

ANANTA SATSANG • SACRED TEXTS

शरणागती

Śaraṇāgati

Taking Refuge in God



Swami Ramsukhdas

*A complete paragraph-by-paragraph English reading
edition*

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Swami Ramsukhdas

This is a fresh, complete English reading edition translated paragraph by paragraph from the Hindi text of Gita Press book 434. The controlling witness is the 63-scan source PDF: the cover is scan 1, the publisher’s note and teaching occupy scans 2-62, and the publisher’s promotional material on scan 63 is intentionally excluded.

Editorial navigation is labelled as such. Scripture quotations and authorial notes remain with their source paragraphs. *Śaraṇāgati* is rendered primarily as “taking refuge”; “complete self-surrender” is used where the passage specifically stresses the total offering of oneself.

Publisher's Note

Salutations to Śrī Hari

A Reverential Submission

Our revered Swamiji, Śrī Ramsukhdas Ji Maharaj, who is well known to our esteemed brothers and sisters who love the Gītā, has given a most beautiful exposition of the eighteenth chapter of the Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā. It has been published as a book entitled *The Essence of the Gītā*. The eighteenth chapter is the essence of the Gītā, and the essence even of the eighteenth chapter is its sixty-sixth verse. In this verse, God commanded Arjuna to abandon all *dharma*s and come to His refuge. Arjuna accepted this by saying, “I shall do as You say,” and he also fought in accordance with his warrior-duty. This raises a question: what did God mean when He spoke of abandoning all *dharma*s? Reading the exposition of this verse answers that question.

There is a second point. When Arjuna took refuge in God, saying, “I am Your disciple; instruct me, who have taken refuge in You” (Gītā 2.7), something in that taking of refuge remained incomplete. That incompleteness was made good in the sixty-sixth verse of the eighteenth chapter. The exposition of this verse therefore contains many especially significant teachings about taking refuge in God and about the devotee who has taken refuge.

In view of the foregoing, the exposition of the sixty-sixth verse appearing in *The Essence of the Gītā* is being published separately for the benefit of seekers. If a seeker shapes his life in accordance with it, his highest good is assured, because God takes upon Himself the burden - the responsibility - for the welfare of one who has

taken refuge in Him. That is why God gives this assurance in the verse: “I shall free you from all sins; do not worry.”

We humbly request readers to study this book attentively and shape their lives accordingly.

-The Publisher

Śaraṇāgati

Editorial guide: The Lord's call to take refuge

Om

Salutations to the Supreme Self

Śaraṇāgati: Taking Refuge in God

[A detailed exposition of the sixty-sixth verse of the eighteenth chapter of the Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā]

Those who have no learning, no wealth, no shelter, no Lord, and no virtues; who, dulled to the revealed scriptures and burdened with sin, have been cast off even by society - they too, by taking refuge in Him whose virtues are renowned and who shelters all, become good people and are liberated. I bow to that stainless Kṛṣṇa, Lord of the Yadus.

“Those who possess no learning, no wealth, and no support; who have no virtues and no knowledge of the Vedas and scriptures; whom the people of the world have rejected as sinners - even such beings take refuge in the Lord who protects those who seek His refuge, become saints, and are liberated. I bow to Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the stainless Lord of the Yadus, whose virtues are renowned throughout the world.”

The Verse

सर्वधर्मान्परित्यज्य मामेकं शरणं व्रज।
अहं त्वा सर्वपापेभ्यो मोक्षयिष्यामि मा शुचः॥ ६६॥

*sarva-dharmān parityajya mām ekaṁ śaraṇaṁ vraja |
ahaṁ tvā sarva-pāpebhyo mokṣayiṣyāmi mā śucaḥ || 66 ||*

Abandoning reliance on all *dharmas*, come to Me alone for refuge. I shall free you from all sins; do not grieve.

“Give up dependence upon all *dharmas* and come to Me alone for refuge. I shall release you from every sin; do not grieve.”

Commentary

“Abandoning all *dharmas*, come to Me alone for refuge.” God says: give up reliance upon all *dharmas*; give up deliberating over the determination of *dharma* - that is, over what is to be done and what is not to be done - and come to Me alone for refuge.

To take refuge in God Himself is the essence of all spiritual disciplines. For the devotee who has taken refuge, nothing remains to be done for himself. It is like the case of a devoted wife: she has no work of her own. Even the care of her body is undertaken in relation to her husband and for his sake. She does not regard the home, family, possessions, sons and daughters, or even the body called her own as hers; she regards them as her husband's. The point is this: just as a devoted wife becomes wholly given to her husband, merges her lineage into his, and makes her home in his house, so too the devotee who has taken refuge offers at God's feet the lineage, caste, name, and so forth that are attributed to the body, and becomes free from worry, fear, grief, and doubt.

According to the Gītā, the word *dharma* here denotes obligatory duty. The reason is that the expression “action born of one’s nature” occurs from verses forty-one through forty-four of this same chapter, and then the word “one’s own *dharma*” occurs in the first half of verse forty-seven. After that, the word “action” occurs in the second half of verse forty-seven and again in verse forty-eight, at the end of the topic. Thus “action” appears at the beginning and end, while “one’s own *dharma*” appears between them. This itself establishes that *dharma* here means obligatory duty.

A question now arises: should the phrase “abandoning all *dharmas*” be understood to mean physically giving up *dharma* - that is, obligatory duty itself?

The answer is that physically giving up *dharma* is warranted neither by the Gītā nor by the context here. After hearing these words of God, Arjuna did not abandon his obligatory duty. On the contrary, saying, “I shall do as You say” (18.73), he agreed to perform his duty in accordance with God’s command. He did not merely agree; he actually fought according to his warrior-duty. Thus the phrase above does not speak of abandoning *dharma*, meaning duty. How indeed could God tell us to abandon duty? In the sixth verse of this very chapter, God says that sacrifice, charity, austerity, and the duties belonging to each one’s *varṇa* and stage of life should never be abandoned; they must certainly be performed.*

* In the third chapter, God devotes an entire section to the necessity of not abandoning obligatory action. Merely renouncing actions leads neither to actionlessness nor to perfection (3.4). No human being, in any condition, can remain even for a moment without acting (3.5). One who outwardly gives up actions while inwardly dwelling upon sense objects is a hypocrite (3.6). One who controls

the mind and senses and performs obligatory action is superior (3.7). Even the maintenance of the body is impossible without action, so action should be performed (3.8). “A creature is bound by action” - yet actions should not be abandoned out of fear of this bondage, because action performed solely to discharge one’s duty does not bind. What binds is acting for oneself, for some purpose other than preserving the succession of obligatory action (3.9). Brahmā created humankind together with duty and said that through this obligatory action they would prosper, and that this very duty would provide them with the means for fulfilling duty (3.10). Human beings and the gods will both attain their good by fulfilling their respective duties (3.11). One who enjoys resources received without fulfilling his duty is a thief (3.12). One who supports himself by performing obligatory action is freed from all sins, whereas the sinner who acts only for himself consumes sin alone (3.13). The cosmic cycle continues only through the performance of duty; one who lives in creation without fulfilling his duty lives in vain (3.16). A person who performs obligatory action without attachment attains the Supreme (3.19). Wise people such as King Janaka also attained perfection by performing duty; duty should be performed also with a view to holding society together (3.20). Citing His own example, God says that if He did not vigilantly perform His duty, He would produce social confusion and destroy the worlds (3.23-24). Even a wise person should perform his duty without attachment, just as the believing but unknowing person does (3.25). The wise person should not unsettle the understanding of the unknowing, but should himself perform duty well and induce them to do likewise (3.26). Thus, throughout the third chapter, God lays great emphasis upon the performance of obligatory actions.

A complete study of the Gītā shows that under no circumstances should a person abandon obligatory action. Arjuna considered it better to give up his duty of fighting and live by begging (2.5), but God rejected this course (2.31-38). This too establishes that the verse does not call for literally abandoning *dharma*s themselves.

We must now consider what is meant here by abandoning all *dharma*s. According to the Gītā, offering all *dharma*s - all actions - to God is itself the highest *dharma*. In this, both points are fulfilled: reliance upon all *dharma*s is abandoned, and refuge is taken in God alone. Those who rely upon ritual *dharma* repeatedly undergo birth and death: “Following the ordinances of the three Vedas and desiring enjoyments, they attain the state of coming and going” (Gītā 9.21). Therefore, once a person gives up reliance on *dharma* and relies upon God alone, there is no longer any need for him to decide his own *dharma*. This in fact occurred later in Arjuna’s life.

Arjuna was fighting Karṇa when the wheel of Karṇa’s chariot sank into the earth. Karṇa climbed down and began trying to free it. He said to Arjuna, “Wait until I have taken out this wheel. You are mounted on a chariot, while I am without a chariot and occupied with another task. At such a time, a chariot-warrior ought not to shoot arrows at a person in my position. Like Sahasrārjuna, you are learned in weapons and scripture, and you know *dharma*. It is therefore not right for you to strike me.” Hearing Karṇa’s words, Arjuna did not shoot. God then said to Karṇa, “To kill an aggressor like you by any means is *dharma*, not sin, for all six marks of an aggressor are found in you. And only moments ago, six of you great warriors surrounded Abhimanyu, who was alone, and killed him. Appealing to *dharma* will therefore do you no good. It is fortunate indeed that at this moment you remember *dharma*, but one who does not himself observe *dharma* has no right to invoke it.” Having

said this, God ordered Arjuna to shoot, and Arjuna began discharging his arrows.

1. “One should kill without hesitation an aggressor who approaches intent on doing one harm. No fault whatsoever attaches to the killer for slaying an aggressor.”

2. “One who sets fire, one who administers poison, one who raises a weapon to kill, one who steals wealth, one who seizes land, and one who abducts another’s wife - these six are aggressors.”

Thus, if Arjuna had determined *dharma* by his own intellect, he would have made a mistake. He therefore left the determination of *dharma* entirely to God, and God did determine it.

Arjuna was uncertain whether it would be better for them to fight or not to fight (2.6). If they fought, their own family would be destroyed, and destroying one’s family is a most terrible sin: “He who brings about the destruction of a family is surely the greatest sinner.” It would only set in motion a succession of calamities (1.40-44). On the other hand, they could see that for a warrior there was no means to the highest good greater than battle. God therefore says: why become entangled in deciding what is to be done and what is not, what is *dharma* and what is *adharma*? Leave the burden of determining *dharma* to Me. This is the meaning of “abandoning all *dharmas*.”

“Come to Me alone for refuge.” In these words, *ekam* (“alone”) cannot qualify *mām* (“Me”), because “Me” - God - is one, not many. It is therefore fitting to understand *ekam* as “exclusively, without another.” Moreover, in the phrases “decide and tell me the one” (3.2) and “which one of these two is better” (5.1), Arjuna also uses *ekam* while asking for one definite means to the highest good from

among Sāṅkhya and Karma Yoga. Taking up that very word *ekam*, God wishes to explain here that of all the means to God-realization - Sāṅkhya Yoga, Karma Yoga, and so on - the principal means is this one: exclusive refuge in Him.

In the Gītā, Arjuna asked many kinds of questions about the means to his highest good, and God answered them. Although all those disciplines are indeed means, a consideration of the Gītā as a whole makes it clear that the essence and crown of every spiritual means is to take exclusive refuge in God.

Throughout the Gītā, God repeatedly extols the greatness of exclusive devotion. Exclusive refuge is the means of easily crossing the otherwise impassable divine Māyā (7.14). “I am easily attained by one whose mind is exclusively fixed on Me” (8.14). The Supreme Person is attained only through exclusive devotion (8.22). God Himself bears the responsibility for the attainment and preservation of what His exclusive devotees need (9.22). Only through exclusive devotion can God be known, seen, and attained (11.54). God very quickly delivers His exclusive devotees (12.6-7). Exclusive devotion is the means of going beyond the three *guṇas* (14.26). Having thus sung the glory of exclusive devotion, God now states the essence of the whole Gītā: “Come to Me alone for refuge.” The meaning is: I alone am both the means and the One to be attained, both the practice and its goal.

2. In this verse, the word *ananya-cetāḥ* - “one whose mind admits no other” - signifies exclusive reliance upon God.

“Come to Me alone for refuge” does not mean merely accepting refuge with the mind and intellect. It means bringing one’s very self into God’s refuge. When the self has taken refuge, the mind,

intellect, senses, body, and all the rest are included in that surrender; they do not remain separate.

“I shall free you from all sins; do not grieve.” Someone might suppose that God is tempting Arjuna with deliverance from the sins which, in the first chapter, Arjuna said would result from fighting. But that interpretation is not reasonable. Once Arjuna has taken complete refuge in God, how can his sins remain,* and how could he then need to be enticed? There is simply no place for offering an inducement to him. If freedom from sin were to be used as an inducement, it could only be offered before he took refuge, not afterward.

* “The very moment a living being turns toward Me, the sins of millions of births are destroyed.”

“I shall free you from all sins.” This means: once you have given up reliance upon all *dharma*s and come to My refuge, do not worry or be afraid even if, after taking refuge, you see no change or improvement in your feelings, mental tendencies, conduct, and so forth; even if love of God and the vision of God have not arisen; and even if you perceive yourself to be unqualified, without entitlement, or weak. Once you have taken refuge exclusively in Me, how can that deficiency remain yours? It is My deficiency. Removing and correcting it is now My work. You have only one task: to remain lying at My feet, free from worry, grief, fear, and doubt!* But if worry, fear, misgiving, and similar faults arise in you, they will obstruct your taking of refuge, and the entire burden will fall back upon you. After taking refuge, to take the burden upon yourself is a stain upon that refuge.

* Some rely upon the strength of their worship and others upon their conduct. But Vyāsa, trusting in the Divine Princess, sleeps at ease with his legs stretched out.

When Vibhīṣaṇa takes refuge at the feet of Lord Rāma, the Lord thereafter regards Vibhīṣaṇa's fault as His own. Once Vibhīṣaṇa came to this side of the ocean. In a village named Vipraghoṣa, he unwittingly caused the death of a Brāhmaṇa. The local Brāhmaṇas gathered and beat Vibhīṣaṇa severely, but he did not die. They then bound him in chains, took him into a cave beneath the ground, and imprisoned him there. When Rāma learned that Vibhīṣaṇa had been imprisoned, He immediately flew in the Puṣpaka aerial car to the village of Vipraghoṣa, found Vibhīṣaṇa, and went to him. The Brāhmaṇas received Rāma with great honor and said, "Your Majesty, this man has killed a Brāhmaṇa. We beat him severely, but he did not die." Lord Rāma said, "O Brāhmaṇas! I have granted Vibhīṣaṇa life and kingship for the duration of a *kalpa*. How could he be killed? And why is there any need to kill him? He is My devotee. I Myself am prepared to die on behalf of My devotee. Responsibility for a servant's offence truly belongs to his master; it is the master who deserves the punishment. Therefore punish Me in Vibhīṣaṇa's place."* Seeing the Lord's loving protection of one who had taken refuge, all the Brāhmaṇas were astonished, and they all took refuge in God.

* "Better that I Myself should die - how can My devotee be killed? I have granted him kingship and long life, and so shall he remain. For a servant's offence, it is everywhere held that the master should be punished." Hearing these words of Rāma, the Brāhmaṇas spoke in amazement.

The point is that no qualification, fitness, entitlement, or anything else can equal this intimate belonging: “I am God’s, and God is mine.” This is the essence of all spiritual disciplines. Even a tiny child, solely by the power of belonging, sets the whole household in motion at midnight: when the child cries at night, everyone gets up and tries to soothe him. Therefore, instead of looking toward his own qualifications and the like, the devotee who has taken refuge should keep looking only toward this intimate belonging with God.

The meaning of “do not grieve” is this:

(1) Having taken refuge in Me, you still worry. This is an offence against Me, an expression of your pride, and a stain upon your taking of refuge. To be in My refuge and yet not place complete faith and trust in Me is itself an offence against Me. Worrying over your faults is actually pride in your own strength, because worry about removing faults arises only when you suppose that you possess the power to remove them. If instead of worrying about the faults you feel sorrow over them, that sorrow is not so blameworthy. When a dog approaches a small child, the child cries on seeing it; he does not worry. In the same way, finding faults distasteful is not itself a fault; worrying about them is the fault. Worry means that, inwardly, you still rely upon some hidden strength of your own,* and this is your pride. If, even after becoming My devotee, you continue to worry, how will your worry ever be removed? People who see you will say, “This man is a devotee of God, yet he worries! God does not remove his worry!” When you worry instead of trusting Me, the lack of trust is yours, but the reproach falls upon Me and upon the refuge I give. Give these up.

* When Draupadī’s garment was being pulled away in the assembly of the Kauravas, she held on to her sari with her hands and teeth

while calling upon God. Because she called Him while still relying upon her own strength, His coming was delayed. But when Draupadī entirely gave up her own effort and depended solely upon God, Duḥśāsana exhausted himself pulling and pulling at the cloth; a heap of garments accumulated, yet no part of Draupadī's body was uncovered.

(2) Even if your feelings, mental tendencies, and conduct have not become pure, do not worry about them. I shall take care of them.

(3) In the seventh verse of the second chapter, Arjuna takes refuge in God. Then, in the eighth verse, he says that even if he were to obtain an unrivalled and prosperous kingdom on earth, or sovereignty over the gods, his grief, which is drying up his senses, could not be removed. God seems to say: what you say is entirely correct, for no one's grief has ever been removed through contact with material and perishable things; it cannot be removed that way, nor is there any possibility that it ever will be. But after taking refuge in Me, your continuing to grieve is a very grave mistake. Even in My refuge, you are carrying the burden upon your own head.

(4) After taking refuge, the devotee should not worry about anything at all - this world or the next, a good destiny or a bad one, and so forth. On this subject, a devotee has said:

Whether my dwelling be in heaven, upon earth, or freely in hell, O Destroyer of Naraka, may I contemplate even at death Your feet, whose beauty puts the autumn lotus to shame.

“O Lord, Destroyer of the demon Naraka! You may keep me in heaven, upon the earth, or in hell for as long as You please. Keep me wherever You wish and do whatever You wish; I have nothing to say

about it. I ask only this: even in the dreadful condition of death, may I continue to contemplate Your exquisitely beautiful feet, which put the splendor of the autumn lotus to shame. May I never forget Your feet.”

A Special Point

When the devotee who has taken refuge firmly grasps and accepts the feeling, “I am God’s, and God is mine,” the root of faults such as worry, fear, grief, and doubt is cut away; that is, their support is removed. From the standpoint of devotion, all faults rest solely upon turning away from God. Even after turning toward Him, latent impressions of relying upon the world and the body remain. They disappear when one’s relationship with God becomes firm, and when they disappear, all faults disappear as well.

What does it mean for this relationship to become firm? Firmness of relationship means the absence of worry, fear, grief, doubt, testing, and contrary conviction. Let us now consider each of these.

(1) Becoming free from worry - When a devotee offers himself to God together with everything he has regarded as his own, not the slightest worldly or otherworldly worry remains: How will I maintain my life now? Where shall I live? What condition will I be in? What will become of me? Such worries disappear altogether.¹

1. When one’s relationship with God becomes firm and reliance upon the world and body ceases entirely, these four no longer remain: the wish to live, the fear of dying, attachment to doing, and greed for obtaining.

2. The care belongs to the Compassionate Lord of the lowly; my mind remains ever joyful. Govinda, says Rāmadāsa, will surely sustain the one He has brought into being.

After taking refuge in God, this thought may arise in the devotee: “If my life has not become beautiful and pure enough to be worthy of the Lord, then where are the qualities of a devotee in my conduct? They have not appeared, for my mental tendencies do not remain right.” In truth, the fault lies in regarding the tendencies as “mine”; the tendencies themselves are not so much at fault. The sense of “mine” in relation to the mind, intellect, senses, body, and so forth is the real mistake. Once I have taken refuge in God and offered everything to Him, how can the mind, intellect, and the rest remain mine? Therefore one who has taken refuge should never worry about impurity in the mind or intellect; he should never entertain the thought, “My tendencies are not right.” If for some reason such tendencies suddenly arise, he should cry to the Lord in anguish: “O my Master! O my Lord! Save me! Save me!! Save me!!!” He is my own Master, my omnipotent Lord, so why should I now worry? God too has said, “Do not worry” - *mā śucaḥ*. Therefore say, “I am free from worry”; fall mentally at God’s feet, and, wholly at ease, tell Him: “O Lord, all this lies in Your hands. You know what is to be done.”

To have taken refuge in the omnipotent Lord and yet continue to worry are two profoundly contradictory things. If one has taken refuge, what place is there for worry? And if worry remains, what kind of refuge is that? One who has taken refuge should therefore think: when God says that He will free me from all sins, must I do something myself to be freed from tendencies such as these? “I am simply Yours. O God, may the feeling that these tendencies are mine never arise in me. O Lord, may the body, senses, vital forces, mind,

and intellect never appear to me as mine. Yet, O Lord, even after I have given everything to You, this body and the rest sometimes appear to be mine. Now You Yourself must free me from this offence.” Say this and become free from worry.

(2) Becoming fearless - Deficiencies in one’s conduct give rise to inward fear, while snakes, scorpions, tigers, and the like give rise to outward fear. Both kinds of fear disappear for the devotee who has taken refuge. Not only that: the fear of death, which the sage Patañjali calls the fifth affliction,¹ and which arises even in the greatest scholars,² also disappears completely.³

1. “Ignorance, egoism, attachment, aversion, and clinging to life are the afflictions.”

2. “Clinging to life, rooted in its own momentum, is firmly established even in the learned.”

3. “Nor, O Mādhava, do those who are Yours and whose loving friendship is bound to You ever fall from the path. Protected by You, O Lord, they move about fearlessly, placing their feet upon the heads of whole hosts of obstacles.”

“O Lord! Your devotees, who have joined their true love to Your feet, never fall away from their spiritual discipline as those proud of their knowledge do. O Lord! They move about fearlessly, setting their feet upon the heads of the commanders of mighty armies of obstacles; no obstacle can hinder their path.”

The seeker should also cast out from within the fear, “My mental tendencies may become bad.” He should think: “I am drenched through and through in God’s grace; now I have nothing whatever to fear. I was unable to purify these tendencies precisely because I

regarded them as mine, for regarding them as mine is itself impurity - ‘the impurity of possessiveness is burned away’ (Mānasa 7.117a). Therefore I shall never again regard them as mine. If the tendencies are not mine at all, what have I to fear? Now there is only God’s grace - grace and nothing else! God’s grace is filling everything everywhere. This is a matter of immense joy and gladness.”

People raise this doubt: if one takes refuge in God and worships Him, duality will result - God and devotee will become two - and “fear arises from a second.” But this doubt is groundless. Fear does arise from what is second, but not from one’s own; in other words, fear comes from another, not from one’s very own. Prakṛti and its products - body and world - are “the second,” so fear arises only when one maintains a relationship with them, for a permanent relationship with them is impossible. The reason is that the natures of Prakṛti and the conscious self are utterly different: one is inert and the other conscious; one is subject to modification and the other unchanging; one is mutable and the other immutable; one is illumined and the other the illuminator, and so on.

God is not “the second.” He is one’s very own, for the living being is His eternal portion, of His very nature. How then could one fear God after taking refuge in Him? On the contrary, by taking refuge in Him a person becomes fearless forever. From an ordinary point of view, a child is afraid when away from his mother, but his fear vanishes when he enters her lap, because she is his own. God’s devotee is in a condition more extraordinary still. A sense of difference may appear between child and mother, but between devotee and God no such separateness is possible.

(3) Becoming free from grief - Grief concerns something that has already passed. To grieve over what is past is a very great mistake, because what happened was bound to happen; what is not to happen can never happen; and whatever is now happening is precisely what was truly to happen. What occasion is there, then, for grief?* Knowing this auspicious ordering of the Lord, the devotee who has taken refuge always remains free from grief; grief never even approaches him.

* “Only what Rāma wills to do comes to pass; there is no one who can make it otherwise.”

“What shall be is only what Rāma has ordained. Who, by argument, can multiply branches of speculation?”

(4) Becoming free from doubt - Never entertain doubts about God such as: Have I become God’s or not? Has God accepted me or not? Instead, see this: “From beginningless time I belonged to God alone; I belong to Him now; and I shall always belong to Him in the future. Through my own foolishness, I regarded myself as separate from Him and turned away. Yet no matter how separate from God I may regard myself, I cannot actually become separate from Him; such separation is impossible. Even if I wished to separate myself from God, how could I do so? God has said that this living being is His own portion - *mamaivāṁśaḥ* (Gītā 15.7).” The moment one remembers the reality, “I am God’s, and God is mine,” all doubts and misgivings vanish; not the slightest room for them remains.

(5) Not putting it to a test - After taking refuge in God, do not test it by reasoning, “Now that I have taken refuge in God, such-and-such characteristics ought to be present in me. If they are not present, how can I have taken refuge?” Instead, if you see that qualities such

as freedom from hatred (Gītā 12.13-19) are lacking in you, be astonished: “How can this deficiency have remained in me?”* As soon as this attitude arises, the deficiency will not remain; it will disappear. For the person directly experiences that qualities such as freedom from hatred are no longer as deficient as they were before. Once refuge has been taken, all the characteristics of a devotee arise without effort.

A village story will help explain this. A mother had three sons. The two older sons were grown and worked for their livelihood. The third was simple and innocent. Their mother died, so the two elder brothers asked the youngest, “At least do this much: carry Mother’s remains and consign them to the Gaṅgā.” He agreed. Taking his mother’s remains, he left home. The Gaṅgā was three hundred kos away. After walking until he was exhausted, he asked someone, “Brother, how far is the Gaṅgā?” The man replied, “You have come one hundred and fifty kos; the Gaṅgā is another one hundred and fifty kos ahead.” The boy thought, “When shall I ever reach the Gaṅgā, and when shall I return?” In his distress, he threw the bones away in the forest. Near a village he filled a vessel with fresh rainwater, because one who goes to the Gaṅgā brings back Gaṅgā water. Then he turned back and reached his village. His elder brothers thought, “Had he gone to the Gaṅgā and returned, he could not have come back so soon. He never went there.” They asked him, “Did you go to the Gaṅgā?” He answered, “Yes, I went. I placed the remains in the Brahmakuṇḍ at the Gaṅgā itself and brought back this Gaṅgā water.” Thus he lied. His brothers understood that he was not telling the truth, but remained silent.*

The next morning, one elder brother said to him, “Brother, tell the truth. Did you really go all the way to the Gaṅgā and place the remains in the Gaṅgā itself?” He answered, “Yes, I certainly went to

the Gaṅgā.” The elder brother said, “Listen, Mother came to me in a dream last night. She said that you did not take her all the way to the Gaṅgā; you left her midway and came back. Now tell me: is Mother speaking the truth, or are you?” The younger brother replied, “Why did Mother come back this way? Why did she not go on in the proper direction? I had already carried her one hundred and fifty *kos*. Instead of coming back here, she could have continued another one hundred and fifty *kos* and reached the Gaṅgā itself!”

The point of the story is this: after taking refuge in God, a person applies the test, “The characteristics of devotees and saints have not appeared in me; therefore I have not taken refuge in God.” This is like asking why the mother came back the wrong way instead of going forward in the proper direction. One should think: “Now that I have taken refuge in God, how can these characteristics still be lacking? Why have they not appeared in me?” With such a conviction, you will truly become one who has taken refuge, and perfection too will come. But if you hold the conviction, “These characteristics have not appeared in me, therefore I have not taken refuge,” you will be deceived.

(6) Not entertaining a contrary conviction - How can the devotee who has taken refuge in God entertain the contrary conviction, “I do not belong to God”? This does not depend upon whether I accept it or not. The mutual relationship between God and me is unbreakable, indivisible, and eternal. My mistake was that I paid no attention to this relationship. Now that the mistake has been removed, how can a contrary conviction arise at all?

A person who sincerely accepts refuge in the Lord no longer retains faults such as worry, fear, and grief. His attitude of refuge naturally becomes firmer and firmer, just as after marriage a young woman’s

connection with her father's home naturally recedes and her connection with her husband's home naturally grows firm. That relationship becomes so firm that by the time she is a grandmother or great-grandmother, not even in a dream does the thought arise that she does not belong there. The conviction becomes firm in her mind: "I belong here alone, and all these are our very own." When her grandson's wife comes and behaves insolently in the house, creating quarrels, she - the grandmother - says, "This girl, born in another family, has ruined my home." Yet it never occurs to that old grandmother that she too was born in another family and came into this house. The point is that if even an assumed relationship can become so firm, what wonder is there if this being, who is a portion of God Himself, becomes firmly established in his eternal relationship with God? In truth, to make one's relationship with God firm, it is necessary only to relinquish the relationships with the world that one has merely assumed.

When a devotee sincerely takes refuge at the Lord's feet, some slight deficiency may remain in his devotional attitude or conduct; at a particular moment a contrary tendency may arise; or, overcome by circumstances, he may occasionally commit some slight wrong. If so, a burning remorse will arise in his heart. Therefore he has no need to perform any other expiation. In His grace, God completely destroys that sin.¹

Authorial footnote 1

*svapādamūlaṃ bhajataḥ priyasya tyaktānyabhāvasya hariḥ
pareśaḥ |
vikarma yac cotpatitaṃ kathañcid dhunoti sarvaṃ hṛdi
sanniviṣṭaḥ ||*

(Śrīmad Bhāgavatam 11.5.42)

“If a loving devotee worships the Lord's feet with exclusive devotion and happens unexpectedly to commit a sinful act, the Supreme Person, Lord Hari, dwelling in his heart, wholly destroys it.”

God looks only at the devotee's intimate belonging with Him, not at his virtues and faults.² That is, God simply does not see the devotee's faults; He sees only the bond of intimate belonging He shares with the devotee. For in his essential being, the devotee has always belonged to God. Faults are adventitious: they come and go, while the devotee's essential identity remains eternally and continuously just as it is. Therefore God's gaze remains fixed upon this reality alone. When a child smeared with mud comes before its mother, for example, the mother's gaze goes only toward her child, not toward the dirt upon him. The child's gaze too does not go toward the dirt. Whether or not the mother cleans him, in the child's sight the dirt is not there at all; he sees only his mother. How much hatred and anger filled Draupadī's heart when she vowed that she would bind her hair only after washing it with Duḥśāsana's blood! Yet whenever Draupadī called upon God, He came at once, because she possessed a deep sense of belonging with Him.

Authorial footnote 2

“The Lord does not keep a fault committed in His heart; He remembers the good a hundred times over.”

(Rāmacaritamānasa 1.29.3)

The sense of intimate belonging with God takes two forms: (1) “God is mine,” and (2) “I belong to God.” God's relationship is equally present in both, yet in the feeling “God is mine” one may desire that God act favourably toward oneself: “If God is mine, why does He not fulfil my wish?” In the feeling “I belong to God,” however, one

cannot desire that God conform to one's wishes, because if I belong to God, He may freely do with me whatever He considers right. Therefore the seeker should merge his own will completely into God's will. He should not claim even the slightest authority over God; rather, he should acknowledge God's complete authority over himself. If at any time God does what we want, we ought to feel hesitant: "For my sake, God had to do this!" If the fulfilment of one's wish produces no hesitation but instead gives satisfaction, this is not taking refuge. Even amid circumstances adverse to the body, senses, mind, or intellect, the devotee who has taken refuge remains content, understanding them to be God's will.

Nothing whatever remains for the surrendered devotee to do for himself, because he has offered himself to God together with everything toward which he felt possessiveness - all of which in truth already belonged to the Lord. All the work of doing, causing things to be done, and so forth now belongs to God alone. In this condition, even amid the most difficult and dreadful event or circumstance, he regards it as the Lord's great grace upon him and remains ever joyful and carefree. When Garuḍa asked Kākabhuśuṇḍi, for example, he related the story of his brāhmaṇa body in a former birth. The sage Lomaśa cursed that brāhmaṇa and turned him into the lowly, outcaste bird among birds - a crow. Yet neither fear nor any sense of wretchedness entered Kākabhuśuṇḍi's mind. He understood it to be nothing but God's pure ordinance. Not only did he understand it so; inwardly he exclaimed, "The ornament of Raghu's line is the mover within the heart" (Rāmacaritamānasa 7.113.1). When even so dreadful a curse did not diminish Kākabhuśuṇḍi's joy, the sage Lomaśa recognized him as God's beloved devotee, called him near, and taught him the meditation upon the child Rāma. Then he narrated the Lord's story and, greatly

pleased, placed his hand upon Kākabhuṣuṇḍi's head and blessed him: “By my grace, unobstructed and unbroken devotion to Rāma will remain in your heart. You will become dear to Rāma. You will become a treasury of every virtue. Whatever form you wish for, you will be able to assume. Wherever you dwell, not the slightest thorn of māyā will approach within one yojana,” and so forth. As soon as he had bestowed these many blessings, a voice from heaven declared, “O sage! Everything you have said will come true; he is My devotee in mind, speech, and action.” Referring to these events, Kākabhuṣuṇḍi, who remained ever joyful in God's ordinance, said:

*“I stubbornly held to the side of devotion, though the great sage
gave his curse;
I received a boon rare even for sages - behold the power of
worshipful remembrance!”*

(Rāmacaritamānasa 7.116 kha)

Here the words “the power of *bhajana*” mean remaining joyful at all times in God's ordinance. Even in the most adverse condition, the loving devotee's joy continues to increase more and more, because love by its very nature grows at every moment.

It is a rule that whatever is one's own always seems dear to one. God regards all beings as His own beloved: “All are dear to Me; all have arisen from Me” (Rāmacaritamānasa 7.86.2). The Lord is also naturally dear to this being. It is another matter that, mistakenly taking the changing world and body as his own, the being turns away from his beloved Lord. Even when he turns away, God has never abandoned any being from His side, nor can He ever do so, because the being has always been a direct portion of God Himself. God's intimacy with all beings therefore remains naturally unimpaired and unbroken. For this very reason He takes

incarnation from time to time solely to bestow grace upon beings - that is, for these three purposes: protecting devotees, destroying evildoers, and establishing dharma.¹ God's intimate concern alone shines through all three. Otherwise, what purpose of His would be accomplished by protecting devotees, destroying evildoers, and establishing dharma? None at all. God performs all three acts solely for the welfare of every living being. This too establishes His natural intimacy, compassion, dearness, benevolence, friendship, and disinterested generosity toward all beings. With this same purpose He says to Arjuna, “Become My devotee; fix your mind on Me; worship Me; bow down to Me.” In all four instructions God's sole intention is to turn the being toward Himself, so that every being may turn away from unreal things; for turning away from God is the principal cause of sorrow, anguish, repeated birth and death, and every calamity.

Authorial footnote 1

*paritrāṇāya sādḥūnāṃ vināśāya ca duṣkṛtām |
dharmasaṁsthāpanārthāya sambhavāmi yuge yuge ||*

“For the protection of the good, the destruction of evildoers, and the establishment of dharma, I manifest Myself age after age.”

(Bhagavad Gītā 4.8)

Whatever God ordains, He ordains solely for the welfare of every being in the whole world. If a being's attention turns toward this grace of God, what then remains for him to do? God's heart yearns for the welfare of beings; that is why He reveals the supremely confidential teaching, “Abandoning all dharmas, take refuge in Me alone.” God regards every being as His friend - “the friend of all beings” (5.29) - and grants them the freedom to attain Him easily

through any of the disciplines of karma-yoga, jñāna-yoga, bhakti-yoga, and so on, and thereby to eradicate sorrow, anguish, and the rest forever, root and branch.

In reality, a being is delivered only through God's grace. All disciplines - karma-yoga, jñāna-yoga, bhakti-yoga, aṣṭāṅga-yoga, laya-yoga, haṭha-yoga, rāja-yoga, mantra-yoga, and the rest - were revealed by God and by great souls who know the reality of God.¹ God's grace therefore pervades all of these disciplines. In performing a discipline, the seeker is merely an instrument; in bringing the discipline to perfection, God's grace is primary.

Authorial footnote 1

“Without any motive, You benefit the world in every age - You and Your servants, O Enemy of the demons.”

(Rāmacaritamānasa 7.47.3)

The surrendered devotee should never even worry, “I have not yet had a vision of God; love for God's feet has not arisen; my mental tendencies have not yet become pure,” and so on. To harbour such worries is to become like the baby monkey. The baby monkey itself clings to its mother. Wherever the mother leaps or bounds, the baby must keep itself fastened to her. The devotee should leave all his worries to God: whether God grants a vision or not, gives love or not, sets his tendencies right or not, makes him pure or not - all this should be left to God's will. He should be like the kitten. The kitten depends upon its mother. She may leave it wherever she wishes and carry it wherever she wishes. When the mother cat picks it up of her own accord, it draws in its paws. In the same way, the surrendered devotee withdraws his hands and feet from the world¹ and, while remembering God, repeating His Name, and so forth, continues to

look toward God alone. He remains supremely content with whatever God ordains and does not impose any preference of his own.

Authorial footnote 1

Whatever work the devotee performs, he performs it regarding it as God's work, accepting the power to do it as God's power, and doing it for God alone. He does not do even the slightest thing for himself. This is what it means for him to withdraw his hands and feet.

When a potter first carries clay upon his head, it is the potter's will; when he moistens and treads that clay, it is the potter's will; when he places it upon the wheel and turns it, it is the potter's will. The clay never says, "Make a water-pot, make a small bowl, make an earthen jar." Whatever the potter chooses to make is his will. In the same way, the surrendered devotee retains no will or preference of his own. The more carefree and fearless he becomes, the more God's grace spontaneously makes him conformable to itself. The more he worries and relies upon his own strength, the more he obstructs the grace that is coming to him. That is, once he has taken refuge, a unique, wondrous, unbroken, and inseverable grace comes from God; by worrying for himself, he obstructs that grace.

When a fisherman casts a net into a river to catch fish, all the fish that enter the net are caught; but the fish that comes close to the feet of the fisherman who cast the net is not caught. In the same way, beings become trapped by attachment in God's *māyā* - the world - and continue to be born and to die. But those beings who take refuge at the feet of God, the Lord of *māyā*, cross beyond *māyā*: "Those who take refuge in Me alone cross beyond this *māyā*" (Bhagavad Gītā 7.14). Only one aspect of this analogy should be

accepted, because the fisherman intends to catch the fish, whereas God has not the slightest intention of trapping beings in māyā. God's intention is to free beings from the net of māyā and take them into His refuge; that is why He says, "Take refuge in Me alone." Through their own greed for pleasure born of contact, beings entangle themselves in māyā.

All the grains that enter a turning mill are ground;¹ but the grains that remain close to the central peg upon which the mill turns stay whole, just as they are. In the same way, every being caught in the turning mill of worldly birth and death is ground - that is, suffers. But the being who takes support of the feet of God, upon whom the wheel of the world turns, is saved from being ground: "A servant of Hari alone escapes, staying close to the mill's central peg." This analogy too does not correspond in every respect, because the grains naturally remain near the peg; they make no effort to save themselves. God's devotees, however, turn away from the world and take shelter at the Lord's feet. The point is that only the one who, despite being a portion of God, regards the world as his own or wants something from the world falls into the wheel of birth and death and suffers.

Authorial footnote 1

*"Seeing the turning mill, Kabīr began to weep:
caught between the two stones, not one remained whole."*

Our relationships with the world and with God are of two different kinds. The relationship with the world is merely assumed, while the relationship with God is real. Relationship with the world makes a person dependent and enslaved, but relationship with God makes him free, makes him conscious in essence - and even makes him God's master!

Whenever one perceives some distinction of one's own on account of anything, that itself is dependence. If a person considers himself distinguished on account of learning, intelligence, wealth and property, renunciation, dispassion, or anything else, this is nothing but dependence upon and slavery to that learning and so forth. If someone considers himself distinguished because of wealth, for example, the distinction in fact belongs to the wealth, not to him. He regards himself as the master of wealth, but in reality he is wealth's slave.

The law of the world is that when a person considers himself distinguished because of worldly things, those very things make him insignificant and trample him underfoot. But those who depend upon God and remain reliant upon Him alone see no distinction in themselves; instead, they see only God's transcendent, extraordinary, and wondrous nature. God may make such a devotee the jewel in His crown or even make him His master, yet the devotee still sees no distinction in himself. The Lord's law is that His extraordinary nature descends into the devotee who perceives no distinction in himself and possesses no pride in anything. In some, this extraordinary transformation goes so far that even material constituents such as the body, senses, mind, and intellect become conscious in essence; material insentience becomes utterly absent from them. Such loving devotees of God have merged into God Himself, and in the end their bodies were not found. Mīrābāī, for example, merged bodily into the Lord's sacred image. For recognition, only a small edge of her sari remained in the image's mouth; nothing else was left. In the same way, Saint Tukārām went bodily to Vaikuṇṭha.

On the path of knowledge, the body does not become conscious in essence, because the knower severs his relationship with the unreal,

separates himself from it, and becomes established in the conscious Reality itself. But when a devotee turns toward God, his body, senses, mind, vital energies, and everything else turn toward God as well. The point is this: those whose vision rests solely upon the conscious Reality - in whose vision material insentience has no independent existence apart from that conscious Reality - have that consciousness descend even into their bodies and other faculties, which then become conscious in essence. To ordinary people's sight, materiality still appears in their bodies; in reality, however, their bodies are conscious in essence.

When one has taken refuge in God completely, God's grace certainly manifests in a special way for the surrendered devotee. Yet no one can describe how much affection Mother Lakṣmī - full of maternal tenderness, lovingly sustaining the whole world, and ever inseparable from God - bears toward one who has taken refuge in the Lord, or how dearly she loves him. Even in ordinary life one sees that a devoted wife is especially fond of a son who is devoted to his father.

Second, when the Lord, filled with love, comes seated upon Garuḍa to see His devotee, Mother Lakṣmī accompanies Him upon that same Garuḍa, from whose wings the mantras of the Sāmaveda are continually sung. But if someone does not want God and wants Mother Lakṣmī alone, then out of affection she may indeed come, but her vehicle is the owl, blind in daylight. Attaining Lakṣmī upon such a vehicle, the person too becomes blinded by pride. If anyone regards that Mother as an object of enjoyment, he undergoes a terrible fall; for he casts an impure gaze upon his own mother and is therefore exceedingly base.

Third, wherever there is love for God alone, Lakṣmī, who remains inseparable from God, necessarily comes together with Him. But wherever there is desire for Lakṣmī alone, there is no rule that God must come together with Lakṣmī.

A story is told concerning taking refuge. Sītā, Rāma, and Hanumān were sitting beneath a tree in the forest. A vine had spread over the tree's branches and twigs, extending its delicate tendrils. Fresh buds were emerging here and copper-coloured leaves there. The vine was covered with flowers and leaves, beautifully adorning the tree, which looked exceedingly lovely. Seeing the tree's splendour, Lord Śrī Rāma said to Hanumān, "Look, Hanumān! How beautiful this vine is! See how it has spread all around the tree! With its lovely fruits, fragrant flowers, and green leaves, how greatly it enhances this tree's beauty. How much more beautiful this tree appears than every other tree in the forest! More than that, this very tree lends beauty to the whole forest. Because of this vine, animals and birds take shelter in this tree. Blessed indeed is this vine!"

Hearing Lord Śrī Rāma praise the vine, Sītā said to Hanumān, "Look, my son Hanumān! Did you notice? See: the vine's climbing upward, becoming covered with flowers and leaves, and spreading its tendrils - all these depend upon the tree and are possible only because of the tree. The vine's beauty too exists only because of the tree. At root, therefore, the glory belongs to the tree. The tree alone is its support. Without the tree's support, what could the vine do by itself? How could it spread? Now speak, Hanumān! You tell us: does not the glory belong to the tree?"

Rāma said, "What do you say, Hanumān? Does not this glory belong to the vine?"

Hanumān replied, “A third answer occurs to me.”

Sītā asked, “What is that, my son?”

Hanumān said, “Mother! The shade of the tree and the vine together is very beautiful. I simply like to remain in the shade of both - that is, I delight only in remaining beneath the shade of both of you, sheltered at your feet!”

*“A servant, a son, a wife, and a mother live by reliance;
free from care, each is sustained by the Lord.”*

In the same way, God and His divine bliss-bestowing potency each enhance the other's splendour. Some proclaim both of them supreme, some proclaim God alone supreme, and others proclaim only His bliss-bestowing potency supreme. For the surrendered devotee, the highest course is to take shelter of both the Lord and His bliss-bestowing potency.

Once, a blind saint - one whose wisdom was his sight - was walking along the bank of the Yamunā toward Agra, staff in hand. The river was in flood. At one place the bank collapsed into the water, and Bābājī fell in as well. His staff slipped from his hand. He could not see in any case; now, if he swam, in which direction could he swim? The moment he remembered the teaching of taking refuge in God, he ceased all effort and relaxed his body. He then felt as if someone grasped his hand and set him upon the bank. There another staff came into his hand, and with its support he continued on his way. The point is that one who takes refuge in God and relies upon Him has nothing left to do for himself. Whatever happens by God's ordinance, in that alone he remains content.

A large flock of sheep and goats went to graze in the forest. As one goat grazed, she became entangled in a vine. It took her a long time to free herself, and by then all the other sheep and goats had reached home. Darkness too was falling. Wandering on, the goat reached the bank of a lake. There, impressed in the moist earth at the water's edge, was the footprint of a lion. She took refuge in that footprint and sat beside it. At night, when wild jackals, wolves, tigers, and other creatures approached to eat her, the goat would tell them, "First see whose refuge I am under; then eat me!" Seeing the print, they would say, "Why, she has taken refuge in a lion's footprint! Hurry away from here! If the lion comes, he will kill us." In this way, every creature fled in fear. At last the lion whose footprint it was came himself and asked the goat, "How are you sitting alone in the forest?" The goat replied, "Look at this footprint first; then speak. I sit here having taken refuge in the one whose footprint it is." The lion looked. "Oh! This is my own footprint. This goat has taken refuge in me!" He reassured her: "Do not be afraid now; remain fearlessly."

When an elephant came to drink water at night, the lion said to him, "Put this goat upon your back. Take her out to graze in the forest, and keep her upon your back at all times. Otherwise, you do not know who I am - I will kill you!" Hearing the lion, the elephant began to tremble. With his trunk he immediately lifted the goat onto his back. From then on the goat sat fearlessly upon the elephant's back, ate the upper buds of the trees, and lived carefree.

"Find a firm hold and remain seated; the Master will come and meet you.

The goat mounts the elephant's head and fearlessly eats the tender shoots."

In the same way, when a person takes refuge in God and accepts the support of His feet, he becomes fearless before every creature and every obstacle. No one can frighten him; no one can harm him in any way.

*“Whoever takes another's refuge, that protector preserves his honour:
the fish swims against the current, while the mighty elephant is swept away.”*

Why should one not form a relationship with God even through desire, fear, hatred, anger, affection, or the like? Even such a relationship works for the being's welfare.¹ The point is that all those who became connected with God in any manner whatever - through desire, fear, hatred, or otherwise - were certainly delivered. But those who formed no relationship with God in any way and remained indifferent were deprived of attaining Him!

Authorial footnote 1

*kāmād dveṣād bhayāt snehād yathā bhaktyeśvare manaḥ |
āveśya tad-agmaṇ hitvā bahavas tad-gatiṁ gatāḥ ||
gopyaḥ kāmād bhayāt kaṁso dveṣāc caidyādayo nṛpāḥ |
sambandhād vṛṣṇayaḥ snehād yūyaṇ bhaktyā vayaṇ vibho ||*

(Śrīmad Bhāgavatam 7.1.29-30)

“Not one but many people fixed their minds upon God through desire, hatred, fear, and affection; all their sins were washed away, and they attained God just as devotees attain Him through devotion. Thus the gopīs fixed their minds on Him through desire, Kaṁsa through fear, kings such as Śiśupāla and Dantavakra through hatred, the Vṛṣṇis through family relationship, you people -

Yudhiṣṭhira and the others - through affection, and we - Nārada and the others - through devotion.”

*satsaṅgena hi daiteyā yātudhānā mṛgāḥ khagāḥ |
gandharvāpsaraso nāgāḥ siddhāś cāraṇaguhyakāḥ ||
vidyādhara manuṣyeṣu vaiśyāḥ śūdrāḥ striyo 'ntyajāḥ |
rajas-tamaḥ-prakṛtayas tasmīṃs tasmīn yuge 'nagha ||
bahavo mat-padaṃ prāptāś tvāṣṭrakāyādhavādayaḥ |
vṛṣaparvā balir bāṇo mayas cātha vibhīṣaṇaḥ ||
sugrīvo hanumān ṛkṣo gajo grdhro vaṇikpathaḥ |
vyādhraḥ kubjā vraje gopyo yajñapatnyas tathāpare ||
te nādhītaśrutigaṇā nopāsitamahattamāḥ |
avratātaptatapasaḥ satsaṅgān mām upāgatāḥ ||*

(Śrīmad Bhāgavatam 11.12.3-7)

God says, “Sinless Uddhava! This is not true of only one age; it is the same in every age. Through *satsaṅga* - that is, through relationship with Me alone - Daityas and Rākṣasas, animals and birds, Gandharvas and Apsarases, Nāgas and Siddhas, Cāraṇas, Guhyakas, and Vidyādharas attained Me. Among human beings, many whose natures were governed by rajas and tamas - Vaiśyas, Śūdras, women, those considered outcastes, and others - attained My supreme abode. Vṛtrāsura, Prahlāda, Vṛṣaparvā, Bali, Bāṇāsura, the demon Maya, Vibhīṣaṇa, Sugrīva, Hanumān, Jāmbavān, Gajendra, Jaṭāyu, the merchant Tulābhāra, Dharmavyādha, Kubjā, the gopīs of Vraja, the wives of the sacrificers, and others were able to attain Me through the influence of *satsaṅga* alone.

“They had neither studied the Vedas nor worshipped great souls according to prescribed method. Likewise, they had observed no vows such as the difficult Cāndrāyaṇa and performed no austerity.

Through *satsaṅga* alone - through the power of relationship with Me - they attained Me.”

Concerning God's exclusive devotees, Nārada says:

nāsti teṣu jātividyārūpakuladhanakriyādibhedah

“Among those devotees there is no distinction based on caste, learning, appearance, family, wealth, occupation, or anything else.”

(Nārada Bhakti Sūtra 72)

The point is that those who have offered themselves wholly to God - who have accepted the realities of intimate belonging with God, complete orientation toward Him, exclusivity, and so forth - are not subject to any worldly distinctions of caste, learning, and the like that may be associated with the gross, subtle, or causal body.¹ For they belong to the infallible God - “because they are His” (Nārada Bhakti Sūtra 73) - and not to the world. Because they belong to the infallible God, they are said to be of “Acyuta's lineage.”²

Authorial footnote 1

pumstve strīve viśeṣo vā jātināmāśramādayaḥ |
na kārāṇaṃ madbhajane bhaktir eva hi kārāṇam ||

(Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa, Araṇya Kāṇḍa 10.20)

“In worshipping Me, distinctions of male and female, or caste, name, stage of life, and the like are not the cause; devotion to Me alone is the sole cause.”

kiṃ janmanā sakalavarṇajanottamena
kiṃ vidyayā sakalāśāstravicāravatyā |
yasyāsti cetasi sadā parameśabhaktiḥ
ko 'nyas tatas tribhuvane puruṣo 'sti dhanyaḥ ||

(Source abbreviated in the print as “Bra. Saṃ. Bha. 17”)

“What is gained by birth in the highest of all social orders, a brāhmaṇa family? What is gained by profound study of all the scriptures? Nothing at all. If devotion to God abides in a person's heart, who else in the three worlds can be as blessed as he?”

*vyādhasyācaraṇaṃ dhruvasya ca vayo vidyā gajendrasya kā
kā jātir vidurasya yādavapater ugrasya kiṃ pauruṣam |
kubjāyāḥ kimu nāma rūpam adhikaṃ kiṃ tat sudāmno dhanaṃ
bhaktyā tuṣyati kevalaṃ na ca guṇair bhaktipriyo mādhabaḥ ||*

“What exemplary conduct did the hunter possess? What mature age had Dhruva? What learning had Gajendra? What high caste had Vidura? What prowess had Ugrasena, lord of the Yādavas? What remarkable beauty had Kubjā? What wealth had Sudāmā? Yet all of them attained God. The reason is that God loves devotion alone: He is satisfied only by devotion, not by virtues such as conduct and learning.”

Authorial footnote 2

*piṭṛgotrī yathā kanyā svāmigotreṇa gotrikā |
śrīrāmabhaktimātreṇācyutagotrena gotrakaḥ ||*

(Nārada Pañcarātra)

“Just as a maiden, formerly of her father's lineage, comes to belong to her husband's lineage, so through devotion to Śrī Rāma alone a devotee comes to belong to the lineage of Acyuta.”

The Secret of Taking Refuge

What is the secret of taking refuge? In truth, God alone knows it. Even so, an attempt is being made to express what has come within my understanding, for whatever a person says reveals only the measure of his own understanding. Readers are requested not to draw the opposite meaning from what is said here. People often seize upon the opposite meaning of a subtle, esoteric teaching without first understanding it deeply. For this reason, very few people are qualified either to speak or to hear such a teaching.

In the Gītā, God has stated two things concerning refuge: (1) “Take refuge in Me alone” (18.66) - “Come into My refuge alone, with exclusive devotion”; and (2) “Knowing all, he worships Me with his whole being, O Bhārata” (15.19), and “Take refuge in Him with your whole being, O Bhārata” (18.62). How, then, are we to take refuge in God? We should take refuge in God alone - that is, we should not fix our attention upon God's virtues, majesty, and so forth - and we should take refuge in God with our whole being - that is, we should retain no worldly desire alongside Him.

The secret of taking refuge in God alone is this: God possesses infinite virtues, powers, realities, mysteries, glory, divine plays, Names, and abodes; His majesty, sweetness, and beauty are infinite. The surrendered devotee does not look toward these manifestations at all. His one feeling is: “I belong only to God, and God alone is mine.” If he takes refuge in God because he looks toward God's virtues, powers, and so forth, then in reality he has taken refuge in those virtues and powers, not in God. But do not take the opposite meaning of this teaching.

What does it mean to take the opposite meaning? It means refusing to acknowledge God's virtues, powers, Names, abodes, majesty,

sweetness, beauty, and so forth, and refusing to approach them at all: “Nothing remains to be done now. There is no need to engage in worshipful remembrance, to hear of God's virtues, powers, divine plays, and so on, or to visit God's sacred abode.” This is to take the opposite meaning. To interpret the teaching in this way is to commit a grave error.

To take refuge in God alone means: God alone is mine. If He possesses majesty, that is wonderful; if He possesses no majesty at all, that too is wonderful. If He is exceedingly compassionate, that is wonderful; and if He is so unfeeling and severe that no one in the world is as severe as He, that too is wonderful. If His power is immense, that is wonderful; and if He has no power at all, that too is wonderful. One who has taken refuge is unconcerned with all such considerations. He has only one feeling: whatever God may be like, He is ours.¹ Being unconcerned with these attributes of God does not mean that His divine majesty, sweetness, beauty, virtues, glory, and so on will disappear. But only when we cease to concern ourselves with them will our taking refuge be genuine.

Authorial footnote 1

*asundaraḥ sundaraśekharo vā guṇair vihīno guṇināṃ varo vā |
dveṣī mayi syāt karuṇāmbudhir vā śyāmaḥ sa evāद्या gatiṃ
mamāyam ||*

“My beloved Śrī Kṛṣṇa may be unattractive or the crown of all beauty, devoid of virtues or foremost among the virtuous; He may bear hatred toward me or bestow grace as an ocean of compassion. Whatever He may be like, He alone is my one refuge.”

*āśliṣya vā pādaratāṃ ninaṣṭu mām adarśanān marmahatāṃ
karotu vā |*

*yathā tathā vā vidadhātu lampāṭo matprāṇanāthas tu sa eva
nāparaḥ ||*

“He may clasp me to His heart, trample me under His feet while I cling to them, or pierce my heart by withholding His sight. Let supremely independent Śrī Kṛṣṇa do whatever He wishes: He alone is the Lord of my life; there is no other.”

When one takes refuge in God on account of His virtues, glory, and so on, one has not taken refuge in God alone; one has actually taken refuge in those virtues and that glory. Suppose someone respects a wealthy man. In reality, his respect is not for the man but for the money. However much a minister may be honoured, the honour is not for the person but for his ministry, his office. If a powerful person is honoured, it is his strength that is being honoured, not the person himself. But if someone honours the person alone - the wealthy man, for example - that does not mean the wealthy man's wealth or the minister's office will disappear. They will certainly remain. In the same way, taking refuge in God alone does not mean that God's virtues, glory, and so forth will disappear. Our gaze, however, should rest on God alone, not on His virtues and the rest.

When the Seven Sages described Śiva's many faults and Viṣṇu's many virtues before Pārvatī and told her to give up Śiva, Pārvatī gave them this very answer:

Mahādeva may be the abode of faults, and Viṣṇu the abode of every virtue; but the one in whom the heart has found delight - with that one alone it has to do.

The gopīs said the same thing to Uddhava:

O Uddhava, it is all a matter of what pleases the heart. Leaving grapes, dried dates, and nectar-sweet fruit, the poison-worm eats poison. Offer camphor to the cakora bird: it casts it aside and strikes at a burning coal. The bee makes its home in hollow wood, yet is trapped within the petals of a lotus. The moth, taking the flame to be its own good, flings itself upon the lamp. Sūradāsa says: whatever the heart has given itself to, that alone seems pleasing.

One who looks toward God's glory and loves that glory may obtain liberation, divine powers, and the like, but cannot obtain God. Only the God-loving devotee who does not look toward God's glory can attain God Himself. Not only that: such a loving devotee can bind God and can even sell Him!

God sees, "He loves Me and does not so much as look toward My glory." Then God holds that devotee in very great esteem.

Looking toward His glory proves that there is still some desire in us to obtain something. In our heart we value the thing desired. So long as desire remains in us, we look toward God's power. If no desire remains in our heart, our gaze will not turn toward God's glory or divine majesty. When it rests on God alone, we shall take refuge in Him and become His own.

Consider this. The demoness Pūtanā smeared poison on her breast and put it into the Lord's mouth. Yet the Lord granted her the state of a mother: "She attained the state of Yaśodā." That is, Pūtanā received the liberation that Mother Yaśodā might receive. God gave liberation even to Pūtanā, who fed Him poison. What, then, could He give to the mother who feeds Him milk every day? The God who grants liberation to countless beings became subject to Mother Yaśodā and gave her His very Self. He became so thoroughly subject

to her that when she showed Him a stick, He became frightened and began to cry. The reason is that Mother Yaśodā never looked toward God's glory or divine majesty. Thus God gives liberation to those who seek liberation from Him, but to one who wants nothing at all He gives His own Self.

Authorial footnote:

IAST: *aho bakī yaṁ stana-kāla-kūṭaṁ jighāṁsayāpāyayad apy asādhvī | lebhe gatiṁ dhātry-ucitāṁ tato 'nyam kaṁ vā dayāluṁ śaraṇaṁ vrajema ||*

"Ah! Although the wicked Pūtanā gave Him the deadly poison smeared upon her breasts, intending to kill Him, she attained the state appropriate to a nurse. Apart from Him, who else is so merciful that we should take refuge in him?"

The secret of taking refuge in God with one's whole being is this. Suppose we think, "My body is sound, my senses are under control, my mind is pure and stainless, my understanding is correct, I am educated, I am renowned, and I am respected in the world." To take refuge in God while thinking in this way that "I too am something" is not taking refuge. After taking refuge in God, one should not even think: "My body ought to be like this; my intellect ought to be like this; my mind ought to be like this; my meditation ought to become absorbed in this way; my devotional feeling ought to be like this; these particular signs ought to appear in my life; my conduct ought to be such and such; I ought to have such love that tears begin to flow and my throat becomes choked when I hear sacred narrative and kīrtana. But nothing like this has occurred in my life, so how can I have taken refuge in God?" And so on. These things are not the test of exclusive refuge.

One who has taken exclusive refuge does not look at whether the body is sick or healthy, whether the mind is restless or steady, whether the intellect possesses knowledge or ignorance, whether there is foolishness or learning in oneself, ability or inability, and so on. He does not look toward any of this even in a dream, because in his sight all these things are rubbish, none of which he takes with him. If he looks at them, either pride will increase - "I am a devotee surrendered to God" - or he will have to become despondent: "I have taken refuge in God, yet the qualities of devotees - 'free from hatred toward every being, friendly and compassionate, free from possessiveness and ego, the same in pain and pleasure, forbearing,' and so on - have not appeared in me at all!"

The point is that if one sees the devotees' qualities in oneself, one will become proud of them; and if one does not see them, one will become despondent. It is therefore best, after taking refuge in God, never to look toward these qualities at all. Do not perversely interpret this to mean, "Then we may oppose others, hate them, harbour possessiveness, or do whatever we like!" It does not mean this at all. The point is that one should not be preoccupied with these qualities. All of them will come of themselves in a devotee who has taken refuge in God, but the devotee should have no concern with whether they have come or not. One should not apply such a test to oneself: "Do I possess these qualities and marks or not?"

A true devotee who has taken refuge looks neither toward God's qualities nor toward his own. Nor does he look toward God's loftiest lovers and think, "Great lovers of God are like this; liberated sages who know the Reality are like that."

People commonly apply tests such as these: "If he worships God, how did he fall ill? If he has become God's devotee, why did he get a

fever? Why did suffering come upon him? Why did his son die? Why was his wealth lost? Why did he become disgraced in the world? Why was he treated with disrespect?" And so on. To apply such tests is utterly pointless and very low. What can be explained to such people? They have not even come near satsanga, and therefore they do not know what devotion is or what taking refuge is. They simply cannot understand these matters.

But this also does not mean that God's devotee must be poor, must be dishonoured in the world, or must be censured. A devotee who has taken refuge has no concern at all with censure or praise, sickness or health, and the like. He does not look toward them. He sees only this: "I am, and God is." That is all. What exists or does not exist in the world? What exists or does not exist in the three worlds? The Lord is such and such; He creates, sustains, and dissolves the universe - his gaze does not turn toward any of these matters.

Someone asked a saint, "Which God are you devoted to? Are you a devotee of the One who creates, sustains, and dissolves the universe?" The saint replied, "Our God has no connection at all with creation, preservation, and dissolution. That is merely one expression of our Lord's majesty. It is nothing extraordinary." A devotee who has taken refuge should be like this. His gaze should never turn toward divine majesty and the rest.

One evening a satsanga was being held at Tībṛī on the bank of the Ganges in Rishikesh. It was hot. A wave of cool air came from the Ganges, and one gentleman said, "What a cool breeze is coming!" Another gentleman sitting nearby said, "How did you find time to notice the wind? How did your attention turn toward whether a cool wind or a hot wind was blowing?" If you are absorbed in worshipful

remembrance of God, then so long as your attention goes toward whether the wind is cool or hot, or whether pleasure or pain has come, how can it be directed toward God? We have heard a story on this subject. The story itself is rather crude, but its conclusion is excellent.

There was an unchaste woman. A man sent her a message to come to a certain place at a certain time, and at the appointed time she was going to meet her lover. A mosque stood along the way, with low walls. Near one wall the mosque's maulvi was bent in prayer. Without realizing it, the woman stepped on him and passed over. The maulvi became very angry: "What kind of woman is this? She has stepped on me with her shoe and made me impure!" He sat there watching for her return. When she came back, he rebuked her: "How senseless you are! I was seated in worship of the Lord, offering namāz, and you stepped on me and walked away!" She replied:

Absorbed in a man, I did not see you; how, wise sir, did you see me? Reading the Qur'an has made you crazed, but you have not become absorbed in the Merciful One.

"Because I was absorbed in the thought of one man, I did not even know whether there was a wall or a person before me. But you were absorbed in God, so how did you recognize me and know that it was this very woman? You have merely gone mad from reading the Qur'an again and again. If you had been wholly absorbed in God, would you have recognized me? Who came, how they came, whether it was a person, an animal, or a bird, what it was or was not, who came above or below, who put a foot on you - why should your attention have gone there at all?" The point is this: leaving the one God aside, how can attention turn toward anyone else? How

can one even become aware of other things? So long as one remains aware of other things, where is the taking of refuge?

When the Kauravas and Pāṇḍavas were boys, they were learning the use of weapons. When their training was complete, they were tested. An artificial bird was placed in a tree, and each was told to shoot an arrow through its neck. They came forward one by one. The teacher first asked each separately, "Tell me, what do you see there?" One said, "I see the tree." Another said, "I see the branch." Another said, "I see the bird; I see its beak and its wings as well." Those who answered in this way were sent away. When Arjuna's turn came, he was asked what he saw. Arjuna replied, "I see only the neck and nothing else." He was then told to shoot. Arjuna pierced the bird's neck with his arrow because his gaze was properly fixed on the target.

If one still sees the bird, the tree, the branch, and the rest, where is one's aim fixed? The gaze is still dispersed. Once there is a target, only the target will be seen; nothing apart from it will be visible. In the same way, so long as a person's aim has not become one, how has he become exclusive? There must be unwavering *ananyayoga*, exclusive union: "and unswerving devotion to Me through exclusive union." There should be no *anyayoga*, no union with or reliance upon another; that is, there should be no dependence on body, mind, intellect, ego, and so on. There should be God alone.

Someone said to Gosvāmī Tulasīdāsa, "The little Rāma whom you worship is an incarnation possessing only twelve *kalās*, whereas Lord Kṛṣṇa, whom Sūradāsa worships, is an incarnation possessing all sixteen!" The moment he heard this, Gosvāmījī fell at the man's feet and said, "Ah! You have shown me immense grace! I had worshipped Rāma merely as King Daśaratha's darling little prince.

Now I learn that He is an incarnation with twelve *kalās*! Is He really so great? You have done me a tremendous kindness by telling me something new today." He did not even hear the statement that Kṛṣṇa possessed sixteen *kalās*; his attention never went toward it.

Devotees have different devotional attitudes toward God. One says, "The little Rāma who plays in Daśaratha's lap is my chosen Deity - 'My chosen Deity is Rāma as a child.'" Not Rāmacandra, King of kings, but the tiny child Rāma. Another devotee says, "My chosen Deity is Laḍḍū Gopāla, Nanda's little boy." Such devotees have saints bestow blessings upon their child Rāma or Nanda's child, and this is exceedingly dear to God. The point is that the devotees' gaze never goes toward God's divine majesty.

By the touch of this dust of Vraja, all four kinds of liberation are obtained; yet every day the gopīs sweep that dust out and cast it upon the road.

If someone were to take the dust of the courtyard in which Kanhaiyā plays, that person would attain all four kinds of liberation. Yet Mother Yaśodā sweeps that very dust away and throws it outside. To her it is only rubbish. Who wants liberation now? Mother's attention is on Kanhaiyā alone. She thinks neither of Kanhaiyā's divine majesty nor even of His extraordinary powers.

The saints have said that if you wish to meet God, you should have neither a companion nor any possessions with you; meet Him without companion or baggage. If a companion or support is still with you, what sort of meeting with God is that? And if the baggage of mind, intellect, learning, wealth, and so forth remains tied to you, it will form a curtain, an obstruction. Can there be a meeting through a curtain? There even a piece of clothing is an obstruction.

Not only clothing: if even a rosary comes between you, what meeting has taken place? Thus, if neither companion nor baggage is with you, the meeting with God will be extraordinary and divine.

A holy man once met a cowherd of Vraja working in a field. The cowherd was a devotee of God. The holy man asked, "What do you do?" He replied, "I do the work of my little Kanhaiyā." The holy man said, "I am an exclusive devotee of God. What are you?" The cowherd answered, "I am a *phananya* devotee." The holy man asked, "What is a *phananya* devotee?" The cowherd asked in return, "What is an *ananya*, an exclusive, devotee?" The holy man said, "An exclusive devotee is one who acknowledges neither the sun, nor Śakti, Gaṇeśa, Brahmā, or anyone else, but acknowledges our Kanhaiyā alone." The cowherd replied, "Bābājī, I do not even know their names, what they are or are not. I know nothing of them at all. So have I become *phananya* or not?" In this way, the devotee who has taken refuge should not turn his attention toward questions such as: What is Brahman? What is the self? What are the qualified and the unqualified? What are the formed and the formless?

There is a story from Vraja. At a well a saint was speaking with someone about Brahman, the Supreme Self, the individual self, and so on. A gopī came there to draw water and listened to what Bābājī was saying. When she later met another gopī, she asked, "Friend, what is this Brahman?" The other replied, "He must be some neighbour or relative of our little boy! We do not know, friend. These people are absorbed in him, are they not? That is why they know all about him. We have only Nanda's little boy. If we need anything, we shall tell Nanda Bābā or ask Girirāja, 'Mahārāja, please show us grace.' Kanhaiyā is so innocent; what will he

understand, and what will he do? What will we get from Kanhaiyā? Friend, that Kanhaiyā is ours - what more is there to get?"

We too are alone, and Kanhaiyā too is alone. We possess no baggage, and neither does He. He is an entirely naked little Bābā: "Naked is the form of Child Gopāla, who cuts and burns away the world's net." What could one obtain from such a Kanhaiyā?

Mother Yaśodā says to Dāūjī, "Look, Dāū! This Kanhaiyā is very innocent. Keep an eye on Him, lest He wander far into the forest." Dāūjī says, "Mother! Kanhaiyā is extremely restless. When He walks through the forest with me and sees a snake hole along the way, He puts His hand into it. What if a snake bites Him?" Mother replies, "Son, He is still a tiny, innocent child, while you are older. You must therefore keep watch over Him." And so Brother Dāū and all the cowherd boys keep watch over Kanhaiyā. If someone were to tell the cowherd boys or Mother Yaśodā that Kanhaiyā sustains the whole world, they would say, "You may have a God like that who sustains the whole world. Ours is not like that. How could our tiny Kanhaiyā sustain the world?"

A Bābājī was conversing with the gopīs. As he spoke, he began to say that Kṛṣṇa possessed such vast majesty and sweetness, and had such a great treasury of divine splendour. The gopīs replied, "Mahārāja, the key to that treasury is with us! What does Kanhaiyā possess? He has nothing at all. If someone asks Him for something, where will He get it to give?" Therefore, if anyone wants something, that person should not go to Kanhaiyā. Only one who never wants anything should go to Kanhaiyā and take refuge in Him. One should want nothing under any circumstances. Even amid calamity or death, there should be no thought, "Give me a little help; protect me."

Vālmīki says to Lord Śrī Rāma:

Dwell forever in the heart of one who never wants anything and whose love for You is natural and uncontrived; that heart is truly Your own home.

When there is no feeling of wanting anything, God naturally seems dear and sweet: "natural love for You." One in whom there is no desire is God's own special home: "that heart is truly Your own home." If we keep desire with us and also keep God with us, the heart is not God's own special home. Love for God should be natural, without any admixture; that is, there should be no desire for anything. Where any desire remains, how can there be love? There are only attachment, craving, delusion, and possessiveness. Therefore the gopīs issue this warning:

IAST: *mā yāta pānthāḥ pathi bhīma-rathyā digambaraḥ ko 'pi tamāla-nīlaḥ | vinyasta-hasto 'pi nitamba-bimbe dhūrtaḥ samākarṣati citta-vittam ||*

"O travellers, do not go down that lane; it is terribly dangerous! A naked boy, dark blue like a tamāla tree, stands there with both hands set upon the curve of His hips. He merely looks like an innocent ascetic. In truth, He never lets any traveller pass by without stealing the wealth of that traveller's heart."

You see that dark, naked little boy standing there? He will rob you and leave you empty! He is such a thief that He will finish everything. Do not go that way at all; take care beforehand. If you do go, you will be gone forever! Therefore, if anyone wishes to carry on living sensibly, he should not go there. His name is Kṛṣṇa, is it not? *Kṛṣṇa* means the One who draws you to Himself. Once He draws you, He never lets go. So long as you have not become

acquainted with Him, all is well. If you do become acquainted with Him, the matter is finished. You will no longer be of any use; you will become useless throughout all the three worlds!

Nārāyaṇa says: she wanders about as one gone mad, no longer of use to anyone - she whose heart has become attached to dark Śyāma.

Yes, one who is of no use for any particular purpose becomes useful to everyone in every way. Yet he himself has no concern with any purpose at all.

A surrendered devotee does not even have to perform *bhajana*. Worshipful remembrance happens through him spontaneously and naturally. God's Name naturally tastes exceedingly sweet and dear to him. Suppose someone asks, "Why do you breathe? What is this business you have started of moving air in and out?" You would reply, "Brother, this is no business; I simply cannot live without it." In just the same way, the surrendered devotee cannot live without *bhajana*. When everything has been offered to someone, forgetting that beloved brings supreme anguish, an intense restlessness: "supreme anguish at forgetting Him." If such a devotee were told, "Forget God for half a moment and you will receive sovereignty over the three worlds," he would reject even that. The *Bhāgavata* says:

IAST: *tribhuvana-vibhava-hetave 'py akuṇṭha-smṛtir
ajitātma-surādibhir vimṛgyāt | na calati bhagavat-padāravindāl
lava-nimiṣārdham api yaḥ sa vaiṣṇavāgryaḥ ||*

"One whose unfailing remembrance does not turn away from the lotus feet of the Lord even for half of the smallest instant, not even for all the splendour of the three worlds - feet sought by the self-controlled gods and others - is the foremost Vaiṣṇava."

IAST: *na pārameṣṭhyam na mahendra-dhiṣṇyam na
sārvabhaumam na rasādhipatyam | na yoga-siddhīr
apunar-bhavam vā mayy arpitātmecchati mad vinānyat ||*

"The Lord says: a devotee who has offered himself to Me desires nothing apart from Me - neither Brahmā's station, nor Indra's abode, nor sovereignty over the whole earth, nor dominion over the lower worlds, nor all yogic powers, nor even freedom from rebirth."

Bharata says:

I desire neither wealth nor righteousness nor pleasure, nor do I seek liberation as my final end. Birth after birth, may I have loving attachment to Rāma's feet; I ask no other boon.

A Special Point Concerning Love

By mentally offering all actions to God, one comes into eternal separation from the world;* and by becoming wholly devoted to God, one comes into eternal union with Him. Within this eternal union, which is love, four states occur through the movements of the mind: union within eternal union, separation within eternal union, eternal union within separation, and separation within separation. These four states should be understood as follows.

Authorial footnote:

In reality there can never be union with the world; separation from it is perpetual. For example, when the mind thinks of an object, that is an imagined union with the object, and it produces the pain of not obtaining it. When the object is obtained outwardly, inwardly one becomes separated from it, which produces pleasure. Similarly, if for some reason the object departs outwardly or is destroyed, one suffers when the mind remains united with it. But when, through

discriminative reflection, one removes the object from the mind by understanding, "This object was never ours and can never become ours," one experiences happiness. The point is this: if union is assumed inwardly, there is separation outwardly; and if union is assumed outwardly, there is separation inwardly. Thus, in reality, there is perpetual separation from the world. A person regards himself as united with the world only by mistake.

For example, when Śrī Rādhā and Śrī Kṛṣṇa meet one another, this is "union within eternal union." Even while they are together, a feeling may arise in Śrījī that her Beloved has gone somewhere, and she suddenly cries out, "Beloved! Where have You gone?" This is "separation within eternal union." Śyāmasundara is not before her, but she is absorbed in intense contemplation of Him and sees Him meeting her directly within the mind. This is "eternal union within separation." Śyāmasundara has not appeared before her for only a short while, yet she feels that a very long time has passed: "Śyāmasundara has not met me. What shall I do? Where shall I go? How shall I meet Śyāmasundara?" This is "separation within separation."

In reality, throughout all four states the eternal union with God remains exactly as it is. Separation never occurs, can never occur, and has no possibility of occurring. This eternal union itself is called love, because in love the lover and the beloved remain inseparable. No division can ever arise there. The play of meeting and separation between the devotee and God takes place solely for the exchange of love.

How does this love increase at every moment? When lover and beloved meet, the lover thinks, "My Beloved had gone away before and I was separated from Him; what if He goes away again?"*

Because of this feeling, meeting the beloved brings neither satiety nor contentment. The thought that He may depart draws the mind ever more strongly toward Him. This is why love is said to increase at every moment.

Authorial footnote:

The relish of love increases through union and separation. If there were always union and never separation, the relish of love would not increase; instead, it would remain uninterrupted and uniform. Therefore, to increase the relish of love, God sometimes withdraws from sight.

Love, or devotion, has four kinds of *rasa* or *rati*: servant-love, friendship-love, parental love, and intimate sweetness. Among these, friendship-love is higher than servant-love, parental love higher than friendship-love, and the *rasa* of intimate sweetness higher than parental love, because in this progression God's divine majesty is increasingly forgotten. Yet when any one of the four reaches perfection, none of the other *rasas* is lacking in it; all of them enter it. For example, when servant-love reaches perfection, friendship-love, parental love, and intimate sweetness all enter it. The same should be understood of the other *rasas*.

The reason is that God is complete, His love is complete, and because the individual being is a part of the Supreme, the being too is complete in itself. Incompleteness comes only from a relationship with the world. Therefore, by whatever mode devotional attachment to God arises, it will become complete and nothing will remain lacking in it.

In *dāśya-rati*, servant-love, the devotee feels toward God: "God is my Master and I am His servant. He has complete authority over

me. He may do whatever He wishes, keep me in whatever circumstances He wishes, and have me perform whatever work He wishes. It is only because He feels such intimate belonging toward me that He arranges everything for me without seeking my consent."

In *sakhya-rati*, friendship-love, the devotee feels toward God: "God is my friend and I am His friend. He is dear to me and I am dear to Him. He has complete claim over me, and I have complete claim over Him. Therefore, if I do what He says, He too will have to do what I say."

In *vātsalya-rati*, parental love, the devotee assumes the role of guardian: "I am God's mother, or His father, or His teacher, and He is our child or disciple. Therefore I must nurture and care for Him. I must also keep watch over Him so that He does not harm Himself!" Thus Nanda Bābā and Mother Yaśodā look after Kanhaiyā, and when He goes into the forest they send Dāūjī with Him to keep watch.

In the *rati* of *mādhurya*, intimate sweetness,* the devotee retains a particular awareness of God's divine majesty. In this mode of love, the devotee regards himself or herself as inseparable from God, joined to Him in intimate belonging. From this sense of inseparability there remains a constant feeling: "I must gather things that will please Him, bring Him happiness and comfort, and ensure that He suffers no trouble of any kind."

Authorial footnote:

People generally understand *mādhurya-bhāva* only as the feeling between a woman and a man, but there is no rule that this feeling exists only in that relationship. *Mādhurya* means sweetness, and

that sweetness comes from inseparability from God. The greater that inseparability is, the greater the sweetness will be. Therefore, when any one of the attitudes of servant-love, friendship-love, or parental love reaches perfection, sweetness will not be lacking in it. Thus *mādhurya-bhāva* is present in every devotional attitude.

There is a distinction between identity and inseparability. When only one Reality remains and every sense of duality is wholly ended, that is called identity. Remaining one even while there are two is called inseparability, as when two friends remain inwardly inseparable because of their deep intimacy. The more profound the inseparability, the more the *mādhurya-rasa* becomes manifest. This is called the relish of love. God Himself longs for this relish of love. It is precisely in order to savour it that God becomes many forms from being One: "The One does not delight in being alone" and "He beheld: May I become many; may I be born forth."

The relish of love is transcendent and conscious in essence. God alone is its taster. In love, both lover and beloved are realities of pure consciousness. At times the lover becomes the beloved, and at times the beloved becomes the lover. Thus the one conscious Reality assumes two forms in order to savour love.

Because some people do not understand the true nature of love, they call worldly lust itself love. This is completely wrong. Lust exists in all beings throughout the 8.4 million forms of life, and among those beings it is especially intense in ghosts, spirits, and ghouls as the desire to enjoy pleasure. But only great souls liberated while living are qualified for love.

Lust has the feeling of taking and taking alone; love has the feeling of giving and giving alone. Lust seeks to satisfy one's own senses

and enjoy pleasure through them; love seeks to give happiness to the beloved and remain wholly devoted to service. Lust concerns the body alone. Love may appear, to outward sight, to occur in the body, but in reality it belongs only to the conscious Reality. Lust contains delusion, a stupefied condition; love does not contain even the scent of delusion. Lust is filled with the world and the world's sorrow; love contains liberation and a joy extraordinary even in comparison with liberation. In lust, inert matter - body, senses, and so on - predominates; in love, consciousness, one's sentient nature, predominates. Lust contains attachment; love contains renunciation. Lust contains dependence; love has not even a trace of dependence, and is therefore freedom.

In lust the feeling is, "May that person become useful to me." In love the feeling is, "May I become useful to that person." In lust the lustful person becomes the slave of the object of enjoyment; in love God Himself becomes the lover's slave. The relish of lust turns into tastelessness; the relish of love, being bliss itself, continues to grow at every moment. Lust is born of inner dissatisfaction; love becomes manifest through the beloved's delight. Lust aims solely at one's own pleasure; love aims solely at the beloved's pleasure. The path of lust leads toward the hells; the path of love leads toward God. In lust, two beings arise and remain two: the sense of duality, difference, or separation never disappears. In love, two arise while remaining one: inseparability never disappears.*

Authorial footnote:

IAST: *dvaitaṁ mohāya bodhāt prāk; jāte bodhe manīṣayā |
bhakty-arthaṁ kalpitam dvaitam advaitād api sundaram ||
pāramārthikam advaitaṁ dvaitaṁ bhajana-hetave | tādṛśī yadi
bhaktiḥ syāt sā tu mukti-śatādhikā ||*

"Before awakening, duality serves delusion. But once awakening has arisen, duality deliberately conceived for the sake of devotion is more beautiful even than nonduality."

"The ultimate Reality is indeed nondual, yet for worship there is duality. If devotion is of this kind, it is a hundred times superior even to liberation."