

# Śaranagati

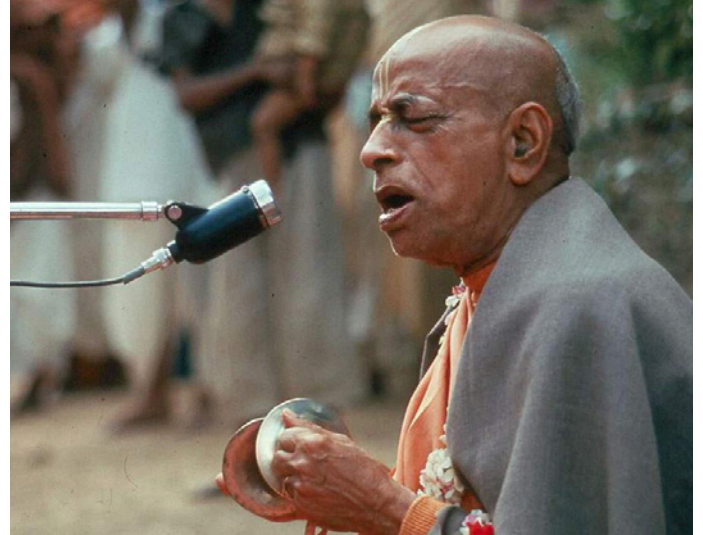
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## THE HIDDEN SECRETS OF BHAKTI PART 2 OF 3

In his famous definition of *bhakti* Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī speaks of the primary characteristics of *bhakti*, namely acting for Kṛṣṇa with body, mind and words and with the intention of pleasing him. He also names two secondary characteristics of *bhakti* which will be the subject of this newsletter. The primary characteristics define the essence, what *bhakti* is. The two secondary characteristics qualify *bhakti* as *uttama bhakti*, or pure *bhakti*. *Bhakti* is compared to gold and pure *bhakti* is compared to gold that has become brilliantly luminous after having been melted and thus purified from all other elements.

The two secondary characteristics are two decisions one has come to. The first one is called *anyābhilāṣitā-sūnyam* which means being free from deep rooted desires other than the desire to please Kṛṣṇa. Does this mean that one's *bhakti* would only be pure when all other desires except the desire to serve Kṛṣṇa have been given up completely? No, what Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī means is that one should not have ulterior motives in one's practice of *bhakti* itself, such as wealth or recognition. In other words, only *bhakti* for Kṛṣṇa should be one's goal. Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura illuminates this by giving the example of a devotee who is in a life threatening situation and calls out to the Lord to save him. This is a material desire, but having this desire does not preclude the devotee from



practicing pure *bhakti* because this desire is not the reason why he is practicing *bhakti* altogether, nor is it as important to him as *bhakti*.

Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī includes two types of devotees in his definition of *bhakti* – the practicing devotee and the perfect devotee. This means that even a beginner can practice pure devotional service! How? By concentrating on, “I’m doing this activity for Kṛṣṇa. I’m engaging my body, mind and words in this activity and I’m doing it with the favorable intention to give Kṛṣṇa pleasure.” Whenever a devotee does this, he or she is practicing pure devotional service. The difference between a beginner and an advanced devotee (*uttama-adhikārī*) is that the advanced devotee is always in this consciousness, without any interruption, in everything he or she does.

This view on *bhakti* can be found in a number of places in our scriptures. In the *Bhagavad-gītā* (9.30) Kṛṣṇa encourages his devotees who still have material desires: “Even if one commits the most abominable action, if he is engaged in devotional service he is to be considered saintly because he is properly situated in his determination.”

Kṛṣṇa also says: “Having awakened faith in the narrations of my glories, being disgusted with all material activities, knowing that all sense gratification leads to misery, but still being unable to renounce all sense enjoyment, my devotee should remain happy and worship me with great faith and conviction. Even though he is sometimes engaged in sense enjoyment, my devotee knows that all sense gratification leads to



a miserable result, and he sincerely repents such activities.” (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, 11.20.27-28)

Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura elaborates: “By my previous shameful life my heart is polluted with many illusory attachments. Personally I have no power to stop them. Only Lord Kṛṣṇa within my heart can remove such inauspicious contamination. But whether the Lord removes such attachments immediately or lets me go on being afflicted by them, I will never give up my devotional service to him. Even if the Lord places millions of obstacles in my path, and even if because of my offenses I go to hell, I will never for a moment stop serving Lord Kṛṣṇa. I am not interested in mental speculation and fruitive activities; even if Lord Brahmā personally comes before me offering such engagements, I will not be even slightly interested. Although I am attached to material things I can see very clearly that they lead to no good because they simply give me trouble and disturb my devotional service to the Lord. Therefore, I sincerely repent my foolish attachments to so many material things, and I am patiently awaiting Lord Kṛṣṇa’s mercy.” (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, 11.20.27-28, purport)

This orientation is what we need: “I will somehow do it even if I still have these unbecoming desires.” If this is your conviction, you have no ulterior motive, your motive is alright. Your goal is *bhakti*.

The second quality that makes *bhakti* pure is the conviction that nothing except *bhakti* is required on this path. Sometimes we seek help in things such as psychology or astrology to get relief from our problems or to receive counseling on how to move on in our lives. This is not a problem, but it should not cover our *bhakti*. This means none of these things should become more important than our orientation of giving pleasure to Kṛṣṇa. Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura often quoted a verse that explains why this is so: “Everything that can be achieved by fruitive activities, penance, knowledge, detachment, mystic yoga, charity, religious duties and all other means of perfecting life is easily achieved by my devotee through loving service unto me. If somehow or other my devotee desires promotion to heaven, liberation, or residence in my abode, he easily achieves such benedictions.” (Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, 11.20.32-33)

Here Kṛṣṇa says, “You don’t need to go anywhere else, come to me, render devotional service to me and if you should still desire something, such as a promotion to heaven, I will fulfill your desire.” Without a doubt, this is not the highest level in devotional service, but it does not exclude one from practicing pure *bhakti* – provided one has

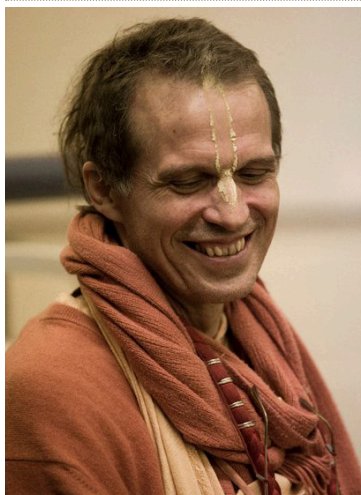


pure *bhakti* as one’s goal and does not cover it by ulterior motives or thinking that other things are required on the path.

We have often gotten this wrong in our movement. We over-emphasize renunciation. Many people have given up the path because in some places they are made to think that giving up certain things is a necessary qualification for *bhakti*. Just to give an example, some people desire to wear a beard for some reason. But giving up the beard or not is not the point of *bhakti*. It’s not Kṛṣṇa’s point. It’s not the *ācārya*’s point. It is the point of people who want to understand things from their own perspective and who may also be a little judgmental and not humanly realistic. Of course, this is not to say that such attachments are desirable. It is simply beside the point. The point of *bhakti* is to use what we have, our body, mind and words, in Kṛṣṇa’s service with the intention of giving him pleasure while having only *bhakti* as our goal and considering nothing else to be required. It is not about us. It is about putting Kṛṣṇa in the center.

From a lecture by Śacīnandana Swami in Zagreb, Croatia, February 11, 2014.

Photo by Mickey Shah



## MEET ŚACĪNANDANA SWAMI

upcoming seminars & events:

Jun. 30 - Jul. 6	Kīrtana Course, Rāḍhadeśa, Belgium
Jul. 4-13	Fruska Goranga Camp, Fruska Gora, Serbia
Jul. 26	Lecture at Ayurveda Hotel Sonnhof, Tirol, Austria
Jul. 28 - Aug. 2	Bhakti Retreat, Switzerland
Aug. 4-7	Kīrtana-Melā, Germany

You can find a more detailed schedule at [www.sacinandanaswami.com](http://www.sacinandanaswami.com)