



Home Deity Worship Course

The Nectar of Devotion, chapter 2



ISKCON Deity Worship Ministry

CHAPTER TWO

The First Stages of Devotion

The three categories of devotional service which Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī describes in *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* are listed as devotional service in practice, devotional service in ecstasy and devotional service in pure love of Godhead. There are many subheadings in each of these categories. Generally it is understood that in the category of devotional service in practice there are two different qualities, devotional service in ecstasy has four qualities, and devotional service in pure love of Godhead has six qualities. These qualities will be explained by Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī later on.

In this connection, Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī suggests that the person eligible for Kṛṣṇa consciousness, or devotional service, can be classified by his particular taste. He says that devotional service is a continual process from one's previous life. No one can take to devotional service unless he has had some previous connection with it. For example, suppose in this life I practice devotional service to some extent. Even though it is not one-hundred-percent perfectly performed, whatever I have done will not be lost. In my next life, from the very point where I stop in this life, I shall begin again. In this way there is always a continuity. But even if there is no continuity, if only by chance a person takes interest in a pure devotee's instruction, he can be accepted and can advance in devotional service. Anyway, for persons who have a natural taste for understanding books like *Bhagavad-gītā* and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, devotional service is easier than for those who are simply accustomed to mental speculation and argumentative processes.

To support this statement there are many authoritative assertions by the learned scholars of bygone ages. According to their general opinion, a person may become governed by certain convictions derived by his own arguments and decisions. Then another person, who may be a greater logician, will nullify these conclusions and establish another thesis. In this way the path of argument will never be safe or conclusive. *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* recommends, therefore, that one follow in the footsteps of the authorities.

Here is a general description of devotional service given by Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī in his *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*. Previously, it has been stated that devotional service can be divided into three categories – namely, devotional service in practice, devotional service in ecstasy and devotional service in pure love of



God. Now Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī proposes to describe devotional service in practice.

Practice means employing our senses in some particular type of work. Therefore devotional service in practice means utilizing our different sensory organs in service to Kṛṣṇa. Some of the senses are meant for acquiring knowledge, and some are meant for executing the conclusions of our thinking, feeling and willing. So practice means employing both the mind and the senses in practical devotional service. This practice is not for developing something artificial. For example, a child learns or practices to walk. This walking is not unnatural. The walking capacity is there originally in the child, and simply by a little practice he walks very nicely. Similarly, devotional service to the Supreme Lord is the natural instinct of every living entity. Even uncivilized men like the aborigines offer their respectful obeisances to something wonderful exhibited by nature's law, and they appreciate that behind some wonderful exhibition or action there is something supreme. So this consciousness, though lying dormant in those who are materially contaminated, is found in every living entity. And, when purified, this is called Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

There are certain prescribed methods for employing our senses and mind in such a way that our dormant consciousness for loving Kṛṣṇa will be invoked, as much as the child, with a little practice, can begin to walk. One who has no basic walking capacity cannot walk by practice. Similarly, Kṛṣṇa consciousness cannot be aroused simply by practice. Actually there is no such practice. When we wish to develop our innate capacity for devotional service, there are certain processes which, by our accepting and executing them, will cause that dormant capacity to be invoked. Such practice is called *sādhana-bhakti*.

Every living entity under the spell of the material energy is held to be in an abnormal condition of madness. In *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* it is said, “Generally, the conditioned soul is mad because he is always engaged in activities that are the causes of bondage and suffering.” The spirit soul in his original condition is joyful, blissful, eternal and full of knowledge. Only by his implication in material activities has he become miserable, temporary and full of ignorance. This is due to *vikarma*. *Vikarma* means “actions which should not be done.” Therefore, we must practice *sādhana-bhakti* – which means to offer *maṅgala-ārati* (Deity worship) in the morning, to refrain from certain material activities, to offer obeisances to the spiritual master and to follow many other rules and regulations that will be discussed here one after another. These practices will



help one become cured of madness. As a man's mental disease is cured by the directions of a psychiatrist, so this *sādhana-bhakti* cures the conditioned soul of his madness under the spell of *māyā*, material illusion.

Nārada Muni mentions this *sādhana-bhakti* in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, Seventh Canto, first chapter, verse 32. He says there to King Yudhiṣṭhira, “My dear King, one has to fix his mind on Kṛṣṇa by any means.” That is called Kṛṣṇa consciousness. It is the duty of the *ācārya*, the spiritual master, to find the ways and means for his disciple to fix his mind on Kṛṣṇa. That is the beginning of *sādhana-bhakti*.

Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu has given us an authorized program for this purpose, centered around the chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mantra*. This chanting has so much power that it immediately attaches one to Kṛṣṇa. That is the beginning of *sādhana-bhakti*. Somehow or other, one has to fix his mind on Kṛṣṇa. The great saint Ambarīṣa Mahārāja, although a responsible king, fixed his mind on Kṛṣṇa, and similarly anyone who tries to fix his mind in this way will very rapidly make progress in successfully reviving his original Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Now this *sādhana-bhakti*, or practice of devotional service, may also be divided into two parts. The first part is called service according to regulative principles: one has to follow these different regulative principles by the order of the spiritual master or on the strength of authoritative scriptures, and there can be no question of refusal. That is called *vaidhī*, or regulated. One has to do it without argument. Another part of *sādhana-bhakti* is called *rāgānugā*. *Rāgānugā* refers to the point at which, by following the regulative principles, one becomes a little more attached to Kṛṣṇa and executes devotional service out of natural love. For example, a person engaged in devotional service may be ordered to rise early in the morning and offer *ārati*, which is a form of Deity worship. In the beginning, by the order of his spiritual master, one rises early in the morning and offers *ārati*, but then he develops real attachment. When he gets this attachment, he automatically tries to decorate the Deity and prepare different kinds of dresses and thinks of different plans to execute his devotional service nicely. Although it is within the category of practice, this offering of loving service is spontaneous. So the practice of devotional service, *sādhana-bhakti*, can be divided into two parts – namely, regulative and spontaneous.

Rūpa Gosvāmī defines the first part of devotional practice, or *vaidhī-bhakti*, as follows: “When there is no attachment or no spontaneous loving service to the Lord, and one is engaged in the service of the Lord simply out of obedience to



the order of the spiritual master or in pursuance of the scriptures, such obligatory service is called *vaidhī-bhakti*.”

These principles of *vaidhī-bhakti* are also described in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, Second Canto, first chapter, verse 5, where Śukadeva Gosvāmī instructs the dying Mahārāja Parīkṣit as to his course of action. Mahārāja Parīkṣit met Śukadeva Gosvāmī just a week before his death, and the king was perplexed as to what should be done before he was to pass on. Many other sages also arrived there, but no one could give him the proper direction. Śukadeva Gosvāmī, however, gave this direction to him as follows: “My dear King, if you want to be fearless in meeting your death next week (for actually everyone is afraid at the point of death), then you must immediately begin the process of hearing and chanting and remembering God.” If one can chant and hear Hare Kṛṣṇa and always remember Lord Kṛṣṇa, then he is sure to become fearless of death, which may come at any moment.

In the statements of Śukadeva Gosvāmī it is said that the Supreme Personality of Godhead is Kṛṣṇa. Therefore Śukadeva recommends that one should always hear about Kṛṣṇa. He does not recommend that one hear and chant about the demigods. The Māyāvādīs (impersonalists) say that one may chant any name, either that of Kṛṣṇa or those of the demigods, and the result will be the same. But actually this is not a fact. According to the authorized version of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, one has to hear and chant about Lord Viṣṇu (Kṛṣṇa) only.

So Śukadeva Gosvāmī has recommended to Parīkṣit Mahārāja that in order to be fearless of death, one has to hear and chant and remember the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Kṛṣṇa, by all means. He also mentions that the Supreme Personality of Godhead is *sarvātmā*. *Sarvātmā* means “the Supersoul of everyone.” Kṛṣṇa is also mentioned as *īśvara*, the supreme controller who is situated in everyone’s heart. Therefore, if some way or other we become attached to Kṛṣṇa, He will make us free from all danger. In *Bhagavad-gītā* it is said that anyone who becomes a devotee of the Lord is never vanquished. Others, however, are always vanquished. “Vanquished” means that after getting this human form of life, a person does not come out of the entanglement of birth and death and thus misses his golden opportunity. Such a person does not know where he is being thrown by the laws of nature.

Suppose one does not develop Kṛṣṇa consciousness in this human form of life. He will be thrown into the cycle of birth and death, involving 8,400,000 species of life, and his spiritual identity will remain lost. One does not know whether he is going to be a plant, or a beast, or a bird, or something like that, because



there are so many species of life. The recommendation of Rūpa Gosvāmī for reviving our original Kṛṣṇa consciousness is that somehow or other we should apply our minds to Kṛṣṇa very seriously and thus also become fearless of death. After death we do not know our destination, because we are completely under the control of the laws of nature. Only Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, is controller over the laws of nature. Therefore, if we take shelter of Kṛṣṇa seriously, there will be no fear of being thrown back into the cycle of so many species of life. A sincere devotee will surely be transferred to the abode of Kṛṣṇa, as affirmed in *Bhagavad-gītā*.

In the *Padma Purāṇa*, also, the same process is advised. There it is said that one should always remember Lord Viṣṇu. This is called *dhyāna*, or meditation – always remembering Kṛṣṇa. It is said that one has to meditate with his mind fixed upon Viṣṇu. *Padma Purāṇa* recommends that one always fix his mind on the form of Viṣṇu by meditation and not forget Him at any moment. And this state of consciousness is called *samādhi*, or trance.

We should always try to mold the activities of our lives in such a way that we will constantly remember Viṣṇu, or Kṛṣṇa. That is Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Whether one concentrates his mind on the four-handed form of Viṣṇu or on the form of two-handed Kṛṣṇa, it is the same. The *Padma Purāṇa* recommends: somehow or other always think of Viṣṇu, without forgetting Him under any circumstances. Actually this is the most basic of all regulative principles. For, when there is an order from a superior about doing something, there is simultaneously a prohibition. When the order is that one should always remember Kṛṣṇa, the prohibition is that one should never forget Him. Within this simple order and prohibition, all regulative principles are found complete.

This regulative principle is applicable to all *varṇas* and *āśramas*, the castes and occupations of life. There are four *varṇas*, namely, the *brāhmaṇas* (priests and intellectuals), the *kṣatriyas* (warriors and statesmen), the *vaiśyas* (businessmen and farmers) and the *śūdras* (laborers and servants). There are also four standard *āśramas*, namely, *brahmacarya* (student life), *gṛhastha* (householder), *vānaprastha* (retired) and *sannyāsa* (renounced). The regulative principles are not only for the *brahmacārīs* (celibate students) to follow, but are applicable for all. It doesn't matter whether one is a beginner – a *brahmacārī* – or is very advanced – a *sannyāsī*. The principle of remembering the Supreme Personality of Godhead constantly and not forgetting Him at any moment is meant to be followed by everyone without fail.



If this injunction is followed, then all other rules and regulations will automatically fall into line. All other rules and regulations should be treated as assistants or servants to this one basic principle. The injunctions or rules and regulations and their resultant reactions are mentioned in the Eleventh Canto of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, fifth chapter, verses 2 and 3. Camasa Muni, one of the nine sages who came to instruct King Nimi, addressed the king and said, “The four social orders, namely, the *brāhmaṇas*, the *kṣatriyas*, the *vaiśyas* and the *śūdras*, have come out of the different parts of the universal form of the Supreme Lord as follows: the *brāhmaṇas* have come out from the head, the *kṣatriyas* have come out from the arms, the *vaiśyas* have come out from the waist, and the *śūdras* have come out from the legs. Similarly, the *sannyāsīs* have come out from the head, the *vānaprasthas* from the arms, the *gṛhasthas* from the waist and the *brahmacārīs* from the legs.”

These different orders of society and grades of spiritual advancement are conceived in terms of qualification. It is confirmed in *Bhagavad-gītā* that the four social orders and the four spiritual orders are created by the Lord Himself in terms of different individual qualities. As the different parts of the body have different types of activities, so the social orders and spiritual orders also have different types of activities in terms of qualification and position. The target of these activities, however, is always the Supreme Personality of Godhead. As confirmed in *Bhagavad-gītā*, “He is the supreme enjoyer.” So, whether one is a *brāhmaṇa* or a *śūdra*, one has to satisfy the Supreme Lord by one’s activities. This is also confirmed in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* by a verse that reads, “Everyone must be engaged in his particular duty, but the perfection of such work should be tested by how far the Lord is satisfied with such activities.” The injunction herein is that one has to act according to his position, and by such activities one must either satisfy the Supreme Personality or else fall down from one’s position.

For example, a *brāhmaṇa*, who is born out of the head of the Lord, has as his business to preach the transcendental Vedic sounds, or *śabda-brahma*. Because the *brāhmaṇa* is the head, he has to preach the transcendental sound, and he also has to eat on behalf of the Supreme Lord. According to Vedic injunctions, when a *brāhmaṇa* eats it is to be understood that the Personality of Godhead is eating through him. It is not, however, that the *brāhmaṇa* should simply eat on behalf of the Lord and not preach the message of *Bhagavad-gītā* to the world. Actually, one who preaches the message of the *Gītā* is very dear to Kṛṣṇa, as is confirmed in the *Gītā* itself. Such a preacher is factually a *brāhmaṇa*, and thus by feeding him one feeds the Supreme Lord directly.



Similarly, the *kṣatriya* has to protect people from the onslaughts of *māyā*. That is his duty. For example, as soon as Mahārāja Parīkṣit saw that a black man was attempting to kill a cow, he immediately took his sword, wanting to kill the black man, whose name was Kali. That is a *kṣatriya*'s duty. Violence is required in order to give protection. In *Bhagavad-gītā* Lord Kṛṣṇa directly gave His order to Arjuna to commit violence on the Battlefield of Kurukṣetra, just to give protection to the people in general.

The *vaiśyas* are meant for producing agricultural products, trading them and distributing them. And the working class, or *śūdras*, are those who haven't the intelligence of the *brāhmaṇas* or the *kṣatriyas* or the *vaiśyas*, and therefore they are meant to help these higher classes by bodily labor. In this way, there is full cooperation and spiritual advancement among all the different orders of society. And when there is no such cooperation, the members of society will fall down. That is the present position in the Kali-yuga, this age of quarrel. Nobody is doing his duty, and everyone is simply puffed up by calling himself a *brāhmaṇa* (intellectual) or a *kṣatriya* (soldier or statesman). But actually such people are without status. They are out of touch with the Supreme Personality of Godhead because they are not Kṛṣṇa conscious. Therefore, the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement is intended to set the whole of human society in proper condition so that everyone will be happy and take profit from developing Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa instructed Uddhava that by following the injunctions of the social and spiritual orders of human society, one can satisfy the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and as a result of such satisfaction the whole society gets all the necessities of life amply and without difficulty. This is because, after all, the Supreme Personality of Godhead maintains all other living entities. If the whole society performs its respective duties and remains in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, there is no doubt that all of its members will live very peacefully and happily. Without wanting the necessities of life, the whole world will be turned into Vaikuṇṭha, a spiritual abode. Even without being transferred to the kingdom of God, by following the injunctions of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and prosecuting the duties of Kṛṣṇa consciousness all human society will be happy in all respects.

There is a similar statement by Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself to Uddhava, in the Eleventh Canto of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, twenty-seventh chapter, verse 49. The Lord says there, "My dear Uddhava, all persons are engaged in activities, whether those indicated in the revealed scriptures or ordinary worldly activities. If by the result of either of such activities they worship Me in Kṛṣṇa consciousness,



then automatically they become very happy within this world as well as in the next. Of this there is no doubt.” We can conclude from this statement by Kṛṣṇa that activities in Kṛṣṇa consciousness will give everyone all perfection in all desires.

Thus the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement is so nice that there is no need of even designating oneself *brāhmaṇa*, *kṣatriya*, *vaiśya*, *śūdra*, *brahmacārī*, *gr̥hastha*, *vānaprastha* or *sannyāsī*. Let everyone be engaged in whatever occupation he now has. Simply let him worship Lord Kṛṣṇa by the result of his activities in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. That will adjust the whole situation, and everyone will be happy and peaceful within this world. In the *Nārada Pañcarātra* the regulative principles of devotional service are described as follows: “Any activities sanctioned in the revealed scriptures and aiming at the satisfaction of the Supreme Personality of Godhead are accepted by saintly teachers as the regulative principles of devotional service. If one regularly executes such service unto the Supreme Personality of Godhead under the direction of a bona fide spiritual master, then gradually he rises to the platform of serving in pure love of God.”