



तव कथामृतं तप्तजीवनम्
tava kathāmṛtaṁ tapta-jīvanam

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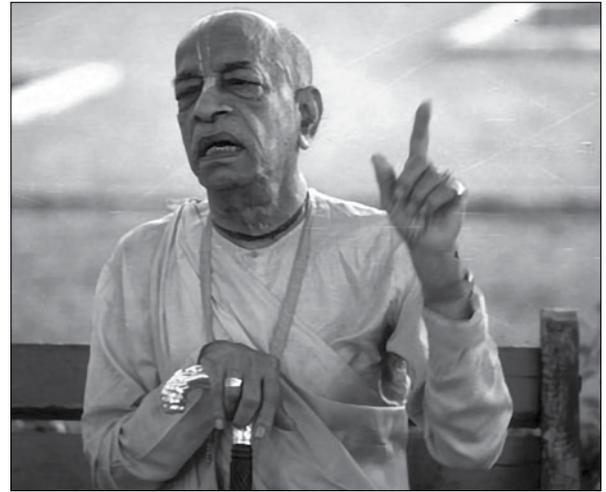


REMAIN FOOLISH

*His Divine Grace A. C.
Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada*

You say that you are all fools. When you can understand that you are a fool that means that you are a little intelligent because you can detect your own foolishness. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu wanted you to remain a fool to teach you how to make progress in spiritual life. All *vaiṣṇavas* – not artificially, but seriously – think of themselves as foolish. The more we consider ourselves foolish the more we remain eager to learn for spiritual advancement in life. ॐ

— Letter to Atreya Rsi, 15 November 1974.



His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami

NO RETURNING BACK

Various Commentaries on Vedānta-sūtra (4.4.22)

anāvṛtti-śabdād anāvṛtti-śabdāt

For the liberated soul, there is no returning back, because the scriptures say so. For the liberated soul, there is no returning back, because the scriptures say so.

Sri Madhvacharya: There is a well known statement in the scriptures: *na ca punar āvartate na ca punar āvartate sarvān kāmān āptvā 'mṛtaḥ samabhadraḥ samabhadraḥ* — The liberated soul does not return. The liberated soul does not return. Attaining the fulfilment of all desires, such a soul attains immortality. Such a soul attains immortality.

Sri Ramanujacharya: If the liberated soul is under the control of the Supreme Lord, does it mean that the liberated soul returns back to the material world if the Lord so desires? This question is answered in this *sūtra*.

The Supreme Lord is the personality devoid of all defects, the sole bestower of auspiciousness and

the source of the creation, etc., of this world. He is distinct from all objects found in this world. He is omniscient. He is truthful to his vows. He is the single large ocean of mercy for the surrendered soul. He is most merciful. He has no equal or superior and is known as *para-brahma* (superior Brahman). His existence is known through the scriptures (*śabdāt*).

Just as the existence of the Supreme Lord is known through the *śāstra*, similarly the Lord, being pleased by his devotee's constant devotion executed according to the rules of *varṇa* and *āśrama*, removes the covering of ignorance of the worshiper by removing the bonds of karma that have accumulated from time immemorial. Thereafter, he makes the surrendered soul experience its own true nature, which is the source of unlimited joy. Thereafter, he does not let the surrendered soul return back. This fact, too, is known from the scriptures (*śabdāt*).

For example, it is said in the *śāstra* (*Chāndogya Upanishad* 8.15.1), *sa khalv evaṁ vartayan yāvad āyusaṁ*

brahma-lokam abhisampadyate na ca punar āvartate na ca punar āvartate — “A person who lives in an ideal way for the entire duration of his life attains *brahma-loka* and from there does not return back. From there he does not return back.”

Moreover, the Lord has said (*Bhagavad-gītā* 8.15 – 16):

*mām upetya punar janma duḥkhālayam aśāsvatam
nāpnuvanti mahātmānaḥ saṁsiddhiṁ paramāṁ gatāḥ
ā-brahma-bhuvanāl lokāḥ punar āvartino 'rjuna
mām upetya tu kaunteya punar janma na vidyate*

After attaining me, the great souls, who are *yogīs* in devotion, never return to this temporary world, which is full of miseries, because they have attained the highest perfection. From the highest planet in the material world down to the lowest, all are places of misery wherein repeated birth and death take place. But one who attains my abode never takes birth again.

There are souls who are free of the bondage of karma, developed in knowledge, having the nature of being exclusively absorbed in the experience of the Supreme Brahman, interested only in loving God, absorbed in great bliss, and absorbed in meditations on the Supreme Brahman. For such souls, there should be no doubts that they never return back.

Neither will the Supreme Lord send back any dear devotee, full of knowledge, after he has attained the company of such a devotee. That's why he says (*Bhagavad-gītā* 7.17 – 7.19):

*priyo hi jñānino 'tyartham ahaṁ sa ca mama priyaḥ
udārāḥ sarva evaite jñānī tv ātmaiva me matam
āsthitaḥ sa hi yuktātmā mām evānuttamāṁ gatim
bahūnām janmanām ante jñānavān mām prapadyate
vāsudevaḥ sarvam iti sa mahātmā su-durlabhaḥ*

I am very dear to such a devotee (who is situated in knowledge), and he is dear to me. All devotees are undoubtedly magnanimous souls, but he who is situated in knowledge of me I consider to be just like my own self. Being engaged in my transcendental service, he is sure to attain me, the highest and most perfect. After many births and deaths, he who is actually in knowledge surrenders unto me, knowing me to be the cause of all causes and all that is. Such a great soul is very rare.

In this *sūtra*, the repetition is to indicate that the *Vedānta-sūtra* has now concluded successfully. All doubts have been resolved.

Sri Nimbarkacharya: For a soul who has attained its divine spiritual form, who is free from the material world and who has attained the spiritual world, there is no returning back. Why so? Because the scriptures say (*Chāndogya Upanishad* 4.15.5), *etena pratipadyamānā*

imaṁ mānavam āvartaṁ nāvartante nāvartante — “Those who walk on this path [God realization] do not return to the whirlpool of material existence. They do not return.”

Moreover, *Bhagavad-gītā* (8.16) says, *mām upetya tu kaunteya punar janma na vidyate* — “Having attained my abode, there is no returning back.”

Sri Vallabhacharya: After experiencing the true nature of the Lord, does one experience rebirth as one usually does after performing ordinary karma? This doubt is clarified in this *sūtra*. The non-return (*anāvṛtti*) of the *jñānīs* and the devotees is spoken of here. The proof is scripture (*śabdāt*).

For the *jñānī*, the scripture (*Chāndogya Upanishad* 8.6.5) says — *tayordhvam āyannam amṛtatvam eti* — “[There are a hundred and one arteries emanating from the heart.] The *jñānī* whose soul departs from that one specific artery that passes through the crown of the head attains immortality.” That such a *jñānī* never returns back is given (in *Chāndogya Upanishad* 4.15.5) as follows, *etena pratipadyamānā imaṁ mānavam āvartaṁ nāvartante nāvartante* — “Those who walk on this path do not return to the whirlpool of material existence. They do not return.”

This liberation through the head *cakra* is not applicable to the devotee. The scripture (*Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* 11.20.31) says that such things are unfavourable for the devotee, *tasmān mad-bhakti-yuktasya yogino vai mad-ātmanaḥ na jñānaṁ na ca vairāgyaṁ prāyaḥ śreyo bhaved iha* — “Therefore, for a devotee engaged in my loving service, with mind fixed on me, the cultivation of knowledge and renunciation is generally not the means of achieving the highest perfection within this world.”

According to the scriptures (*Kaṭha Upanishad* 1.2.23), *yam evaiṣa vṛṇute tena labhyaḥ* — “The Supreme Lord is attained only by those who are favored by his devotee.” But another *śāstra* (*Taittiriya Upanishad* 3.1.1) says something apparently contradictory, *brahma-vid āpnoti param* — “He who knows Brahman attains the Supreme [by his own efforts].” This apparent contradiction is resolved [by Sri Vyasadeva] in this *sūtra* by acknowledging both types of liberation. The *jñānī* who knows Brahman achieves the Supreme according to his eligibility, but it is bestowed by the devotees. [And the attainment is of the Supreme Lord's impersonal feature only, whereas the devotee attains the Supreme Lord's personal feature.]

For a devotee who has attained the supreme, there is no return due to the devotee being faultless in character and due to there being no cause for returning back. The Lord does not desire such devotees to return back to this world. He says this (in *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* 9.4.65), *ye dārāgāra-putrāpta-prāṇān vittam imaṁ param hitvā mām*

Unknown artist. Rajput Style, c. 1700.



The Govinda form of Lord Vishnu in Vaikuntha

śaraṇaṁ yātāḥ katham tāns tyaktum utsahe — “Since pure devotees give up their homes, wives, children, relatives, riches and even their lives simply to serve me, without any desire for material improvement in this life or in the next, how can I give up such devotees at any time?”

From statements like these, it can be known that on attaining the Supreme, there is no possibility for the devotee to lose the Lord. Even though the same devotee may be associated with various pastimes of the Lord at various times, still these pastimes are eternal (and so is the position of the devotee). Hence, even Lord Brahma cannot speak of the return of the devotee.

And, moreover, rebirth is something which happens under the influence of the time factor. However, time cannot affect the Lord (or his devotees). The scriptures (*Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* 2.2.17) say this as follows, *na yatra kālo 'nimiṣāṁ paraḥ prabhuḥ* — “In the spiritual world, there is no influence of time.”

It should be known that even though both the devotee and the *jñānī* do not return back, the fruit attained by them is different. Therefore, the first instance of *anāvṛtti śabdāt* is for the devotees and the second instance is for the *jñānīs*.

At the end of this *Vedānta-sūtra*, the repetition by the *ācārya* (Vyāsadev) is not to prove that liberation means

the merging of the soul in the supreme. This *sūtra* describes how the *jñānī* who knows Brahman attains the supreme destination as the fruit of all his efforts. For such a *jñānī*, his true nature and his enjoyment are all described in *śāstra*. This enjoyment is according to the respective eligibility of the *jñānī* and is bestowed by the devotees on the *jñānī*. By this it is known that the devotee also does not return back, for if the perfect devotee would also return back to the material world, then the scriptural statement above (that the devotee selects a *jñānī* and bestows results upon him) would be meaningless.

Some people think that *bhakti* is less potent as compared to *jñāna*, and to refute such false thoughts, Sri Vyāsadev has mentioned the non-return of the devotee as well as *jñānī* in the same *sūtra*.

[Another interpretation of the *sūtra*] — Devotees who are following *puṣṭi-mārga* (or *rāgānugā bhakti*) hear the sound of Krishna’s flute (*śabdāt*), which produces great love and destroys all illusion. Hearing that sound, they reach in close proximity to the Lord and never return again (*anāvṛtti*). For those devotees who are following *maryādā-mārga* (*vaidhī bhakti*), they hear the sound of the Vedas (*śabdāt*), follow their prescribed duties and perform the required *sādhana*. Thus being liberated, they too do not return back (*anāvṛtti*). In this way, the first repetition in the *sūtra* can be for the *puṣṭi-mārga* devotee and the second repetition for the *maryādā-mārga* devotee. Both of them will definitely attain the supreme fruit of their devotion. Enough now! No more elaborations.

Sri Baladeva Vidyabhushan: In this *sūtra*, the fact that a liberated soul stays eternally close to the Lord is described. The *sūtra*’s subject is the attainment of the Lord’s abode. In that regard there is a doubt — Is this liberation eternal or non-eternal? The claim may be made that the Lord’s abode is fallible just like heavenly planets, therefore a falldown is possible and the liberation is non-eternal. [Sri Vyāsadeva gives here the conclusion that it is not so.]

When a devotee who is aware of the Lord’s true position worships the Lord, he attains the Lord’s abode, and for such a devotee there is no returning back (*anāvṛtti*). How do we know this? This is known through scripture (*śabdāt*). For example (in *Chāndogya Upanishad* 8.15.1), *sa khalv evaṁ vartayan yāvad āyusaṁ brahma-lokam abhisampadyate na ca punar āvartate na ca punar āvartate* — “A person who lives in an ideal way for his entire duration of life attains Brahmaloka, and from there he does not return back. From there he does not return back.

Moreover, *Bhagavad-gītā* (8.16) says, *ā-brahma-bhuvanāl lokāḥ punar āvartino 'rjuna mām upetya tu kaunteya punar janma na vidyate* — “From the highest planet in the material world down to the lowest, all are places of misery wherein repeated birth and death take place. But one who attains to my abode, O son of Kunti, never takes birth again.”

Moreover, the Supreme Lord Hari does not ever desire to make his dear devotee fall down from his abode, nor does the devotee ever wish to leave the Lord. This is because their extreme love for each other is given in the scriptures (*Bhagavad-gītā* 7.17), *priyo hi jñānino 'tyartham ahaṁ sa ca mama priyaḥ* — “For I am very dear to him and he is dear to me.” Moreover, *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* (9.4.68) says, *sādhavo hṛdayaṁ mahyaṁ sādḥūnām hṛdayaṁ tv aham* — “The pure devotee is always within the core of my heart and I am always in the heart of the pure devotee.”

The *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* (9.4.65) also says, *ye dārāgāra-putrāpta-prāñān vittam imaṁ param hitvā mān śaraṇaṁ yātāḥ kathaṁ tāṁs tyaktum utsahe* — “Since pure devotees give up their homes, wives, children, relatives, riches and even their lives simply to serve me, without any desire for material improvement in this life or in the next, how can I give up such devotees at any time?”

That the devotee never gives up the Lord is also given (*Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* 2.8.6), *dhautātmā puruṣaḥ kṛṣṇa-pāda-mūlaṁ na muñcati mukta-sarva-parikleśaḥ*



Unknown artist

Lakshmi serves the Lord

pānthaḥ sva-śaraṇaṁ yathā — “A pure devotee of the Lord whose heart has once been cleansed by the process of devotional service never relinquishes the lotus feet of Lord Krishna, for they fully satisfy him, as a traveler is satisfied at home after a troubled journey.”

In all such places, the fact that the Lord never gives up his devotee and the fact that the devotee loves his Lord very much is described. The conclusion is that the truth-speaking Lord, who is truthful to his vows and is an ocean of mercy to the souls surrendered to him, removes all those types of knowledge from a devotee which take him away from *bhakti*, and then, bringing these dear souls to his abode, never gives them up. The conditioned soul trying to find real happiness in this world considers material pleasure to be true happiness and thus gets absorbed in it and spends countless lives. Then somehow by the mercy of a *sad-guru*, the soul comes to know about the truths pertaining to the Lord. Thus, the soul becomes detached from all other objects except those related to the Lord and then through worship of the Lord he becomes pure. Attaining the Lord as a dearmost beloved, such a devotee never ever desires to be separate from the association of the Lord. All this is known through the study of the scripture. Therefore, taking shelter of the scripture, one should situate oneself properly. 🙏

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