousness’. So in this context, this verse would definitely mean “Bhakti or devotion for the Supreme Lord of the World is the best form of spiritual activity that a person can engage in his life, for it ensures his welfare in the present life as well as in the future life, besides destroying all the sins that he may have committed in his past life and brought forward by him to his present life.”

The fact that the Lord God is the only Truth in existence is affirmed in Srimad Bhagvat Mahapuran, 10/2/26, which says: “The Lord is the only Truth in all the three phases of time. Devotion for this Lord is therefore the only true way of having this virtue. To wit, there may be many other deities who are all to be paid respect, but for one’s own spiritual welfare he is advised to surrender himself to none but the Supreme Lord alone and worship him exclusively as he is the only truthful Lord of creation.”

There are other verses in Narad Bhakti Sutra that also reiterate this basic fact about Bhakti—that it is the best tool one has for achieving his spiritual goal in life. Refer earlier verse nos. 25, 33.

The glories of Bhakti are so immense that one can go on writing endlessly about it but would still find no end to it. In this context we can cite two instances from Ram Charit Manas where the magnificence and excellence of Bhakti have been highlighted.

In Ram Charit Manas, Uttar Kand, Chaupai line nos. 1-15 that precede Doha no. 120, the saintly crow Kaagbhusund asserts as follows: “I have elucidated at length to you about the principles governing Gyan (esoteric knowledge pertaining to the mysteries of the soul, and how to attain liberation and deliverance as well as beatitude through this path; gnosis).

Now listen carefully about the profound glories, the stupendous spiritual powers, and the magnificent virtues and importance of Bhakti (devotion for Lord God) which is like a priceless Gem. (1)

Oh Garud! Lord Ram’s Bhakti (having devotion, affection, love, faith, belief in the Lord; submission and surrender before him; serving him selflessly) is like a Gem known as ‘Chintaamani’—a magical and priceless self-illuminated gem that removes all sorts of worries and miseries of a person who possesses it.

Any person's heart where it ('the priceless gem symbolising the eclectic spiritual virtue of Bhakti') is found --- (2)

--- is well illuminated day and night. This mystically empowered Gem is self-illuminated, and so it does not need a lamp, ghee (clarified butter) or a wick to keep it lighted with a fluorescent shine. (3)

Once this wonderful Gem is placed in the treasury (heart) of one's inner-self, poverty symbolised by 'Moha' (worldly attractions, attachments and infatuation) does not torment him.

{This is because this Gem inherently possesses the power to remove poverty of all kinds. Whereas an ordinary Gem found in this world would remove sufferings arising out of lack of wealth and material things, the Gem in the form of Bhakti removes all sorts of spiritual troubles and worries of the devotee. 'Moha' is the root cause for all miseries and grief arising out of the various relationships that a creature establishes with the material, gross and perishable world. Bhakti diverts the attention of the creature from the illusive charm and false happiness that he thinks he would get in this mortal world of perishable things, the reason why he is attracted to the world and gets infatuated with it, to the world of eternal spiritual peace and happiness as well as contentedness that he gets by worshipping and having love and devotion for Lord Ram, the Supreme Being in a manifested form.

To wit, the bearer of this Gem does not have to suffer from the dearth of any 'spiritual riches' in the form of beatitude, blessedness, bliss, peace, happiness and contentedness in his life.}

The light that naturally emanates from this mystical Gem cannot be extinguished by the gust of wind represented by 'Lobha' (i.e. greed and temptations of the material sense objects of the world and the desire of the sense organs for gratification).

{This is because the light symbolising spiritual peace, beatitude, blessedness, bliss, happiness and contentedness that emanates from this mystical Gem known as 'Bhakti' comes from within it; it is self-generated. Therefore it needs no protection. It is also not like the light emanating from another Gem known as 'Gyan' because this latter Gem needs great care and constant polishing by way of following many strict spiritual observances and diligent practices to maintain its shine.

Hence, the Gem representing 'Bhakti' is not affected by any external factor like the case of an ordinary oil lamp whose light can be extinguished if there is a strong gust of wind, or the Gem known as 'Gyan' that needs constant care to maintain its brilliant shine for otherwise it would become dull and lustreless.} (4)

In the eternal light shining from this self-illuminated Gem of Bhakti, the darkness symbolising the powerful effects of 'Avidya' (ignorance that gives rise to delusions and its innumerable problems; lack of Vidya; lack of true and correct spiritual knowledge) is automatically eliminated.

{This is because 'light' and 'darkness' can't co-exist. The light of Bhakti dispels the overpowering fear arising out of ignorance and delusions that are like the darkness of night when one is overcome with the horrifying prospects of having to face so many ghosts and phantoms representing countless miseries, grief and torments associated with the mortal life in this gross world of transmigration.}

Hordes of moths representing the many sensual pleasures and material charms of this world fail to extinguish this light of Bhakti by attacking it from all sides.

{Moths are attracted in droves by the flame of a lamp. They crowd around it in such huge numbers that they create a virtual blanket around the flame and suffocate it; they also jump in the flame in hordes, resulting in the flame flickering and dying away

gradually. In this metaphor, the countless sensual pleasures and material charms of the world fail to disturb the inner peace and happiness of a person who has devotion for Lord God in his heart.} (5)

Other insects representing 'Kaam' (lust, passion, longing) and other such wicked tormentors of the soul also aren't able to go near the person who has Bhakti enshrined in his heart. (6)

{The self-effusing light from this Gem helps to eliminate the darkness created by Avidya. The irritating group of insects represented by such negativities as Mada (arrogance, haughtiness, ego, pride and vanity) etc. fail to disturb the Jiva and dirty the environs of the Gem. In the case of an oil lamp, the insects are attracted to its light in their hordes, dance around its flame, get burnt, and die, littering the area around the flame and the lamp. Sometimes it often also happens that they die and fall in the oil and cover its surface with their carcasses, thereby suffocating the wick of its space and the flame of its air, and this result in the flame gradually dying away. In the case of the Gem no such thing can happen because there is no physical flame to attract the insects.

The net effect is that the person in whose heart Bhakti resides, the evil-mongering wicked fellows such as Kaam (worldly passions), Krodha (anger, wrath, fury), Lobha (greed) and their like, do not dare to come near him.}

For a person who has this Gem in the form of Bhakti in his heart, a poison turns into nectar, and an enemy or someone who harbours animosity towards becomes a friend.

Indeed, in all sooth and without gainsay, no one can find true happiness, peace, bliss and contentedness without having this miraculous Gem. (7)

Again, such a fortunate person never suffers from any of the grievous emotional problems and spiritual woes known as 'Manas Roga' (literally meaning mental diseases arising out of emotional disturbances) from which countless creatures suffer interminably. (8)

Anyone in whose subtle heart dwells the Gem representing Bhakti for Lord Ram, such a person can never suffer from a trace of grief, misery and torment of any kind even in his dream. (9)

Therefore, a person is said to be sagacious, erudite, wise and intelligent if he makes an auspicious and all-out diligent effort to acquire this priceless spiritual Gem, and then carefully stores it or enshrines it in the treasury of his heart. To wit, a person who makes diligent effort to acquire this Gem of Bhakti is deemed to be the most wise, clever, intelligent and fortunate amongst all men. (10)

Though the astounding spiritual value and magnificent glory of this Gem (Bhakti) is so obvious in this world, yet one is not able to access or acquire it without the grace of Lord Ram. {This Gem known as 'Bhakti' is not like some precious jewel of this material world that one can find by making concerted effort to acquire it. This Bhakti can only be accessed if Lord Ram shows his grace and kindness upon a seeker.} (11)

Fortunately, the ways and means to access this valuable Gem are also very easy, but the irony is that those who are unlucky and ill-fated fail to employ these opportunities and remain deprived of this priceless jewel. (12)

The scriptures such as the Vedas and the Purans are like the sacred mountains (because they are enormous in their size). The many enchanting stories and fascinating events associated with the life and time of Lord Ram are like the many mines and caves (of precious stones) that are found on these mountains. (13)

Saints and devotees are the people who know the secret of these mines and caves, and how to extract the precious gems hidden in them (like expert minerologists do).

A wise mind and its intelligence is like the sharp pickaxe that is used to dig out the precious gems (representing spiritual rewards that are got by a person who pursues Bhakti).

Gyan (true and analytical knowledge) and Vairagya (renunciation, detachment and dispassion) are the two eyes of such saints and devotees (who are like the minerologists). (14)

{The scriptures such as the Vedas and the Purans are like the holy Mountains; the divine story of Lord Ram, with its numerous versions and interpretations, are like the numerous mines (caves) in them (where spiritual secrets lie hidden and buried); the many sages and saints are the wise ones who know about them and their sacred location (i.e. they can unravel the mysteries of the story and explain them to the eager hearer); and the wise intellect and mind are like the spade, the shovel and the pick-axe which are to be used to unearth the gems hidden in them (i.e. to unravel the holiness, the divinity and spiritual message contained in the story of Lord Ram).

The two eyes needed to see this treasure are represented by the twin virtues of Gyan and Vairagya. One must have a deep and penetrating intellect to understand the import of the message contained in the divine story, and he must have the virtue of renunciation and detachment from this world so that he can concentrate upon benefiting from this knowledge without getting constantly distracted and disturbed by the tug and pull of the mundane world.

To wit, in order to mine the spiritual treasure represented by Bhakti, one must have the two indispensable virtues of 'Gyan' and 'Vairagya'. Just like a blind person who stumbles and falls repeatedly, and it becomes too difficult for him to reach his destination, a spiritual aspirant who has no Gyan and Vairagya in him also finds it virtually impossible to access Bhakti that would grant him sustainable spiritual blessedness, beatitude, felicity, bliss, happiness, contentedness etc, as well as liberation and deliverance from all sorts of worldly sufferings that come naturally with Bhakti.

In the absence of Gyan and Vairagya, even if a person manages to find the Gem known as Bhakti, it would be too hard for him to protect it just like a blind man who may have a priceless gem in his possession but would not be able to protect it from thieves or even his jealous friends who are envious of his good fortune.

This observation is extremely significant in the context of earlier statements where it was said that Gyan is very cumbersome and one should try to steer clear of it. But by likening Gyan as one of the eyes of a wise spiritual seeker of Bhakti, its importance and value is established beyond doubt. In fact, 'Gyan' is one of the two main tools for accessing Bhakti, the other is 'Vairagya'. It is stressed here that Gyan plays an important role in one's spiritual welfare, and it should not be overlooked or undermined or neglected while one pursues Bhakti.

This is because without having true knowledge, enlightenment and wisdom, Bhakti becomes a blind pursuit. Like a blind man groping in the dark to reach his destination, and even if he manages to find what he has been searching for he is not sure of what he has found, a person who does not know his spiritual goal or whom he is worshipping, if he worships some God just because others are doing it, he is bound to falter easily and overcome with doubts and uncertainties when confronted by some fact that is beyond his understanding.

The simplest example we have is that of Garuda himself in this Ramayan. He is an eternal companion of Lord Vishnu as he is the Lord's vehicle, his mount, but he too was overcome with doubt about the reality of Lord Ram, which led him to Kaagbhusund and listen to the story of Lord Ram and told about the truth of the Lord's actual identity. After having Gyan, or true knowledge of who the Lord was, Garuda's doubts and confusions vanished. So the importance of 'Gyan' as an instrument to reinforce Bhakti cannot be underestimated.

Similarly, 'Vairagya' is essential for Bhakti to take a firm root in the heart of the devotee. A person can do one thing at a time; otherwise he would be too distracted to focus on his goal if he tries many things at the same time. If the mind and the heart of a spiritual aspirant are distracted by the countless temptations from the material objects of the world, if the aspirant fails to practice renunciation and detach himself from the world, he won't be able to focus on his actual goal of attaining spiritual blessedness. It is just like a college student or a researcher in an university who does not focus on his studies and wastes his time in worthless indulgences. Either he would fail his exams or pass with a very dismal grade.}

A man who searches for this Gem known as Bhakti with due sincerity and devotion (commitment and diligence) is sure to find it. This Gem is a treasury that is full of all happiness and joy for him; it is a giver of all happiness and joy to him. {To wit, Bhakti grants bliss, beatitude, felicity and blessedness to its adherents. It grants to its followers liberation and deliverance from all miseries and sufferings. It bestows emancipation and salvation to the soul.} (15)"

Once again, we read in Ram Charit Manas, Uttar Kand, Chaupai line no. 3 that precedes Doha no. 85 that Lord Ram has himself praised the virtues of Bhakti, declaring unequivocally that: "Bhakti is a mine or treasury of all joy, happiness and bliss."

The excellence of Bhakti and its stellar ability to help the devotee get rid of the negative consequences of his sins has also been declared in Srimad Bhagvat Mahapurana, 11/14/19, where Lord Krishna tells Uddhav: "Oh Uddhav! Even as a fire that is burning fully is easily and effortlessly able to reduce a huge stock or pile of firewood to ashes, Bhakti for me, done in whatsoever way, is able to burn one's sins completely, and without trace."]

**८२ गुणमाहात्म्यासक्तिरूपासक्तिपूजासक्तिस्मरणासक्
तिदास्यासक्तिसख्यासक्तिवात्सल्यासक्तिकान्तासक्त्या
त्मनिवेदनासक्तितन्मयासक्तिपरमविरहासक्तिरूपै कथाप्य् एकादशधा भवति**

82 guṇa-māhātmyāsakti-rūpāsakti-pūjāsakti-smaraṇāsak ti-dāsyāsakti-sakhyāsakti-vātsalyāsakti-kāntāsakty-ā tma-nivedanāsakti-tan-mayāsakti-parama-virahāsakti-rūpai kadhāpy ekādaśadhā bhavati

(82) Though Bhakti (devotion and love for the Lord God) is one and wholesome, yet it is expressed or it manifests itself in eleven different forms as follows:

- (i) Loving to glorify the divine virtues and attributes of the Lord God.
- (ii) Loving the Lord God's holy, divine form.
- (iii) Loving to offer worship to the Lord God and observing religious rituals dedicated to him.

- (iv) Loving to remember the Lord God and invoking him at all times of life.
- (v) Loving to do selfless service to and for the sake of the Lord God.
- (vi) Loving to be the Lord God's friend; loving the Lord God as if he were a person's best and only friend.
- (vii) Loving the Lord God with the same intensity of emotion and dedication that a parent has for his or her only child.
- (viii) Loving the Lord God as one's beloved (without whom living for a moment appears to be painful and burdensome).
- (ix) Loving to offer one's own self totally to the Lord God; loving to surrender completely before the Lord's holy feet.
- (x) Loving to have a desire to get unification with the Lord God, to be completely one with him, to be fully absorbed in him so much so that no distinction exists between the Lord God and his devotee.
- (xi) And, loving to feel the pain of separation from the Lord God. {Usually this is not something one looks forward to, for this is a sort of a curse. But a true devotee would rather weep in the memory of his beloved Lord God than to suffer any other kind of agony related to the world. This eclectic spiritual state is achieved when a devotee is so deeply in love with his Lord God that even a momentary diversion of his mind from the Lord creates a strong pang of anguish in his heart that is equivalent to the grief of separation that overcomes a person when he is separated from his beloved. When this happens, it can be affirmatively said that this devotee has attained maturity in his Bhakti. }

[The 11 types of devotees of the Lord have been mentioned in this verse by sage Narad. This in a way outlines the eleven forms that devotion takes; they are actually variations of the same virtue of Bhakti because their main objective is the same—to develop devotion and love for the Lord God which lead to spiritual bliss, to liberation of the soul from worldly delusions and miseries, and to attain oneness of the individual's soul with the Supreme Soul of creation so that the cycle of birth and death is terminated for good. They are as follows:—

- (i) Devotees who enjoy praising the Gunas and Mahatmya of the Lord—this involves narrating, singing and generally propagating the glories of the Lord and his divine virtues;
- (ii) Devotees who enjoy in praising the form or Rupa of the Lord God—this involves remembering the divine form of the Lord and worshipping this form;
- (iii) Devotees who enjoy doing worship or Pooja of the Lord God—this involves offering of formal forms of worship to the Lord;
- (iv) Devotees who enjoy remembering the Lord God constantly, i.e. in Smaran of the Lord;
- (v) Devotees who enjoy being a humble servant of the Lord God and serving him selflessly, i.e. in being a Dasa of the Lord; to become a humble servant of the Lord; to serve the Lord with great simplicity and humility, not expecting anything in return; to be ever eager to do anything which would please the Lord;
- (vi) Devotees who enjoy being a friend of the Lord God, a form of devotion that is called Sakhya Bhava—to treat the Lord as one's close friend and companion;
- (vii) Devotees who enjoy the splendour and radiance of the Lord God's divinity and holiness, known as Kanta, that they experience within their own self in the form of their Atma which is pure consciousness; who treat their own Atma as a fraction of the Supreme Atma represented by the Lord God;

(viii) Devotees who enjoy the emotion of Vaatsalya—i.e. who love the Lord God as dearly as one loves one's own children;

(ix) Devotees who enjoy Atma-nivedan—i.e. who submit themselves completely to the Lord God; who pray to the Lord internally;

(x) Devotees who have Tanmayataa, i.e. who enjoy being submerged in the thoughts of the Lord God so much so that they lose awareness of themselves as well as their surrounding; who remain perpetually engrossed in the thoughts of the Lord and to remain lost in the bliss derived from it;

(xi) And, devotees who enjoy Param-viraha—i.e. who suffer gravely due to separation from the Lord just like a lover remains submerged in grief if his loved one is separated from him.

Narada's eleven ways of Bhakti appear to be a combination in which devotion and love for Lord God can be practiced by a spiritual aspirant. They help a person to achieve spiritual purification and God-realisation in one way or the other.

Now, let us briefly see some examples of devotees who had attained bliss and liberation perfection by following one or the other paths of Bhakti. This list is just for the purpose of illustration, for there are countless other devotees who have also enjoyed bliss of God-realisation. This list is not strictly in order of the ways of Bhakti listed herein above, but gives us an idea of the essence of the theme.

(i) King Parikshit attended salvation by hearing the glories of Lord Krishna. The saintly crow named Kaagbhusund attained eternity and bliss by hearing the divine story of Lord Ram. Garud, the mount of Lord Vishnu, attained freedom from delusions by hearing the divine glories of Lord Ram from Kaagbhusund. Similarly, sage Sukdeo, the parrot-saint, attained bliss and beatitude by narrating the divine glories of the Lord.

(ii) The four celestial sages known as Sanat Kumars and sage Narad gained perfection by singing the glories of the Lord.

(iii) The devotee named Prahalad realized the Lord by remembering him.

(iv) Laxman and Bharat, the younger brothers of Lord Ram, attained bliss and perfection by serving the Lord.

(v) Hanuman, the legendary monkey devotee of Lord Ram, attained perfection by physical service to the Lord, and by constantly remembering the Lord's holy name.

(vi) King Prithu attained an exalted stature by worshipping the Lord.

(vii) Dhruva and Akrura attained the Lord by offering prayers to him.

(viii) Arjuna became perfect by befriending the Lord.

(ix) King Bali and Vibhishan (the brother of Ravana, the demon king of Lanka) attained fame by offering everything to the Lord.

(x) Manu and Satrupa attained the Lord by loving him as their beloved son Lord Ram in their next birth as king Dasrath and his queen Kaushalya of Ayodhya.

(xi) The citizens of Ayodhya attained the bliss of God-realisation by suffering the pangs of separation from Lord Ram when he was away from them for fourteen years during which period the Lord had eliminated the demons led by their king Ravana of Lanka. Similarly, the Gopis of Vrindavan attained perfection in spiritualism by the pangs of pain they suffered upon separation from Lord Krishna.]

८३ इत्य् एवं वदन्ति जनजल्पनिर्भया एकमताः

कुमारव्यासशुकशाण्डिल्यगर्गविष्णुकौण्डिल्यशेषोद्धवारुणबलिहनूमद्विभीषणादयो
भवत्याचार्याः

83 ity evaṁ vadanti jana-jalpa-nirbhayā eka-matāḥ kumāra-vyāsa-śuka-
śāṇḍilya-garga-viṣṇu-kaunḍilya-śeṣoddhavāruṇi-bali-hanūmad-vibhīṣaṇādayo
bhakty-ācāryāḥ

(83) Wise, learned, acclaimed and God-realised saints, seers, teachers and practitioners of Bhakti (bhakty-ācāryāḥ) have unanimously affirmed this (i.e. they have unequivocally endorsed what has already been said in the preceding verses) without being afraid of inviting ignominy for their views, or hoping to be praised for it.

[Now, a list of such exalted devotees is given.] These illustrious devotees are the following: Sanat Kumars, Veda Vyas, Shukdeo, Shandilya, Garga, Vishnu, Kaundinya, Sesha, Uddhava, Aaruni, Bali, Hanuman, Vibhishan, etc.

[Sages and seers are not afraid of saying the truth. They are not concerned about the way the world would treat their views—whether it would accept their advice or reject it. These pious and self-realised souls had personally experimented with Bhakti for a lifetime, and they experienced success with it. They concluded that of all other spiritual paths that have been prescribed in the different scriptures for one’s spiritual well-being and attaining eternal bliss and freedom from the torments associated with the cycle of birth and death, this single path known as Bhakti is the best and the easiest one of them. So they thought it wise to share their personal experiences with other devotees so that they too can benefit from it.

They were dispassionate in their teaching; they had no one to appease or provoke. They weren’t afraid if the world would receive their advice with scorn and ridicule, or welcome it as a panacea for spiritual ills that overwhelm the creature. They taught the Truth that they themselves had experimented with and experienced success in.

An important point to note here is that just like the fact that ‘Truth’ is one, constant and universal in nature, the advice given by these teachers regarding Bhakti is also one and the same, without any trace of doubt and without any ambiguity.]

८४ य इदं नारदप्रोक्तं शिवानुशासनं विश्वसिति श्रद्धते स भक्तिमान् भवति स प्रेष्ठं
लभते स प्रेष्ठं लभत इति

84 ya idaṁ nārada-proktaṁ śivānuśāsanam viśvasiti śraddhate sa bhaktimān
bhavati sa preṣṭhaṁ labhate sa preṣṭhaṁ labhata iti

(84) Thus (“iti”), he who believes and has faith in these spiritual principles related to Bhakti as expounded by sage Narad and commanded (or decided) by Lord Shiva, is able to attain devotion and love for the Lord God; he is able to attain his beloved (i.e. the Lord God) as well as perfection in his spiritual objectives in life (i.e. attain eternal

bliss, beatitude and peace; is able to attain liberation, deliverance, salvation and emancipation).

Indeed, a practitioner of Bhakti is able to establish himself and attain perfection in his spiritual pursuit by following the principles laid down by sage Narad and Lord Shiva. Indeed he can do so; there is no doubt in it!

[An important point to note here is that the origin of these eclectic spiritual principles related to Bhakti is attributed to Lord Shiva. Sage Narad is merely expounding upon them; he is only 'spreading the good word' that was originally conceived by Lord Shiva for the good of mankind.

Lord Shiva is the most enlightened amongst the pantheon of Gods. It is believed that he is the God who had first conceived the divine story of Lord Ram in his mind, and then enshrined it reverentially in his heart as it bestowed upon him immense spiritual peace and bliss. Lord Shiva remains perpetually immersed in doing meditation and contemplation, in remembering the Lord and his holy name; he is the patron God of ascetics; he practices an exemplary level of renunciation, detachment and dispassion. He is a self-realised Soul par-excellence. Hence, Lord Shiva is the best moral preceptor and the best guide to teach what Bhakti consists of.

Sage Narad is a blessed soul too, for he is not only the mind-born son of the creator Brahma but a beloved devotee of Lord Vishnu, the Supreme Being, who practiced Bhakti every moment of his existence. He is loved by the Lord as Narad always ensures that all the creatures ultimately develop love and devotion for the Lord. Wherever he goes he teaches the path of Bhakti that would help the creature attain freedom from worldly miseries as well as freedom from the cycle of birth and death. So wherever he goes he is warmly welcomed and shown respect. He is trusted and respected even by the demons who generally detest saints.

Another important point to note is that one must have firmness of faith and belief in this spiritual path, in the advice given by learned teachers, and in the Lord God himself. Doubts and skepticism lead one nowhere. They only create confusion and perplexities. This has already been stressed in verse no. 75.

The last word "iti" means that this discussion is now concluded.]

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Appendix 1

A Brief Life-Sketch of Sage Narad

The celestial sage Narad is said to be a manifestation of the Supreme Being's Mana (mind and its thoughts, intentions, hopes, desires and wishes, as well as the heart and its emotions and sentiments). The Supreme Being implements his wishes and expresses his intentions and wishes by making Narad his spokesperson. Purans list uncountable instances when Narad has approached people—both the good and righteous as well as the demonic and unrighteous ones—to tell them the path best suited to them, and the wise ones treated this advise as the Lord's wish while the unwise ones still benefited from it because Narad's intention was always to turn a living being away from his sinful ways and lead him towards the good.

Since he is a personified Mana, he is as fickle, unstable and transient as the Mana—never staying at one place for more than a fleeting moment, always roaming here and there in the entire creation, having nothing to stop his path as he could go anywhere he wished. And the remarkable thing is that he was never unwelcome anywhere—even the demons welcomed him with the same respect as did the Gods.

It is believed that he is born in each Kalpa to carry out the wishes of the Supreme Being. [1 Kalpa is equivalent to 4.32 billion human years.] He was a Gandharva (a semi-God who is a celestial musician) named Upbarhan in the previous Kalpa. He was physically very charming and an expert musician. Once he showed his amorous intentions towards Urvashi, a celestial dancer, in the presence of Brahma the creator where he was supposed to show exemplary restraint, and this overt show of lust resulted in his being cursed by Brahma that he would become fallen and take birth in the mortal world as a Shudra (a low caste). So, he was born from a maid servant of low caste working as a devoted servant of a learned Brahmin. Under the constant companion of this great Brahmin, Narad developed noble and auspicious virtues in him even though he was a mere child of five years. He was very modest, devoted, pious, noble hearted and diligent.

Since he had the Lord's genes in him, his inclinations were more inclined towards the Spirit than the worldly charms of material sense objects which he detested from childhood. As luck would have it, once some wondering mendicants came to spend the four-month period of the rainy season in the hermitage of this Brahmin. Narad served them with great devotion. Impressed by his service and having some inner vision of his high spiritual stature and the spark of divinity that was lying hidden in him waiting for an opportune moment to leap up and shine through, they blessed him, taught him meditation and contemplation, besides initiating the child into the path of the Lord.

Thus, the dormant fire of renunciation and spiritual awareness was immediately ignited in Narad's little heart and he wished to take to Sanyas (a renunciate's life marks by constant wandering as a mendicant in search of the supreme bliss and Truth), but he did not wish to hurt his mother's emotions. But the Lord had other plans for him, and soon his wish was fulfilled when his loving mother died of snake bite while milking a cow. Instead of grieving at such a loss in human

terms, the child Narad felt happy as if the last fetter was broken and he was liberated from worldly obligations.

He immediately headed north towards the mighty Himalaya Mountains to do severe Tapa (penance and austerity) to attain access to the Supreme Being. The little one walked on and on, and finally he was so tired and exhausted that when he saw a cool lake he drank water, ate fruits that he found there, and sat under the shadow of a tree and became lost in meditation. Lord Vishnu revealed himself in his four-arm form in his heart, but Narad was so thrilled and excited with this divine vision that he wished to see the Lord in practical terms with his physical eyes rather than the subtle eyes while he was in deep meditation. But as soon as he opened the eyes, the Lord vanished. Most sorry and overwhelmed with this loss, the child began to cry bitterly. Then a cosmic formless reverberating voice said—‘Oh son! Your penance is accepted, and I do love you. Though I bless you with an eternal life and that your memory of me would never be erased, but you would not be able to see me with physical eyes in this world. So go back to the world and carry out my divine mandate for me. Become my messenger and go preach the path of my devotion and holy name to this world so that other unfortunate creatures also can get liberation and deliverance from the fetters in which they have bound themselves with no one to show them an easy and practical way out of their predicaments. Go and preach my message to such people in every corner of the earth; go and preach my devotion and let them have faith in my holy name. Your salvation would come naturally and automatically to you as an unasked reward.’

Narad turned back with this divine mandate of the Lord to be carried out just like the great Apostles of Lord Jesus Christ had went, on the Lord’s instructions, to spread his message to the people on this earth. Henceforth, he wandered in the entire creation like a mendicant, with an Indian lute upon which he sang the Lord’s glories and his divine name, spreading the divine message of the Lord’s mercy, compassion, benevolence and love everywhere, attempting to turn everyone towards the Lord and away from this sinful and mortal world so that each individual creature could get his spiritual liberation and deliverance. Such are the ways of great and holy saints that instead of being selfish to seek his own liberation and deliverance from the Lord as the grant of a boon and letting the rest of the world go to hell, Narad chose to sacrifice his own life, liberation and deliverance at the altar of larger good of creation and to fulfill the wish of the Lord. Of course there is another twist to this tale—the Lord does not select everyone to carry on his own divine agenda, and a soul who the Lord designates for this purpose is indeed the most favoured and lucky one—because the Emperor chooses only those upon whom he has utmost confidence to carry out his personal task. It is just like Jesus choosing his disciples and ordaining them the task of spreading his glorious Gospel of love and salvation.

Therefore, Narad, the apostle of the Supreme Being, is the most loved disciple of the Lord, and it is evidenced by the fact that he is the only saint who has unrestricted access to the abode of the Trinity Gods (Lord Vishnu the sustainer and protector of creation, Brahma the creator and Shiva the concluder of this creation) besides every nook and corner of creation without hindrance and even without seeking any previous permission and appointment from anyone, be it a God or a Demon or anybody else. Narad’s visit was always for the host’s long term good, so he was always welcome and revered.

When the time came and the age of the physical body ended, he left the mortal coil like a serpent leaves its cuticle and went to heaven to sing the Lord’s holy and

divine name in the presence of Brahma, the old patriarch of creation. At the end of the Kalpa, at the time of Doomsday, he merged and became one with Brahma, the creator.

When the new cycle of creation came into being, he was born again from the Mana (mind) of Brahma the creator after the Sankadi sages were born. That is why, in the present Kalpa, Narad is called the 'Manas Putra' of Brahma, i.e. the son born out of Brahma's mental powers or his wishes. With this heritage and gene running in his blood, it is natural that he is highly respected and regarded as one of the greatest devotees of Lord Vishnu who is the Supreme Being personified. It is from the navel of Lord Vishnu that Brahma, the creator of the visible world, was born atop a divine Lotus that emerged from it while he was reclining on the bed made of the coiled body of the legendary serpent named Seshnath who floated on the surface of the celestial ocean of milk called Kshirsagar.

Narad preached renunciation of this material world and an extreme sense of faith in and complete devotion for Lord Hari (Narayan, Vishnu, the Supreme Being). But this was against the process of creation, because if everyone followed the path preached by Narad and renounced the material world then the process of propagation of the world and its inhabitant creatures along with its development would come to a naught. So, when Narad preached renunciation and detachment from this material world of sense objects that was mortal, transient and never a giver of peace and happiness to the ten thousand mental sons who were created by Daksha Prajapati (the first male from whom the rest of the human race was born and who was assigned the task by Brahma to propagate creation) in order to propagate this human race, Narad obviously annoyed him. These sons were preached by Narad and they all became mendicants, renouncing their attachment with this life and all charms of the material world along with the desire to enjoy it, gratify their sense organs and remain entangled in affairs of this world. Daksha Prajapati was exasperated and he created another set of ten thousand sons. But when Narad again played spoil-sport, Daksha cursed him that Narad would have to remain on the move always and he would not be able to stay at one place for more than two 'Gharis'. [1 Ghari = 24 minutes. In practice the term means a very short period of time; a fleeting moment as small as batting an eyelid.] As a result of this curse, Narad became an ever-wandering mendicant. But this suited the divine mandate of the Lord—for now Narad was forced to keep on the move and reach newer corners of the worldly and celestial realm to preach the Lord's message amongst the mortal creatures on earth and the Gods and Spirits in the heaven.

It is believed that Narad is immortal and is symbolic of the stupendous powers of a man's mind. The mind is ever-wandering like Narad, and the subtle message in the entire lore is that one should tame this restless mind and train it to turn away from this mortal engrossing material world and instead turn towards the Lord for finding permanent liberation and deliverance from this world. A wise mind would teach (preach) the aspirant about the futility of pursuing this artificial world, and instead seek ways of finding the Truth that gives eternity and brings to an end the endless litany of miseries and horrors, perplexities and confusions, restlessness and agitations that are invariably associated with un-truth, delusions and ignorance.

Narad was the most erudite and scholarly devotee of the Lord. No other sage or saint could match him in his scholarly acumen and profundity of wisdom (ref. Chandogya Upanishad, Canto 7, section 1, verse no. 2). Narad is also credited with the composition of the great Sutra (formula or key) called 'Narad Bhakti Sutra' which defines the eclectic principles and characteristics of the spiritual practice called Bhakti which is to have a profound and exemplary degree of devotion for and surrender to

the Supreme Being. Narad himself epitomizes Bhakti at its most refined and developed form.

In Atharva Veda's *Narad Parivrajak Upanishad*, sage Narad has taught an assembly of sages the grand philosophy as well as the eclectic tenets of Sanyas, the life of total renunciation, detachment and dispassion, leading to one's spiritual liberation and deliverance.

The Atharva Veda's *Hayagriva Upanishad* has been revealed to sage Narad by Brahma the creator when the sage approached the latter with his quest for Brahm-Vidya, the knowledge of Brahm.

In *Garud Upanishad* of the Atharva Veda tradition, the creator Brahma has taught Narad the esoteric knowledge known as the 'Garud Vidya' which describes the secret Mantras pertaining to Garud, the divine mount of Lord Vishnu, as well as the Mantras which can help to counter the evil effects of all types of poisons arising from snake bites.

It was sage Narad who had told Valmiki the story of the Lord Ram which the latter penned down in the form of the epic *Ramayan* by sage Valmiki.

In Tulsidas' epic *Ram Charit Manas*, Lord Ram had explained to Narad why the Lord had not allowed him to marry in great detail. In essence the Lord told him that once he had taken the vows of renunciation and detachment to lead a life of a wandering hermit or friar, it would have been very wrong to marry. At the same time, the Lord has outlined the characteristic virtues of saints in the same discourse. Refer: *Ram Charit Manas*, Aranya Kand, from Chaupai line no. 1 that precedes Doha no. 43—to Chanda line no. 4 that precedes Doha no. 46.

Sage Narad was the greatest exponent of the spiritual practice of "Bhakti", the path of devotion and love that leads to God-realisation. He is famous as the sage who had expounded on the eclectic spiritual philosophy of Bhakti in his book of aphorisms on this theme, called "*Narad Bhakti Sutra*". It is believed that the principles of devotion and love for the Lord God that he has enunciated in this book were originally conceived by Lord Shiva, and Narad had been ordained by the Lord to spread this good message far and wide as the sage used to roam around in every corner of this creation.

Narad was a selfless saint, and therefore he was respected by all wherever he went. Even the demons praised him and welcomed him because they knew that he would always give them such advice as would be good for them. Everyone knew that Narad always taught of ways that would provide liberation and deliverance to the soul of all the creatures, and that his company will always do some good for even the greatest of sinners.

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Appendix 2

About the Author

Ajai Kumar Chhawchharia left home when he was approximately 29 years of age due to an inner call of his heart that told him to devote his life in the service of his beloved Lord God, Sri Ram. Worldly attractions did not enchant him at all. So, he didn't marry, and after his father's death he came and settled permanently in Ayodhya, the holy town in India associated with Lord Ram.

Presently he works as an honorary manager of a world famous Kanak Bhavan Temple at Ayodhya, and spends his time writing in English so that the world can access the wonderful nectar of metaphysical, spiritual and devotional philosophy that is contained in Indian scriptures for which they are so renowned.

His English Books published separately by a reputed publisher of India, the details of whom can be had by contacting the author on his email given below, include: (i) The series on '108 Upanishads' in five volumes having eighteen parts, (ii) Veda Vyas' 'Adhyatma Ramayan' in two parts, (iii) 'Devi Puran Ramayan', (iv) Valmiki's 'Adbhut Ramayan', and (v) 'Biography of Lord Ram' based on Tulsidas' books.

Genre of Writing: Spiritualism, Philosophy, Metaphysics, Religious, Devotional and Theological.

The author's Books are available for order online both in 'e-book' format and 'paper-back book' format at following websites—

- (a) www.amazon.com (in their 'kindle' + 'paper-back book' versions),
- (b) www.pothi.com (in 'paper-back book' version),
- (c) www.draft2digital.com (in 'e-book' version) through the following platforms: (i) Apple (ibooks), (ii) Barnes & Noble (nook), (iii) 24 Symbols, (iv) Kobo, (v) Page Foundry, (vi) Scribd, (vii) Tolino etc.:-

List of Books that are currently available as mentioned above :-

(A) (1) The Chariot of God: Dharma Rath; (2) OM and Naad; (3) YOGA—Its Practice and Philosophy according to the Upanishads; (4) Ram Geeta; (5) The Revelation of Creation—as envisioned in the Upanishads; (6) The Pentagon of Creation: As Expounded in the Upanishads; (7) The Triumvirate of Creation; (8) Maya: The Whirlpool of Delusions in Creation; (9) Surdas-Ram Charitawali; (10-a) The legend of Lord Shiva: Book 1 'Lord Shiva's marriage with Parvati'; (10-b) Book 2 'Lord Shiva's Sacred Hymns'; (10-c) Book 3 'Shiva's different names & their significance, Shiva Puran, Upanishads'; (11) the Mahavakyas of the Upanishads; (13) Lord Ram's marriage with Sita (based on Tulsidas' books "Ram Charit Manas", "Janki Mangal", "Ram Lala Nahachu" & "Geetawali", and sage Veda Vyas' book "Adhyatma Ramayan"; (14) "Anthology of Sacred Hymns, Stotras & Mantras of Lord Ram"; (15) "Vairagya Shatkam" of king-sage Bhartrihari; (16) An Anthology of the Sanyas Upanishads-Parts 1 and 2; (17) "Kaag-Bhusund Ramayan" or the "Aadi

Ramayan” based on Tulsidas’ Ram Charit Manas; (18) The Legendary Glory of Hanuman; (19) “Narad Bhakti Sutra”—Aphorisms for Devotion for God and the Principles of Love for the Lord.

(B) Goswami Tulsidas Series: (1) Book 1- ‘Dohawali’; (2) Book 2- ‘Parvati Mangal’; (3) Book 3- ‘Kavitawali’; (4) Book 4- ‘Janki Mangal’; (5) Book 5- ‘Ram Lala Nahachu’; (6) Book 6- ‘Geetawali Ramayan’; (7) Book 7- ‘Vairagya Sandipani’; (8) Book 8- ‘Vinai Patrika’.

The rest of the Books are in various stages of production, and would be made available on-line at the above websites as and when they are ready.

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