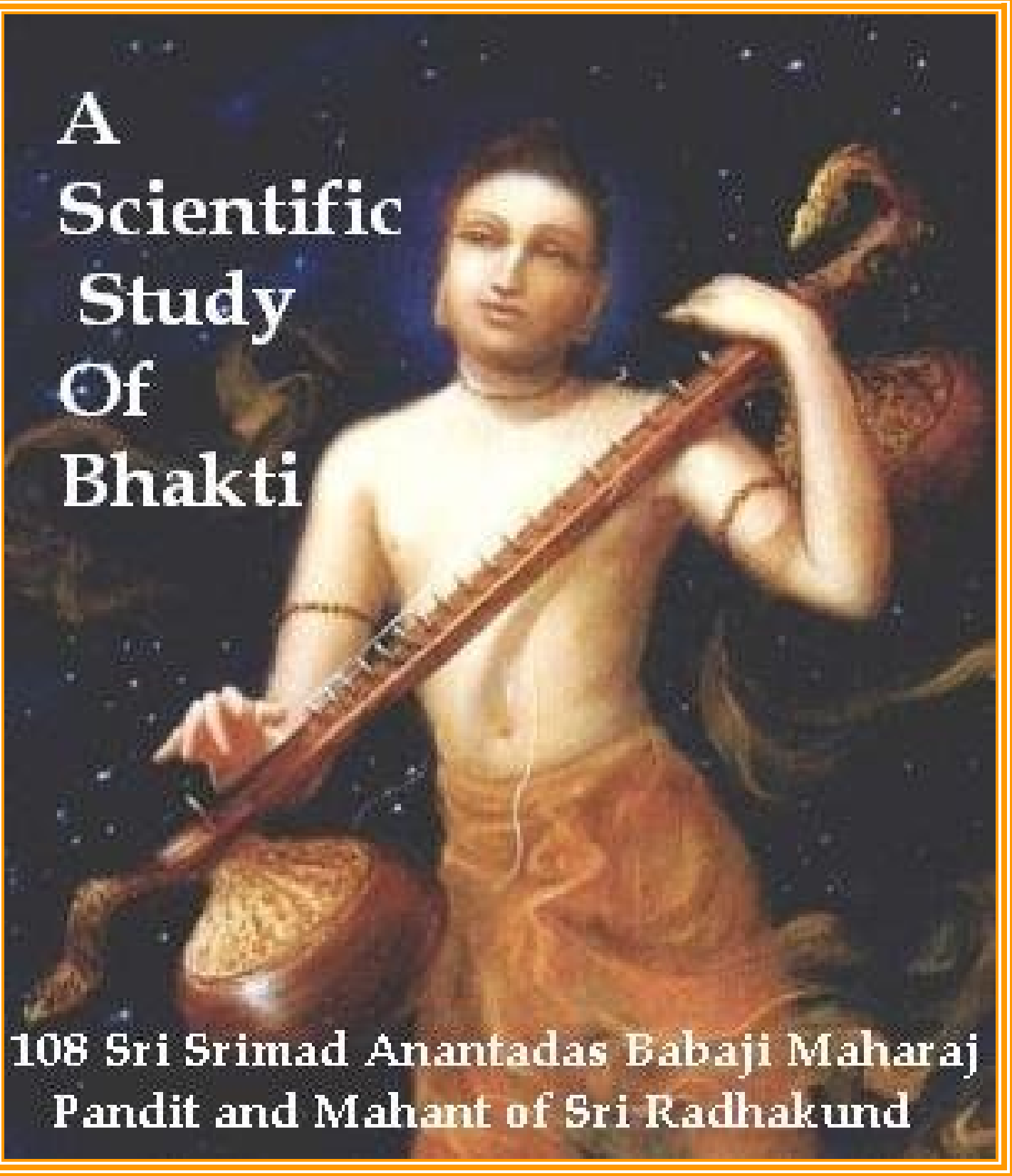


**A
Scientific
Study
Of
Bhakti**

**108 Sri Srimad Anantadas Babaji Maharaj
Pandit and Mahant of Sri Radhakund**



Sri Bhakti-Tattva-Vigyaan

(A Scientific Study of Bhakti)

By

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What is Bhakti?

What is Bhakti? When Rishis such as Sanak Muni asked this question, Gopâl-Tâpani Shruti answered –

“bhaktirasya bhajanam tadihâm-utra-upâdhi-nairâsyena amusmin manah kalpanam-etad-eava hi naishkarmyam.”

Meaning - "Bhakti means 'to serve Sri Bhagavân'. When we are free of all material desires and engage our mind and all the senses in serving Sri Bhagavân, we call it 'bhajan' and this bhajan alone is 'naishkarmya'¹."

These words of the Shruti prove that bhajan and naishkarmya are synonymous. It expresses the truth that when we begin bhajan all our material desires are destroyed and our heart becomes immaculate. We simply get drowned in relishing the sevâ-ras of Sri Bhagavân.

Tâpani Shruti has defined bhakti and how bhakti subjugates Sri Krishna. It says –

“vigyâna-ghana ânanda-ghana sachchidânandaika-rase bhakti-yoge tishthati.”

Meaning - "Sri Krishna is intense special knowledge personified. He is revealed through Bhakti-yog that is eternal, conscious and blissful ras."

From the above statement we learn three things –

- ☛ What is bhakti – it is eternal, conscious and blissful ras
- ☛ What does bhakti do – it reveals Sri Krishna, which means that He is under the control of bhakti
- ☛ Sri Bhagavân's original form – intense special knowledge

Sri Nârad-Pancha-Râtra says –

“surarshe vihitâ shâstre harim-uddishya yâ kriyâ,
Saiva bhaktir-iti prokta taya bhakti parâ bhavet.’

Meaning - "Bhakti comprises all the activities we perform to serve Sri Krishna. By performing these activities we gain supreme bhakti called prem."

Here, 'all the activities we perform to serve Sri Krishna' means the actions that please Him such as, hearing, glorifying etc.

'Bhakti' originates from the root word 'bhaj'.

**What does
'bhaj' mean?**

bhaj ityasha vai dhâtuh sevâyâm parikirtitah
Meaning - "The root word 'bhaj' means 'sevâ'."

¹ An action that does not bear any fruit and does not result in rebirth.

– (Garud Purân)

However we should note that, if we perform bhajan with any desire other than pleasing Sri Bhagavân, we shall not gain eternal love.

“We do not get prem in spite of performing devotional practice if we have material desires or the desire for liberation in our heart.”

– (C.C.Madhya.19.152)

Bhakti is the chief characteristic of Sri Bhagavân’s internal potencies Hlâdini and Samvit. Hlâdini has only one function – to please Sri Bhagavân. Therefore if we have any desire other than pleasing Sri Krishna, Bhakti will never appear in our heart. This is why we should first know the truth about Sri Bhagavân and bhakti. And then we should embark on the path of bhajan. Then our hearing, glorification etc. will bear result. Sri Shândilya Rishi has told in his Bhakti-Sutra

“sâ parânuraktireeshware”

Meaning - “Bhakti means supreme love for Sri Bhagavân.”

Sripâd Swapnâchârya has explained this statement as follows –

“In this verse ‘anu’ indicates that bhakti is the deep attachment we gain for God after we have gained knowledge about God’s true form, His glory and Bhakti.”

Srimat Rupa Goswâmpâd has analyzed the above statements of Shruti and Smriti and has written a verse in the beginning of his beautiful text Bhakti-Rasâmrita-Sindhu. In this verse he has expressed the complete definition of Bhakti. And this is strictly in accordance with the Shrutis and Smritis. This definition holds good whether we are in vidhi-marga, râg-mârga, sâdhan-bhakti, sâdhya-bhakti, bhâv or prem. The verse is -

anyâbhlâshitâ-shunyam gyâna-karmâdi-anâvritam,
ânukulyena krishnânusheelanam bhaktiruttamâ.

Meaning - “The topmost bhakti is that which is free of all desires other than to please Sri Krishna; it is not shrouded in gyân¹ and karma². It is beneficial to Sri Krishna.” – (B.R.S.1.1.11)

Srimat Jiva Goswâmpâd and Srila Vishwanâth Chakravartipâd have elucidated this verse very nicely. Let us relish their explanation.

**Srimat Jiva Goswâmpâd and
Srila Vishwanâth
Chakravartipâd’s explanation
of the ‘anyâbhlâshitâshunya’
verse of B.R.S.**

‘Bhakti’ comprises activities that are conducive for serving Sri Krishna. This is the true characteristic or main definition of Bhakti. The word ‘anusheelan’ in the verse has originated from the root ‘sheel’. Now ‘sheel’

¹ Path of knowledge that leads to liberation

² Path of action that results in heavenly enjoyments

means 'sheelan' (to follow some rule) and it is of two types –

- ☛ Do's – We should do certain things with our body, mind and tongue. With our body we should serve the Deities, with our mind we should meditate on His divine pastimes and please Him with our thoughts; with the tongue, we can glorify His Holy Name, qualities and pastimes.
- ☛ Don'ts – We should avoid sevâ-offences and offences to the Holy Name.

'Krishnânusheelan' indicates all the do's and don'ts that we should follow to serve and please Sri Krishna. This involves everything starting from taking the shelter of Sri Gurudev's lotus-feet and practicing sthâyi-bhâv¹ and vyâbhichâri-bhâv².

In this manner if we please Sri Krishna with our body, mind and speech, we can say we are performing Bhakti.

We can perform bhakti in two ways –

- ☛ With impurity
- ☛ Without impurity

The 'impurities' in Bhakti comprise of

- a) Some other desires
- b) Adulteration.

When bhakti is free of other desires and adulteration, we call it 'pure bhakti'.

**'Other desires' and
'adulteration'**

'Other desires' means longing for material objects, liberation, magical powers, monetary gain, power, position, fame etc.

'Adulteration' indicates the presence of 'gyân' (knowledge) and 'karma' (action). Here 'gyân' refers to worshipping the Impersonal and 'karma' implies activities such as sacrifices, charity and worshiping for material gains - as mentioned in the smriti shâstras³. Of course knowledge about bhakti and Sri Bhagavân are true knowledge and we should definitely acquire it. Also it is necessary to perform activities such as worshiping, glorifying and hearing about Sri Krishna. These are parts of 'Sri Krishna-anusheelan' (serving Sri Krishna). If we perform these activities without the desire for material gain and/or liberation then we are said to perform pure bhakti. This bhakti is also called by many other names such as – nirgunâ (free of impurities), kevalâ (only), mukhya (main), ananyâ (exclusive), akinchanâ (devoid of desires) and swarup-siddhâ (self-independent or true form).

¹ Permanent mood – in the case of the Goudiya Vaishnavs, it is the mood of a Manjari.

² Passing moods such as joy

³ The scriptures dealing mainly with rituals

Here Srila Rupa Goswâmpâd has used a word – ‘ânukulya’ or beneficial. If we serve Sri Krishna in such a manner that it is not beneficial for Him, it is not bhakti. Let us understand this better. We may serve Sri Krishna in a non-beneficial manner also. Kamsa, Shishupâl, Jarâsandha too served and pleased Sri Krishna; however their activities were not beneficial for Him, rather they intended to harm Him. Therefore we do not call them ‘bhakti’.

Explanation of ‘ânukulya’

Here if we think that, going by the dictionary, ‘ânukulya’ also means ‘pleasing’ then we are wrong. For example, Sri Krishna was pleased to fight with the asurs and He relished the ras of battle. Although He liked it, we cannot say the asurs were performing bhakti, simply because they were not doing it for His good. Contrary to them, Mother Yashodâ left the hungry Sri Krishna and hurried to save the milk from spilling. He did not like it one bit, however we call the mother’s activity as bhakti because she was striving for His welfare (since the milk was meant for Him). So ânukulya means ‘devoid of envy towards Sri Krishna’.

What does Srila Rupa Goswâmpâd mean by ‘uttamâ bhakti’?

Srila Rupa Goswâmpâd has proved what is ‘uttamâ’ or ‘topmost bhakti’ with this verse from Nârad-Pancharâtra –

sarvopâdhi vinirmuktam tat-paratvena
nirmalam,
hrishikesha hrishikesha-sevanam bhaktir-
uchyate

Meaning – “‘Bhakti’ is serving Sri Krishna without any impurity, with organs (hands, mouth etc.) purified because they are serving Him lovingly.”

We find that the following terms of this verse are synonymous with Srila Rupa Goswâmpâd’s verse.

Nârad-Pancharâtra	Srila Rupa Goswâmpâd
‘sarvopâdhi vinirmuktam’ (free of impurities)	anyâbhilâshitâ-shunyam (free from other desires)
tat-paratvena	ânukulyâtmak (beneficial to Him)
nirmalam	gyâna-karmâdi-anâvritam (not shrouded by gyân and karma)
sevanam	anusheelanam (to serve)

“Prem arises from pure bhakti. Therefore I am expressing the characteristics of pure bhakti –

- ☛ Forsaking other desires, other worship, gyân and karma
- ☛ Perform activities for Sri Krishna with all the organs of the body such that

☞ They are beneficial to Him.

This is pure bhakti and we gain prem by practicing it. The Pancharâtra and Srimad-Bhâgavatam expound the same."

– (C.C. Madhya.19.147-149)

We have already heard what the Pancharâtra has to say. Now what does Srimad-Bhâgavatam state?

Sri Kapildev told Mother Devahuti – "O mother, I am the supreme Personality seated in everyone's heart. As soon as someone hears my excellences, if his heart rushes towards me continuously like the flow of the Gangâ towards the sea, if it does not seek anything else and is without the obstacles called gyân and karma, then it is bhakti without any impurity. My devotees do not accept anything else other than my seva. They do not accept sâlókya (living with me in the same abode), sârshti (an opulence alike to mine), sârupya (beauty like mine), sâmpīya (staying close to me), and sâyujya (merging into me), even though I may offer it to them." – (S.B.3.29.11-13)

Such pure devotion results in prem. Sriman-Mahâprabhu instructed Srila Rupa Goswâmi about how we can gain prem as a result of performing pure devotion. Sri Chaitanya-Charitâmrita elucidates in a simple manner.

"After roaming in the entire universe some blessed creature, by the mercy of Sri Gurudev and Sri Krishna gets the seed of Bhakti-latâ¹. He (the sâdhak) becomes the gardener and sows that seed. He nurtures it by pouring the water of hearing about and glorifying Sri Krishna (His beauty, excellences and pastimes). The seed germinates into a sapling, grows and ultimately pierces

**How pure devotion
results in prem**

the envelop of the universe. It crosses the River Virajâ and reaches the transcendental abode. There it goes to Golok Vrindâvan and climbs Sri Krishna's feet that are like the wish-fulfilling tree. Once there, it spreads and ultimately it fruits into prem. Here the gardener waters the creeper daily with the water of hearing, glorifying etc. If he commits Vaishnav-offence, which is like a mad elephant, then it uproots the creeper, and its leaves dry up. Therefore the gardener takes care not to commit aparâdh. However it is possible that parasitic plants may grow on the creeper. What are these 'parasitic plants'? They are the desires for material pleasure, liberation and countless other wishes. These plants also contain forbidden activities, crookedness, violence, monetary gain and power. The water nourishes these parasitic plants in stead of the Bhakti-creeper; they grow further and further, while the main creeper stops growing. Therefore first of all, we should cut off these other plants. Then only the main creeper will grow and travel to Vrindâvan. It will fruit into prem that will ripen, fall down and the gardener will relish it. He will climb up with the support of this creeper and reach the wish-fulfilling tree (Sri Krishna's lotus feet). There he will serve that wish-fulfilling tree and enjoy the ras of the prem-fruit happily. This is highest reward and the supreme goal of human life. All other goals are worthless as compared to it." – (C.C. Madhya.19.143-146)

¹ Bhakti is likened to latâ or a creeper since it is very tender and fragile. This also indicates that we have to nurture it with care.

What is bhakti made up of?

When we analyze bhakti from the philosophical point of view, we see that it contains nothing other than realization and ras. Ordinary people have many doubts regarding bhakti because it contains joy. Srimat Jiva Goswāmipād has written in Priti-Sandarbha (65) –

“Shruti says – ‘Bhakti takes the devotee to God and reveals Him to the devotee. Bhakti subjugates Sri Bhagavān and it is the best and the surest way to attain Him.’

Bhakti is so great that it is able to madden Sri Bhagavān with its own joy – the same Sri Bhagavān who is bliss Himself! So what does bhakti comprise? The proponents of Sāṅkhya, who do not believe in the existence of God, say that no joy is greater than when we are established in goodness. Sri Jiva says - Bhakti is not like the happiness arising out of goodness because the mode¹ of goodness is material. We read in the scriptures that bhakti subjugates Sri Bhagavān, and nothing material can possibly control Him. Also He is joyful in Himself and self-satisfied. He does not feel the necessity for any material pleasure. Therefore bhakti is not synonymous with the mode of goodness.

When the worshipers of Brahman realize Him, His bliss transmits into them. Therefore they feel certain pleasure. However bhakti is not Sri Bhagavān’s own joy either, since we find that bhakti gives more pleasure than Brahman-realization. Sri Bhagavān too is happier with bhakti than He is with Himself.

Bhakti definitely is not the inner joy arising out of the living being (if it does not arise from Sri Bhagavān, how it can arise from us since we are His part?) We are atomic; our happiness too is miniscule. It is impossible to make Sri Bhagavān delirious with such small pleasure. How can the owner of crores of kām-dhenus² be attracted by a goat?

Dhruva Maharaj says (quoted in Vishnu-Purān) – “O my Lord, You are the source of everything. The three potencies such as Hlādini, Sandhini and Samvit reside in You. You are above all material modes of nature. Therefore sattva-gun that gives peace, the troublesome tama-gun and raja-gun – do not exist in You.”

Now the question arises – how is it possible for Hlādini shakti to give such immense pleasure to Sri Bhagavān when all the while it is present in Him? Let us study the following case. There is a man called Devdatta. If we say ‘Devdatta does not eat during the day, yet he is fat,’ it surely indicates that he eats during the night. Similarly we find that Sri Bhagavān is getting immense pleasure from bhakti and at the same time it is not possible for Hlādini shakti to make Him so happy, since it already exists in Him. We have previously stated that when we do Bhakti it gives Him much more joy than Brahman-realization. Therefore we conclude that Bhakti is not synonymous with Hlādini shakti. Just as Devdatta cannot become fat without food. If he does not eat during the day, he must be eating at night – so if Hlādini shakti is not giving

¹ There are 3 material modes of nature – goodness, passion and ignorance.

² Wish-fulfilling heavenly cow

Him so much happiness by herself, then logic follows that she must be giving Him immense pleasure in some other form. What is that form? We conclude – when the devotee assists Hlâdini shakti, she gains a special power and gives even Sri Bhagavân (Who is Her source) extreme happiness so much so that He is spellbound.

What happens is like this – Hlâdini has a property called extreme happiness. It continuously enters the devotees and exists in them as 'love for God'. Therefore when Sri Bhagavân feels that love, He too is extremely pleased with His holy devotees. Bhakti is an intense combination of Hlâdini and samvit shakti.

It enters the heart of a devotee and gives Sri Bhagavân immense pleasure. Therefore it is so powerful that it controls Sri Bhagavân. Here intense combination means tat-sâratvancha tannitya-parikarâshrayak tad-ânukulyâ-bhilâsha-visheshah' - 'Bhakti is the desire that forever exists in His eternal associates and benefits Sri Bhagavân. This bhakti flows like the River Mandâkini¹ from the eternal associates in disciplic succession of devotees (Guru-paramparâ) in the material world.

We may ask – bhakti is transcendental. It is the intense combination of Hlâdini and samvit. It is opposite of material nature. Even Sri Bhagavân experiences it and it is supremely blissful. Then how come it appears in this material world in the miniscule living beings? The answer is that – the mercy of the pure devotee carries bhakti from the transcendental world and places it inside the living being, unknown to him. Later it attracts his heart and creates a situation so that the seed of the bhakti-creeper (the wish-fulfilling creeper) can be sown in the heart. This seed sprouts into a desire to serve Sri Bhagavân in favorable manner. A loving mother picks up her baby rolling in the dust, wipes it cleans with her own cloth and breast-feds it. Bhakti devi too is loving. We, who are turned away from God, have dirt inside us. This dirt consists of doubts regarding God, and many material desires. She cleans the dirt and actively sows the seed of Bhakti-creeper that is favorable for Sri Bhagavân and for bhajan. Then Bhakti devi makes us inquisitive about bhajan, knowledge of bhakti, firm scriptural faith that is good for bhakti and disinterest in material objects. When our chitta gets cleansed in this manner, the devotee thinks, whether my material attachment diminishes or increases, whether hundreds of obstacles appear in bhajan, I can never forsake the path of bhakti. The devotee is firmly determined; gradually his offences and anarthas disappear and he is blessed with rati and ultimately prem.

¹ Mandâkini is a tributary of river Alaknandâ. Mandâkini originates from the Charabari glacier near Kedârnath in Uttarâkhand, India. Mandâkini is fed by river Vâsukigangâ at Sonprayâg. Mandâkini joins Alaknandâ at Rudraprayâg. Alaknandâ then proceeds towards Devaprayâg where it joins with Bhâgirathi River to form the Gangâ.

Bhakti is the means

Prem is the most desired wealth and the topmost goal of the living being. And bhakti is the means to obtain it. Therefore we call devotional practice as the 'abhidheya' (means or process). We cannot get Sri Bhagavân's mercy by following any path, be it karma, gyân or yog – if we do not possess bhakti.

"Gyân, karma or yog cannot subjugate Sri Krishna; He can be controlled only by the ras of love and devotion." – (C.C)

Sri Krishna has told Sri Uddhav –

"O Uddhav, steadfast devotion for me subjugates me to such an extent that yog, sânkhya, dharma, study of the Vedas, austerity and even renunciation cannot."

– (S.B.11.14.20)

"Devotion for Sri Krishna is the most important means to obtain Him. If we want to attain success in karma, yog or gyân, we have to resort to bhakti. These practices yield fruits that are next to nothing and do not have any power without the assistance of bhakti." – (C.C.)

Bhakti is the only means to achieve spiritual goal. In fact bhakti is the only way for the living being. Bhakti can help all living beings to attain happiness. Therefore the shâstras and Mahâjan have called bhakti as the supreme dharma, supreme yog and supreme welfare. Srimad-Bhâgavatam says – when Sri Brahmâ patiently analyzed all the Vedas thrice, he understood that the scriptures have only one message – and that is devotion for God. Not only this, Bhakti alone is the topmost goal for the living being. Devotional practice is universal. Anybody can follow this path, anywhere and in any situation. The Chatuhshloki¹ of Srimad-Bhâgavatam says –

"etâvadeva jigyâsyam Tattva-jigyâsunâtmanah,
anvaya-vyatirekâbhyâm yat syât sarvatra sarvadâ."

Meaning - "O Brahmâ, who wishes to know the confidential truth about love for me, will accept the path of devotional practice that contains do's and don'ts; it is universal and eternal. He will enquire about it from his Spiritual Master."

Sri Bhagavân is proving that devotional practice is the means to achieve our goal. Although karma, gyân and yog also have rules, it is not written anywhere that if you do not resort to them you will commit an offence. Rather some parts of the scriptures also criticize them. On the other hand, we find lots of statements that assert the need for bhakti. Srimad-Bhâgavatam states –

¹ The Chatuhshloki Bhâgavatam which as the name suggests condenses the essence of the Purân into 4 verses. It was imparted by Sri Bhagavân to Brahmâji who was about to perform creation but has doubts as to the nature of what he is about to create. It occurs in the 9th chapter of the 2nd skandha of Srimad-Bhâgavatam.

"Sri Chamas Yogindra told Mahârāj Nimi – O King, The brahmins are born from Sri Bhagavân's mouth; they are in the mode of goodness. The Kshatriyas (warriors) have arisen from His arms; they are in the mode of passion. The Vaishyas are born of His thighs; they are in the combined mode of passion and ignorance. The shudras are born of His feet; they are in the mode of ignorance. Likewise, the four âshrams viz. the order of householders, celibacy, vânaprastha and sannyâs have arisen from His thighs, heart, bosom and head respectively. Therefore we see that Sri Hari is the father of all four varnas and orders. If a member of the human society does not worship Sri Hari, Who is the parent, he is disregarding Him. They fall down from their state." – (S.B.11.5.2-3)

Sri Krishna has told in Gita with His holy lips –

"na mām dushkritino mudhâh prapadyante narâdhamâh,
mâyayâpahrita-gyâna âsuram bhâram-âshritâh."

Meaning - "O Arjun, Who are sinful, foolish, have lost their intelligence due to Mâyâ and are in the evil mode of nature are the lowest of human species and they do not surrender unto me."

Thus we see that those who are without bhakti suffer in many ways However we never come across any scripture criticizing the devotional process.

Devotional practice is indeed universal. We find it -

☛ In every scripture

Skanda Purân states –

âlôchya sarva-shâstrâni vichârya cha punah punah,
idamekam sunishpannam dhyeyo nârâyano sada.

Meaning - "After analyzing all scriptures and repeated pondering we conclude that always Sri Nârâyan is the Only Object of meditation."

☛ Suitable for everybody

Sri Brahmâ has told Sri Nârâd –

"Fallen beings such as women, shudras, huns and shabars too can take the shelter of Sri Hari. If they surrender unto Him, Who is the only refuge for devotees and if they follow their nature and activities, then they can know the truth about Him. They too can cross His illusory potency (mâyâ). Even if animals associate with devotees and follow their conduct and nature, they can also learn the truth about Sri Bhagavân and can transcend the material ocean.

Bhakti is so universal that anyone, simply anyone – whether he is most sinful, pious, learned or without any knowledge, renounced or with deep attachment, striving for liberation or already liberated, not-yet-successful in Bhakti, or he has accomplished success in Bhakti, practiced-and-became the Lord's associate or eternal associate – bhakti is for everyone, is good for all and spreads happiness all around. There is no restriction or requirement for anyone to follow this path. Therefore undoubtedly, we should all practice Bhakti.

Then do we have any doubt that we can learn the truth about Sri Bhagavân and cross the material barrier after hearing instructions from the Holy Spiritual Master about Jap, and we hear, glorify and meditate on Him?"- (S.B.2.7.46)

It is true that the ones who have committed heinous crimes too get supreme peace by practicing bhakti. Sri Bhagavân has Himself assured in Bhagavad-Gita

"O Arjun, even if one commits most abominable activities, yet he serves me, then consider him a saint; for by the impact of bhakti, he will very soon become righteous and attain eternal peace. Dear Kounteya (son of Kunti), in this context you may declare in an assembly of debate that my devotee never perishes."

– (B.G.9.30-31)

When one who indulges in foul actions can achieve welfare by practicing bhakti, how much more will one following the rules of bhakti and having good conduct attain – can we guess?

Sri Bhagavân has told Uddhav –

"O Uddhav, the people who live in impure countries and times – if they serve me who is the soul in all beings - either knowing me to be sat-chit-ânanda, or not knowing this – but if they adore me exclusively, then I consider them as the best of my devotees." – (S.B.11.11.33)

This proves that the ones with knowledge or without knowledge can practice devotion.

Srimad-Bhâgavatam very clearly mentions that even the ones who are very deeply attached to material pleasures are qualified for devotional practice.

“Sri Krishna told Uddhav – Dear Uddhav, Bhakti is very powerful. Even though in the beginning of devotional practice my devotee may be highly materialistic, yet with practice (by the impact of bhakti) he mostly transcends the temptations of materialism.” – (S.B.11.14.18)

Hence it is needless to state that by the effect of bhakti, the ones who are detached from materialism will definitely not succumb to its charm again.

The already liberated and the ones striving for liberations both have the tendency for bhakti – we know this from Srimad-Bhâgavatam –

“mumukshavo ghora-rupân hitvâ bhuta-pati-natha,
Nârâyana-kalâh shântâ bhajanti hi-anasuyavah.’

Meaning - "Sri Suta Muni said - O Shounak, those who wish to be liberated from the bondage of ignorance should reject the worship of terrible forms such as Bhairav etc. and in stead adore the serene forms of Sri Nârâyan and His parts."

Sri Suta Muni has described how the already liberated people serve Sri Hari –

âtmâ-râmashcha munayo nirgranthâ apy-urukrame,
kurvanty-ahaitukim bhaktim-itthambhuto guno harih.”

Meaning - "O Shounak, Sri Hari’s excellences attract even the âtmârâm sages who are liberated from the bondage of false-ego and serve Him without any cause." – (S.B.1.7.10)

Whether a devotee has reached the state of rati or he has not attained rati, he likes to practice bhakti –

“Sri Shukadev told Mahârâj Parikshit – O King, some great people who are devoted to Vâsudev destroy huge collection of sins by practicing pure devotion just as the direct rays of the sun annihilate fog.” – (S.B.6.1.15)

This indicates the ajâta-rati devotee (who has not attained rati).

The following statement proves that one who has reached the stage of rati too likes devotional practice –

“Sri Havi Yogindra told Nimi Mahârâj – O King, Brahmâ and other devatâs strive to obtain the lotus-feet of Sri Bhagavân, yet they do not achieve them. However the devotee’s mind is transfixed on those extremely rare lotus-feet and does not waver for half a moment even though you may offer him the wealth of the three worlds. He is the best amongst the Vaishnavs.” – (S.B.11.2.53)

We find the devotees who have become the Lord's associates by performing sādhanā continue to do so –

“Sriman-Nārāyan told the great sage Durvāsā – O Muni, my devotees who are free of all material desires do not want to accept the four types¹ of liberation although offered on a platter, since they are always engrossed in the joy of serving me. This is the effect of their Bhakti. When they do not wish for liberation that brings supreme bliss, then it is needless to say that they have no inclination for temporary material objects.” – (S.B.9.46.7)

The eternal devotees (e.g. Laxmi devi) too practice bhakti –

“Sri Brahmā told the devatās – O Devas, The lakes of Vaikuntha contain extremely clear and pure water. It is nectarine in taste. The banks of these lakes are bound with corals. Laxmi devi sits on the shore along with her maidservants and worships Sri Vishnu with Tulasi leaves. Then she sees her reflection in the water of the lake and gazes at her pretty face with its curly locks and high nose. She meditates on Sri Nārāyan kissing her face.” – (S.B.3.15.22)

☞ Every sense organ is happy to perform bhakti.

For example –

“mānasopachārena paricharya harim mudā

pare'vām-manasā gamyan tam sākshāt pratipedire.”

Meaning - "Extremely fortunate people have got actual darshan of Sri Hari by serving Him in meditation, although He is indescribable and inconceivable."

And of course we all know how to serve Him with external senses. In fact, Bhakti means to serve Him with all our senses. The blessed Lord has told in Sri Gita –

“patram pushpam phalam toyam yo me bhaktyā prayachchhati

tad-aham bhaktyupahritam-ashnāmi prayatātmanah.”

Meaning - "O Arjun, who lovingly gives me a leaf, flower, fruit or water – I eat that loving offering of the pure devotee."

We can practice devotion by various activities –

Devarshi Nārād has told Sri Vāsudev - “Dear Vāsudev, if one hears Bhāgavat dharma, reads, meditates, respects or simply second (approve) of Bhāgavat dharma, even though he may be inimical to the entire universe, this action immediately purifies him.” – (S.B.11.2.12)

¹ Sālokya – living in the same abode as that of the Lord
Sārshī – having the same opulence as the Lord
Sāmīpya – to live close to Him
Sārūpya – to look similar to Him

- ☛ We can perform bhakti through all activities –

The Lord told Arjun – “O Arjun, whatever you do, eat, offer in sacrifice, give in charity, perform austerity – offer them all unto me.” – (B.G.9.27)

- ☛ Not only this, we also see that some have performed just a shadow of bhakti (not pure bhakti) and yet they have got the result, such as Ajâmil.

He was scared of the emissaries of Yam (the Lord of death) and piteously called out to his son Nârâyan. As a result of this, he later went to Vaikuntha. All of us have heard this story from Srimad-Bhâgavatam. We find another incident in The Purâns –

Once upon a time, a mouse lived in a Mandir. Everyday it used to carry away the cotton wick dipped in ghee to eat. One day when he was scurrying with the wick dipped in ghee, it accidentally touched a lighted lamp. The mouse tried its level best to get rid of the wick since his mouth was burning. But since it had got entangled in its teeth, he could not set free of the fire. The Lord accepted its movements as if it had performed ârati. In the next life it was born as a queen. She conducted a festival of lights for the Lord, pleased him and went to his abode.

In the above narration we see that the mouse has committed an aparâdh by stealing the ghee-wick. Also it has performed ârati which is not true bhakti, but just a shadow of bhakti (bhakti-âbhâs). Yet, Sri Bhagavân did not consider its offense (since the mouse was ignorant), rather He was satisfied with its bhakti (offering of lamp) and brought its soul to His abode.

- ☛ Srimad-Bhâgavatam tells us that Sri Bhakti Devi can give all sorts of results in return for bhakti.

For example –

“Who has no desire other than serving the Lord, who has all material desires and who longs for liberation – if they are intelligent, all of them will worship the Supreme Personality with deep devotion.”

The scriptures recommend bhakti as the mode of worship in every age –

“krite yad-dhyâyato vishnum tretâyâm yajato makhaih,

Dwâpare paricharyâyâm kalou tad-hari-kirtanât.”

Meaning - “Whatever the people achieved by meditation in Satya Yug, offering fire-sacrifice in the Tretâ Yug, worshiping Him in Dwâpar Yug, they can attain the fruits of all these activities simply by taking the Holy Name in Kali Yug.’

- ☛ We can perform devotional practice anywhere and in any situation, for example –

Prahlâd in his mother's womb, Dhruva as a child, Ambarish and Bharat in youth, Dhritarâshtra in old age and Ajâmil at the time of death performed bhakti and achieved the highest welfare. Sri Bhagavân tells us about Chitraketu who served Sri Hari in the heaven. In Nrisimha Purân we read of an instance when a devotee attained Sri Bhagavân by taking His Holy Name in hell. Thus we observe that bhakti is universal and eternal. Therefore we can firmly state that bhakti is the only means to achieve the topmost goal of life.

Who is qualified for Bhakti?

Each and every man is qualified for bhakti. Although bhakti is universal and does not depend on the place and time and person, Sri Bhagavân has told Uddhav with reference to who is qualified for pure devotion –

Yadrichchhayâ mat-kathâdou jâta-shraddhastu yah pumân

Meaning - "When someone gains faith in hearing about me, know him to be qualified for bhakti-yog." – (S.B.11.20.8)

Srimat Jiva Goswâmpâd has explained this verse as – "While stating the qualification for bhakti-yog, Sri Bhagavân has said that the cause and rules of bhakti-yog are very much different for those of karma-yog and other spiritual paths. He has noted that scriptural faith alone is the cause of bhakti. In this verse 'yadrichchhayâ' means 'one becomes worthy for the path of bhakti when one comes in contact with some extremely self-sufficient (spiritually) devotee and the devotee takes mercy on him. This brings about his welfare and he becomes qualified for practicing bhakti.'

Sri Suta Muni told sages such as Shounak –

"O pure souls, if we visit holy places we generally tend to serve the pure devotees; if we have respect for Hari-kathâ and wish to hear about Sri Bhagavân, that sevâ arouses in us an interest for Holy discourse." – (S.B.1.2.16.)

There are only two ways to gain faith – association with a devotee and getting his mercy.

Srimat Jiva Goswâmpâd has explained this verse as follows –

"Suppose someone visits a Holy Place, say Vrindâvan, simply because his job warrants him to go there. He sees some devotees who might have come there to serve Vrindâvan or they may be residents of that place. They take darshan of the great devotees, touch their feet, speak to them and serve them. As a result of their sevâ, they start believing in them. Pure devotees are naturally engrossed in discussing about Sri Bhagavân amongst themselves. The visitor becomes curious – 'let me hear what they are talking'. When he hears Sri Hari-kathâ from their holy lips, he gains interest in it."

Thus, association and mercy of pure devotees result in faith. This is the only requisite to start with devotional practice.

What is faith?

“Shraddhâ (faith) means very firm conviction that if we perform Sri Krishna-bhakti we will achieve success in all our endeavors.”

– (C.C.Madhya.22.37.)

We should believe that the scriptures tell the truth, have firm conviction in them, try to study them carefully and adopt measures to resolve contradictions. If we follow the scriptures in this manner then we shall find life worthless without devotional practice.

When can we say we have faith?

Suppose we know that if we perform desire-free karmas we shall become pure-hearted and if we do not perform the same we shall go to hell. In spite of knowing this, when we have firm conviction that following these paths are obstacles in my service unto Sri Bhagavân, if I perform only Sri Krishna-bhakti, I shall be successful in all my endeavors and resolutely forsake all other dharmas, we can say we have faith. Such faith leads us to Sri Hari-bhajan.

Shraddhâ = shrat + dhâ + am. Shrat = heart; dhâ = dhâran (to hold) or establish. Thus, shraddhâ means – believing with all our heart – believe the scriptures – believe in the meaning of the scriptures. Shruti says –

“When we gain shraddhâ in Sri Bhagavân then we think about Him and meditate on Him; an unfaithful person can never do this. Therefore O Nârada, first you try to understand what faith is. Sri Nârada said, I wish to know about shraddhâ itself. How do I learn about shraddhâ?” – (Chândogya Upanishad)

The reply to this question is –

“shradhâtvanypâyavarjyam-bhaktyunmukhi-chitta-vritti-visheshah”

Meaning - “Shraddha is to reject all other means and turn to bhakti alone.”

– (Āmnâya- sutra)

How do we know we are detached from material pleasure?

Hence when we have faith and turn to bhakti, then we gradually become detached from material pleasure. As a result we gain dislike for all topics unrelated to Sri Krishna and we are satisfied with whatever we get. This proves we have faith or shraddhâ.

Another proof of shraddhâ is – bhagavat-shranâgati - complete refuge at the lotus feet of Sri Bhagavân. Srimat Jiva Goswâmpâd says –

“Sharaddhâ and sharanâgati (to accept His shelter or protection) are synonymous. It is logical, since if we have faith in the scriptures we shall surely believe that those who are not surrendered to Sri Bhagavân need be afraid and those who are in His shelter have no need to fear. Therefore if we have shraddhâ we shall definitely have sharanâgati.”

– (Bhakti-sandarbha – 173)

Immediately after this Srimat Jiva Goswâmpâd has mentioned a few characteristic of scriptural faith. Let us learn this in brief. He says that, if we gain scriptural faith - whether we realize our goal or not, we shall continue to serve Sri Bhagavân just like a gold-digger¹. We shall not care for monetary gain, fame and power. Knowingly we will never offend the devotees. It is possible we may not be able to give up material pleasure altogether; however we will not have deep attachment for the same. If we have shraddhâ we shall never be ill-mannered or commit anything foul.

Sri Bhagavân wants that we should be careful and enthusiastic when we embark on bhakti, since –

“jatnâgraha binâ bhakti nâ janmây preme”

Meaning - "Devotional practice does not result in prem if we are not careful and enthusiastic." – (C.C.)

A father may give all his property to an unworthy son, yet he would be happier if he could make his son worthy and then confer the rights of the property to him. This is natural. Sri Hari loves us, hence He gives us bhakti when we gain faith in Him, and it is true. However how much qualified we are, to receive bhakti, depends on the extent of shraddhâ we have. The faithful can be classified into three categories –

- ☞ Best
- ☞ Medium
- ☞ Junior

The best – He is a good expert in the scriptures and presenting logic based on the same. He firmly believes that Sri Krishna is the only Object of worship, Eternal Love is the only goal and bhakti is the only means to achieve this goal. He has absolutely no doubt about this and has very deep shraddhâ – he is the most qualified for bhakti.

“Who is a good expert in the scriptures and has extremely firm conviction He is the best amongst the faithful and can deliver the whole world.” – (C.C.)

The medium – He is not so good at analyzing the scriptures nor is he so experienced in studying or presenting the shâstras. In case of a debate, if the opponent is strong he cannot decide on what to say; neither can he resolve a difficult poser. However he has extremely strong conviction and is very sure about whom he

¹ One who is convinced there is gold in a certain place continues to search for it in spite of failing repeatedly.

should worship and what bhajan he should perform. None – not even a strong opponent – can shake his faith.

“He does not know the scriptures, however he has very firm faith; he is the medium devotee and is highly blessed.” – (C.C.)

Junior – He has little knowledge of the shāstras and he has less faith. One may break his faith through arguments presented from the scriptures.

“He is a ‘junior devotee’ since he has less faith; he too will gradually ascend to the top.” – (C.C.)

64 rules of Bhakti

Sri Prahlād Mahāshay has cited 9 rules of bhakti in Srimad-Bhāgavatam – hearing, glorification, remembrance, serve the lotus-feet, worshiping, prayer, servitude, friendship and self-surrender. Scriptures such as Sri Hari-Bhakti-Vilās mentions many more rules of Bhakti. To make us happy Srila Rupa Goswāmipād has compiled all of them and made them easy for us so that we find devotional practice a joy and not drudgery. He has written down 64 rules. Of these, the first twenty form the gateway to the Temple of Bhakti – there are 10 do’s and 10 don’ts.

The 10 do’s

1. Surrendering unto Sri Gurudev’s feet - First of all, we have to take the shelter of the Spiritual Master. Without this we can never start with bhajan. If we find someone making little progress in the path of devotion we should know that he had accepted the shelter of Sri Gurudev in his past life and had made some progress. Hence a faithful person should first take refuge at Sadguru’s feet, take initiation in Sri Krishna-mantra and take instruction about bhajan. Sri Gurudev instructs him about the topmost achievable goal and how to accomplish it. He also teaches the devotee about good conduct, drive away the disciple’s ignorance and show him the path to Sri Bhagavān. In this manner he showers mercy and blessing on him. On the other hand we see how much one suffers if he is not under the guidance of Sri Gurudev.

“The one who forsakes the feet of Sri Gurudev and tries to control the extremely wavering mind by regulating the sense organs and life-air, they get painful experience from the very same sense organs and life-air. They fall into hundreds of troubles and continue to exist in this material world (they are not delivered). They face the same peril as a sea-faring merchant without his captain.”

☞ (S.B.10.87.33)

This indicates that when we follow Sri Gurudev’s instructions and practice bhajan under his subservience, we gain the knowledge of Bhagavad-dharma¹. By the kripā of Sri Gurudev, obstacles never overwhelm us and our mind quickly becomes unwavering.

¹ Divine path

In fact Sri Krishna expresses his powerful mercy through Sri Gurudev; He is not so much compassionate as Sri Krishna. Sri Gurudev is God in the incarnation of a devotee. In the transcendental abode he resides in the form of Sri Gurudev on the left side of Himself (Sri Bhagavân). He spreads extreme mercy – much more than Sri Krishna and awakens in us knowledge about Himself. Shruti is testimony to this –

“âchâryavân purusho veda”

Meaning - "Who surrenders at the feet of the Spiritual Master, can know God".

2. Taking dikshâ and instructions from Sri Gurudev – We should take dikshâ (initiation) from Sri Gurudev. The initiation should comprise of 'Sri Krishna-Mantra'. And we should learn the Bhâgavat dharma from him. After all 'dikshâ' is the process by which we get enlightenment and destroy our sins. 'Enlightenment' indicates that we know the 'dikshâ-mantra' as non-different from Sri Bhagavân and we realize our special relationship with Him.

In the scriptures we find many mantras with relation to dikshâ. However Sri Krishna-mantra is the most important of all. Again, amongst Sri Krishna-mantras, some pertain to His Vrindâvan pastimes while others are related to His Mathurâ and Dwârakâ pastimes.

Just as Sri Krishna's Vrindâvan-leelâs as a cowherd-boy are the sweetest, the mantras that reveal His supremely sweet ras of Vrajadhâm are the sweetest. Hence the ten-syllable and eighteen-syllable mantras are the best and we call them as 'the King of Mantras'.

Certain scientific processes can turn lesser metals into gold; similarly by taking dikshâ in proper manner we can turn our material body into spiritual and get the right to serve Sri Krishna.

“When the devotee surrenders during dikshâ, Sri Krishna makes him His Own. He converts the devotee's material body into spiritual and he serves Sri Krishna with his transcendental body.” – (Sriman-Mahâprabhu in C.C.Antya.4.184-185)

After taking dikshâ it is necessary to learn Sri Bhâgavat Dharma from Sri Gurudev –

“We should consider Sri Gurudev as dear to us as our life and make him our worshiped Deity. We should be free from arrogance, be submissive to Sri Gurudev and learn Bhâgavat Dharma from him. When we approach the Spiritual Master to learn Bhâgavat Dharma we should serve him in such a manner so as to please Sri Hari Who has made us His Own.”

– (Srimat Jiva Goswâmpâd's explanation of S.B.11.3.22)

3. Serve Sri Gurudev – We should consider Sri Gurudev as our well-wisher, dear most friend and the embodiment of the supreme most being Sri Hari. Considering him thus we should serve him. If we do not have very strong faith that Sri Gurudev is divine manifestation, we can never gain the knowledge of the highest truth. If we think of the Spiritual master as mundane all our endeavors become fruitless.

“Sri Gurudev is the torch of knowledge and is the very embodiment of the divine one. Whoever has the corrupt intelligence to think “he is human” is only taking an elephant-bath (all his spiritual endeavors are fruitless).”

- (S.B.7.15.26)

So we should serve Sri Gurudev most carefully since we are able to please Sri Hari by his blessing alone.

yo mantrah sa guruh sâkshât yo guruh sa harih swayam,
gururyasya bhavettushtasya tushto harih Swayam.”

Meaning - “Mantra, Guru and Sri Hari are one and the same. When the Spiritual Master is pleased with a devotee, even Sri Hari is pleased with him.”

4. Walk on the footsteps of the pure devotees – We should follow in the footprints of the pure devotees since they have obtained Sri Hari-bhakti.

Sri Bhakti-Rasâmrita-Sindhu has quoted the following statement from Sri Skanda Purân –

“The previous Mahâjans have obtained Sri Hari-bhakti without any labor. The path that they followed to achieve this is without stress and it is auspicious. It is our duty to follow that path.”

Sri Vyâsdev has said –

“The rules concerning Dharma are very difficult to comprehend. Therefore we should follow the path taken by the Mahâjans since they have attained what is good.”

The Mahâjans behave strictly according to the scriptures. This is why Sri Srila Rupa Goswâmpâd has immediately quoted Sri Brahma-Yâmal –

“If we practice single-pointed Bhakti yet neglect the injunctions of Shruti, Smriti, Purân and Pancharâtra then we simply create trouble.”

Srimat Jiva Goswâmpâd has explained this statement –

“If we practice single-pointed Bhakti without following the injunctions of the scriptures it is not good, since this means that we do not have faith in the Vedic scriptures. Here we are not referring to those who do not follow the scriptural injunctions because they are not aware of them or they may be simply lazy. We are referring only to those who know the rules yet disregard them because they do not consider them true. Their so-called ‘single-pointed devotion’ is an eye-wash since it is not according to the scriptures.”

Believers respect the scriptures and forsake what is forbidden by them only to please Sri Krishna. Therefore a devotee naturally wishes to do what the scriptures prescribe and forsake what they forbid, since faith rests on the scriptures alone.

5. We should be inquisitive about the devotional practice of the pure devotees - We should ask questions such as - what sort of devotional practice did the pure devotees perform? How did they gain Sri Krishna's sevâ? We should be eager to know these facts and ask learned devotees about the process of devotion.

If we are extremely curious about devotional practice we will become absorbed in this topic. This will make us somewhat interested in Bhakti, our heart will become pure and the facts about bhakti will arise in our mind spontaneously. We cannot realize Bhakti by using logic alone. Here by 'interest' we mean that the devotee has an earlier sanskâr by which he considers Srimad Bhâgavatam and such scriptures as the highest and has extremely firm faith in the pure devotees and the spiritual master. This is how we understand the true knowledge of bhakti – we cannot realize it with dry logic. Sri Bhakti-Rasâmrita-Sindhu proves that we should inquire about the rules of Bhakti by quoting Nârad Purân –

“Those who are extremely eager to learn about the path followed by the pure devotees achieve the highest goal within a very short time.”

6. To forsake material enjoyment for Sri Krishna's pleasure - Our minds are conditioned to take pleasure in worldly sound, touch, beauty, taste and smell. We always seek sense gratification. This desire is the root cause of material suffering and digression. Our goal should be to give up sensual pleasures and gradually engage the senses in relishing Sri Krishna's divine beauty and ras. If we have strong attachment for sense gratification, it is but natural that we will not be deeply inclined towards bhajan. Yet, if we do not perform bhajan with intense absorption we cannot please Sri Krishna. In fact if we want to obtain Sri Krishna we must please Him. To make Sri Krishna happy we must give up material enjoyment and the desire for such pleasure. We see in Sri Padma Purân –

“From time to time you have forsaken sense gratification; therefore the permanent treasure of Vaikuntha is waiting to welcome you (you will be given a grand welcome and the treasure of Vaikuntha will belong to you - that treasure will never exhaust unlike material prosperity that is temporary).”

We have a natural attraction for material pleasures. It does not go easily. However, the Vedas state that –

“âhâr shuddou sattva-shuddhi,
sattva-shuddhou dhruvâ-smritih,
smriti-lâbhe sarva-granthinâm vipra-mokshah.”

Meaning - “Eating pure food purifies our chitta. When our chitta becomes pure we remember Sri Bhagavân; along with that we naturally get rid of material desires.”

Food nourishes and energizes the body and mind. Pure food cleanses the body, senses and the mind. This makes us more easily engrossed in bhajan. Therefore if we want to attain the purest state it is necessary to be very careful about food.

7. We should reside in the holy places of Sri Krishna – It is easy to get bhakti when we live in the places where the Lord has performed His pastimes – such as Sri Vrindavan, Sri Nabadweep, Sri Kshetra and on the banks of the Gangâ. These places remind us of His divine pastimes and they create an ambience for bhajan. We also get darshan of pure devotees and saints since they too reside in such places. Otherwise it is very difficult to get their darshan. It also shows our surrender.

tavâsmiti vadan vâchâ tathaiva manasâ vidan,
tatsthânamâshritastanvâ modate sharanâgatah .

“O Lord, who says ‘I am Yours’ and believes the same in his heart and joyously resides in Your leelâ-sthals is indeed surrender unto You.”

8. We should accept what is necessary for our living –

“We should accept whatever is necessary for our living; if we accept either less or more than that we will stray from the spiritual path.”

– (Nârad Purân quoted in B.R.S.)

Srimat Jiva Goswâmpâd has explained this as – “The sâdhak should earn and spend money in such a manner that bhajan should go on.” The householder should earn by honest means, execute their duties and practice bhajan. Until we reach the stage of renunciation we should continue in this manner. If we attempt to earn more than what is necessary to maintain bhakti our appetite for bhajan will decrease. On the other hand, if we earn less then our mind will be agitated. Therefore it is best to accept that much wealth as is necessary to execute family life and carry on with our bhakti.”

9. We should revere Hari-bâsar – We call the end of Ekâdashi and the beginning of Dwâdashi as ‘Hari-bâsar’. Hari-bâsar also includes other Vaishnav-fasts as mentioned in the scriptures, such as – Janmâshtami, Râdhâshtami, Râmnavami, Nrisimha-chaturdashi, Shiva-chaturdashi, the appearance days of Lord Gourânga, Lord Nityânanda, Lord Advaita etc. We should always forsake the ‘biddhâ’ days and observe pure vrata. When we keep a vrata, we please Sri Krishna and if we do not, we commit great offence.

Many fast but they give up just food. In reality, ‘fast’ signifies –

“upavrittasya pâpebhyo yo bâsas-tad-gunaih saha,
Upavâsah sa vigneya nopavâsastu langhanam.”

Meaning - "Fasting does not mean merely giving up mahâprasâdam. We should avoid all material activities and spend the day in hearing and glorifying Sri Krishna’s name, excellences and divine pastimes. This is fasting in the true sense.”

10. We should respect dhâtri, ashwattha etc. – “We should worship, pay obeisance and meditate on the ashwattha, Tulsi, dhâtri, cow, brahmin and Vaishnavs. This destroys our sins.” – (Skanda Purân quoted in B.R.S.)

Srimat Jiva Goswâmpâd has explained further –

“Ashwattha is a majestic manifestation of Sri Bhagavân, hence it is worthy of worship. Sri Bhagavân descends to protect the cow and the brahmin; therefore even pure devotees worship them. Tulsi and the Vaishnavs are the topmost, so all of us should worship them. Especially if we desire prem it becomes inevitable for us to worship Tulsi and the Vaishnavs. This is an intricate part of our bhajan.”

“We begin bhakti with these ten rules.” – (B.R.S.)

This means that if we do not follow these ten laws, we do not start with bhajan. So these are the “dos”. Srila Rupa Goswâmpâd now mentions ten “don’ts”. They are as follows.

11. We should reject the association of non-devotees – They belong to two classes –

(a) Who do not perform bhajan is ‘bhagavad-vimukh’ (turned away from Sri Bhagavân)

(b) Those who oppose the devotees, devotion and Sri Bhagavân are ‘Bhagavad-vidweshi’ (envious of God).

We should reject the association of both.

“It is better to live in a cage of fire than suffer in the company of one who does not meditate on Sri Krishna.” – (Kâtyâyan Samhitâ quoted in B.R.S.)

The point is that the association of non-devotees is detrimental for our devotional knowledge, material detachment and bhajan, so we should reject their company at all costs. If we keep their company our materialistic tendency is bound to increase and we get attached to all the things that are not conducive for bhajan. Just like an infectious disease the bad qualities of a non-devotee attack us and hence his association is dangerous for our spiritual health. Of course we cannot call a chance meeting with a non-devotee as ‘association’. Even then we should accept him as a venomous snake ready-to-sting and run away from him trembling in fear. In fact to reject the company of non-devotees is part of Vaishnav-etiquette also.

“Vaishnav-etiquette requires us to reject bad company that comprises of ‘stri-sangi’¹ and non-Krishna-devotee.” – (C.C.M.22.49)

Sri Bhagavân’s devotee can absorb our mind so deeply in Him by describing His beauty, qualities and sweetness that even Sri Bhagavân Himself cannot achieve; similarly a lusty man can make us deeply attached to sense gratification such

¹ Men who are attached to sexual pleasure. Here the point to be noted is, C.C. does not tell us to give up the company of the opposite sex but rather with those who are attached to sex.

that even a woman herself cannot do. Therefore we cannot over-emphasize the need to reject the company of such men at all costs.

12. We should not make too many disciples –

“Sri Nârad Muni has said – Do not make too many disciples. Do not study too many texts. Do not earn your living by giving commentaries on the scriptures. Never ever start building religious institutions.” – (S.B.7.13.8 quoted in B.R.S.)

Srimat Jiva Goswâmpâd has explained this point further –

“Read ‘Do not make many disciples’ as ‘do not make unqualified disciples’, since preceptors such as Nârad have given initiation to many. If we do not make disciples the sampradây faces the danger of extinction and we are accused of being miserly with the dispersion of spiritual knowledge. However it is wrong to initiate unworthy people simply to increase the fold. ‘Many’ refers to non-devout unqualified disciples.”

Sridharswâmpâd has written – “nânubadhneeta pralobhanâdinâ balânnâpâdayet”. Meaning - “You should never make disciples by using either temptation or force.”

It is aparâdh to make disciples to gain money, fame, power or increase one’s fan-following.

“ashraddhâne vimukhe’pi-shrinvanti yashchopadeshah shiva-nâmâparâdhah”

Meaning - “It is an aparâdh to instruct someone in the Holy Name if he lacks scriptural faith and is not interested in hearing the Holy Name.”

This means that one is qualified to become a disciple if he has such faith and is interested in the Holy Name.

13. We should not start great projects – When we take up mega-projects like building institutions, missionaries etc. it results in turning away from God. When we get involved in building temples etc. we lack the time and energy for bhajan. Srimad Bhâgavatam says – “nârambhayet kwachit” – which means – “Never ever start religious institutions.” How much such endeavors affect our bhajan is evident from what is happening in the institutions today. The residents of religious institutions are in disagreement with each other, they are constantly fighting that even results in court-cases! The religious institutions are burning examples of all these grievous incidents.

Sri Krishna cites the character of a loving devotee in Sri Gita –

“sarvâmbha-parityâgi yo mad-bhaktah sa me priyah”

Meaning - “O Arjun, He is my dear devotee who does not indulge in building big projects.” – (B.G.12.16)

Sridhar Swâmpâd has explained this verse as -

“sarva-drishta-adrishtârthan-ârambha-anudyamân parityaktum sheelah yasya sah”

Meaning - "The one who rejects mega-endeavors is dear to Sri Krishna."

14. Avoid studying too many texts and explanations –

This statement refers to the texts that oppose bhakti. Sri Nârada Muni has said –

"granthânaivâbhyased bahun na vyâkhyâm-upayunjeeta"

Meaning - "Do not study too many texts and do not earn your living by lecturing on the scriptures."

Srimad-Bhâgavatam is the essence of all Vedic teachings. The Vedas are like a wish-fulfilling tree and Srimad-Bhâgavatam is like an extremely ripe and sweet fruit of this tree. In Kaliyug mankind is enveloped in darkness and Srimad-Bhâgavatam is shining brilliantly like the sun to show us the way. It is self-luminous. There is no scripture that is so full of love. Srimad-Bhâgavatam is extraordinary and sets us on the path of love and God. Our Goswâmis have composed texts of bhakti-principles and ras that are following the dictum of Srimad-Bhâgavatam. Therefore they too are of the same status. These texts are enough for us to relish ras and to gain the knowledge of bhajan.

Some people earn their living by reciting Srimad-Bhâgavatam, this is offensive and hence to be rejected.

15. We should not be miserly in practical life –

"The sâdhak who performs bhajan such as meditation should not get worried when there is lack of food and shelter or when food and shelter are destroyed; instead he should remember Sri Hari." – (Padma Purân quoted in B.R.S.)

Srimat Jiva Goswâ mipâd has explained this verse as –

"This is the way of Sri Hari's devotee. A sâdhak who loves sevâ is satisfied with whatever he gets and continue to execute loving service; he should not show humility by begging too much. In all practical sense, he should not be a miser."

16. We should not succumb to sorrow –

"If our heart is full of misery and depression, how can Mukunda reveal Himself to us?" – (Padma Purân quoted in B.R.S.)

It is but natural to feel hopeless and miserable when we lose a dear one such as our child, spouse, parents etc. However since we are sâdhaks, we should quickly remember Sri Hari and realize that the body and things related to the body are meant to perish. We should not let sorrow overwhelm us.

17. We should not disrespect devatâs –

It is true that even the devatâs worship Sri Hari; however we should not disrespect Brahma, Rudra and other devatâs.

“Although a devotee worships only Sri Krishna, he should realize that devatas and devis are His devotees as well and so he should not disrespect them.”

– (Padma purân quoted in B.R.S.)

“anya deb anya shâstra nindâ nâ koribe” – (C.C.)

Meaning - “Do not slander other devatâs and shâstras”.

Also we should not show contempt for those who worship devatâs. They seek material pleasure and hence they engage in such worship. It is their nature to be loyal to devatâs and they are qualified only for that. If the devatâs feels true mercy for them they too will become free of material desires and gain the opportunity to practice Sri Krishna-bhajan. Then they will be truly blessed. Janasharmâ of Sri Brihad-Bhagavatâmrita was a worshiper of Kâmâkhyâ devi and later on became a Krishna-devotee.

18. We should not cause anxiety to anyone –

“Do not cause anxiety to any living being physically or mentally”. – (C.C.)

This is our singular duty.

“A devotee should behave sweetly with every living being just as a parent treats a child. He never causes anxiety to anyone. Lord Hrishikesh is quickly pleased with such a devotee for his consciousness is pure.’

– Mahâbhârât quoted in (B.R.S.)

Sri Bhagavân has declared this with His sacred lips in Bhagavad-Gita as well –

“O Arjun, who does not trouble anyone, neither can anyone make him agitated, who is free of material joy, anger, fear and anxiety – he is dear to me.”

– (B.G.12.15)

19. We should forsake seva-aprâdh and nâm-aparâdh –

What is ‘aparâdh’? Srimat Jiva Goswâmpâd has written in Bhakti-Sandarbhâ (300th chapter) –

“When we say that a devotee should have ‘shraddhâ’ and ‘bhakti’ it naturally means that we should be respectful. When we commit an offence it indicates disrespect. Therefore disrespect is the root cause for offence and we should stop being disrespectful.”

Seva-aparâdh and Nâm-aparâdh are offences we commit at the sacred feet of Bhakti devi. After all we worship Bhakti devi when we hear, chant the Holy Name etc. We should place her on the highest pedestal. We should treat her with utmost reverence. It is necessary to love and respect all the devotees who are on the path of bhakti and feel pleased when someone glorifies them – otherwise we are committing aparâdh.

Bhakti-Rasâmrita-Sindhu quotes Varâha Purân in this context –

“Sri Varâha dev told Dharani devi (Mother Earth) – Dear Vasundharâ, A Vaishnav should very carefully avoid all the aparâdhhs while serving me. They are as follows

–

- 1) To enter Sri Bhagavân’s Mandir riding in a vehicle or with footwear.
- 2) not to take darshan of Sri Krishna’s festivals
- 3) not to pay obeisance to the Deity
- 4) To glorify or serve Sri Bhagavân when we are in a state of ‘ucchishta’¹ and contamination.
- 5) To pay obeisance with one hand
- 6) To circumambulate (turn round and round) in front of the Deity or to circumambulate a devatâ in front of Him
- 7) To spread our legs and sit in front of Him
- 8) To sit in front of Him with our arms around our knees
- 9) To sleep in front of the Deity
- 10) To eat in front of Him
- 11) To tell lies in front of Him
- 12) To talk loudly in front of Him
- 13) To chit-chat in front of Him
- 14) To cry out of material sorrow
- 15) To quarrel
- 16) To chastise anyone before the Deity
- 17) To bless anyone or to accept obeisance in front of the Deity
- 18) To speak cruelly to anyone
- 19) We should not wrap ourselves in blanket while paying obeisance or serving Him
- 20) To blaspheme others in front of Him
- 21) To praise others in front of Him
- 22) To use vulgar language in front of Him
- 23) To break wind in front of Him
- 24) It is an offence if we bring less costly items to serve Him in spite of being able to afford more valuable things
- 25) To eat food that has not been offered to Him.
- 26) Not offering the seasonal fruit and flower to the Deity
- 27) If we give the first portion of anything to someone else and then offer Him from the remaining, it is an offence.
- 28) To sit with our backs turned to the Deity
- 29) Not to glorify our Spiritual Master
- 30) To praise oneself
- 31) To blaspheme the devatâs
- 32) To pay obeisance to someone in front of the Deity, to pay obeisance to the left side of the Deity or facing Him or inside the sanctum sanctorum.

These are the 32 sevâ-aparâdhhs.

There are some more offences that we should avoid such as –

- ☞ to eat food offered by a materialist
- ☞ to touch the Deity in the dark
- ☞ to offer food after touching untouchable animals like dog etc.

¹ Without washing our hands and mouth after eating or drinking

- ☞ to speak during archanam
- ☞ to get up for passing stool and urine during archanam
- ☞ to offer incense before offering perfume and garland
- ☞ to enter the Mandir without washing hands and feet and without taking a bath after intercourse
- ☞ to serve the Deity after touching the dead, offered lamp and contaminated objects
- ☞ to serve Their Lordships wearing red, blue and dirty clothes or wearing clothes worn by someone else and unwashed
- ☞ to serve the Deity in an angry mood
- ☞ after returning from the crematorium
- ☞ when the food in the stomach is not digested
- ☞ after taking addictives such as drugs
- ☞ after taking an oil-massage

Other scriptures also instruct us to forsake some more seva-aparâdhs such as –

- ☞ to worship the Deity by disregarding the rules stated in the Bhakti-shâstras
- ☞ to disregard the Bhakti-shâstras and uphold other scriptures
- ☞ to chew betel-leaf in front of the Deity
- ☞ to worship Sri Bhagavân with flowers kept on castor leaf
- ☞ to worship at inauspicious hours
- ☞ to sit on the floor or on a raised seat during archanam
- ☞ to touch the Deity with left hand while pouring water (bathing) Him – the liquid should not touch our left hand and then pour on Him
- ☞ offering dry or rotten flowers
- ☞ to spit during archanam
- ☞ to feel proud that none can worship like me
- ☞ to draw a crooked tilak
- ☞ to enter the Mandir without washing the feet
- ☞ to offer and partake of food cooked by non-Vaishnavas
- ☞ to dress up the Deity or offer bhog within a non-Vaishnava's eye-sight

Now we appreciate that seva-aparâdh means all acts that show even the slightest disregard for the Deity or show in any manner that we have but the highest love, care, and faith and respect for Him. We should carefully avoid all the seva-aparâdhs. It is possible that we may commit them, not knowingly, but by chance; in that case if we take the Holy Name daily and recite the various hymns and glories then the seva-aparâdh is destroyed. However if we perform them knowingly and then recite glorifications because we know that it will destroy the offence, it gets converted into a 'Nâm-aparâdh', that is – 'to commit a sin on the strength of the Holy Name' and it is very difficult to get out of this one!

Nâm-aparâdhs are 10 –

1. to blaspheme a devotee
2. to consider the names of Sri Vishnu and Sri Shiva as independent
3. to disregard the spiritual master
4. to blaspheme the Vedas and scriptures following them
5. to consider the glory of the Holy Name an exaggeration
6. to give some interpretation to the Holy Name

7. to commit a sin on the strength of the Holy Name
8. to consider Sri Harinâm equal to pious activities
9. to instruct in Holy Name a person who lacks faith in it.
10. not to love the Holy Name in spite of hearing its glory

“Who has committed all sorts of offences will become free of them when he takes the shelter of Sri Hari; a sinner who offends Sri Hari may get rid of it by taking refuge of the Holy Name; however if we commit an offence unto the Holy Name who is everybody’s friend, we shall certainly suffer.”

☞ (Padma Purân quoted in B.R.S.)

20. We should not tolerate the blasphemy of Sri Krishna and His devotees

How can we say that we love Sri Krishna and his devotees if we bear their criticism?

“Who does not leave the place after hearing the blasphemy of Sri Bhagavân or His devotee falls down since all his sukritis get destroyed.”

☞ (S.B.10.74.40 quoted B.R.S.)

Srimat Jiva Goswâmpâd has explained this verse further as –

“Srimad-Bhâgavatam (4.4.17) orders us to leave the place only if we are incapable of doing anything; however if we have any power it is our duty to cut off the slandering tongue; and if we cannot do this we should give up our body. Sri Durgâ devi lost her self-control when she heard her father Daksha criticizing Shivji and said – “When an independent person is not capable of protesting he should cover his ears and leave the place in which Lord Shiva who protects dharma is criticized; and if he has the power he should cut off the tongue of the slanderer and then give up his body.” – (B.S.265)

Vaishnavs are more humble than a blade of grass, offer respect to others, yet do not desire respect. They do not wish to stress anyone by body, mind or speech, hence it is best for us to cover our ears, meditate on Sri Bhagavân and leave the place.

These 20 points are the gateway to bhakti. Amongst these the first 10 are necessary to obey as our sâdhan bhakti commences and we should shun the next 10 as ‘don’ts’. The next points are mostly related to certain activities.

21. We should don sacred marks on our body such as tilak and tulsi-

“Vaishnavs who decorate themselves with Tulsi and lotus-deed-necklaces, draw Sri Hari’s sacred feet beautified with symbols of conch-shell, discus etc., whose foreheads dazzle with tilak – they definitely purify the world.”

-(Padma Purân quoted in B.R.S.)

The scriptures also state –

yagnopaveet-vad dhârya kanthe tulasi-mâlikâ
kshana-mâra-parityâgât vishnu-drohi bhaven-narah.
ashouche cha-py-anâchâre kale-akâle cha sarvadâ,
tulasi-mâlikâm dhatte sa yâti paramam padam.”

Meaning - "We should don the Tulsi necklace constantly just like the sacred thread. If we detach it even for a moment we become anti-Vishnu. Even during child-birth, dealing with the dead and intercourse, or any other time – if we continue to sport the Tulsi necklace we shall attain the highest realm."

These statements prove the glory of wearing sacred insignia. There are people who say – "Bhakti should be in our heart, what is the need to wear Tulsi beads and tilak?' If they read these statements of the Holy Scriptures they will realize how much spiritual strength they confer on a devotee and when we forsake them the loss is tremendous. For a Vaishnav the Tulsi necklace and tilak are reminders of his swarup, they are conducive for self-surrender and hence boost our bhajan.

22. We should write the Holy Name on our body -

"Who write Sri Krishna's names on their body with chandan etc. purify the world and attain Sri Hari's abode which is supreme." – (Padma Purân quoted in B.R.S.)

The Holy Name is non-different from Sri Bhagavân, hence it is indeed sach-chidânanda. When the Holy Name touches our body it is good for our health and general well-being also, what to speak of spiritual welfare. The saints advise us to serve the Holy Name with all our senses – by adopting this process we serve Him with our skin.

23. We should wear prasâdi garland –

Flowers, garlands, chandan, Tulsi etc taken from the Deities are called 'nirmâlya'. When this 'nirmâlya' touches our body it destroys anartha and grants us love for His holy feet.

"Uddhav Mahâshay is saying in Srimad-Bhâgavatam (11.6.46) – quoted in B.R.S. – My dear Lord, We are your servants; we shall don garlands, chandan, clothes and ornaments enjoyed (worn) by You and thus we shall easily overcome mâyâ."

This proves how we can destroy other-than-Krishna desires and gain Sri Krishna-bhakti by using materials offered to the Deity.

24. We should dance in front of the Deity –

"Who dances happily in front of the Deity with bhâv and bhakti annihilates all the sins he has accumulated in hundreds of manvantars."

☞ (Dwârakâ-Mâhâtmyam quoted in B.R.S.)

How simple it is to sing and dance in front of the Deity – in fact it is an enjoyable experience too – yet it supremely pleases Sri Bhagavân!

25. We should pay obeisance –

"We cannot compare the outcome of paying a single obeisance to Sri Krishna with the result of ten complete Ashwamedh sacrifices. We still get rebirth after performing Ashwamedh sacrifice, whereas who pay obeisance to Sri Krishna is released from the cycle of birth and death." – (Nârad Muni quoted in B.R.S.)

Srila Vishwanâth Chakravartipâd explains 'obeisance' –

“swâpakarsha-bodha-anukula-vyâpâra-vishesho namaskârah”

Meaning - “'obeisance' is an act by which we degrade ourselves yet it is good for us.”

There are four types of obeisance –

- ☛ Abhivâdan¹ (to touch the feet after exclaiming “Jay” or other words of glorification)
- ☛ Sâstânga² (to touch the feet by fully prostrating on the ground – this indicates the surrender with 8 organs - feet, knees, chest, eyes, head, hands, speech and mind)
- ☛ Panchânga (to touch the lotus feet with 5 organs – hands, head, knees, speech and mind)
- ☛ Join our palms and touch to our head

Padma Purân says –

“ahamkritirmakârah syân-nakârah-tan-nishedhakah,
Tasmâttunamasâ kshetriswâtantryam pratishidhyati.”

Meaning - “'ma' signifies 'ahamkâr' (false ego) and 'na' means 'no'. Hence 'namaskâr' or obeisance is the best way to get rid of false pride.”

When we pay obeisance to Sri Gurudev, we should touch our head to his feet and pay panchânga or sâstânga obeisance with prayer.

26. We should rise (from sitting or lying position) when we get darshan of the Deity -

Also we should get up when Sri Gurudev arrives or else it is not good for our welfare. When we arise, it is a mark of respect and it destroys inauspiciousness.

27. When we see a procession of the Deity and Guruvarga we should follow them -

“Even dog-eaters become as adorable as Vishnu if they accompany Sri Bhagavân's chariot, procession etc. at the side, behind or in front.”

☛ (Bhavishyottar Purân quoted in B.R.S.)

28. We should visit the Mandirs in the Holy places such as Sri Vrindâvan where Sri Bhagavân has performed His divine pastimes and take His darshan –

When we visit holy places we get the association of pure devotees, we feel blessed in their company, and especially since Sri Vrindâvan dhâm have inconceivable potency. We shall describe this later.

29. We should circumambulate the Deity and Tulsi devi –

¹ = hail

² Sa= with; ashta = eight; anga = organs.

The right way to do parikramâ is to keep the Deity to our right and circumambulate 4 times. This yields very quick and good result – it is better than bathing in the Gangâ. Parikramâ of Sri Girirâj in Vraja-dhâm has very great glory and fulfils our desire swiftly. Many faithful people do Sri Girirâj Parikramâ on the Full moon day, new moon day, on special occasions and in the Purushottam month.

30.Archanam - it is the process by which we make offerings to the Deity after purifying ourselves and with mantras. It is the bounden duty of every initiated devotee to perform archanam, otherwise the consequence is terrible. During archanam we must never ever consider the Deity as an 'idol' but He is really Sri Bhagavân. All those who perform archanam after initiation attain Sri Bhagavân's eternal and blissful abode.

We should do archanam only after we learn the scriptural method of worshipping. Although we may worship lovingly but not in the prescribed manner we get only one hundredth the result. We get 0.01 % result only because we have done the pujâ with love and care – without these we shall not gain anything.

During Yogpeeth-sevâ we should meditate on our siddha-deha, be present near Sri Krishna Who is surrounded by Srimati Râdhârâni and the sakhis. Then we should worship as per the instructions of our Spiritual Master. After this we should worship externally with external paraphernalia. This Yogpeeth-seva is the soul of external seva (without Yogpeeth-seva external seva is meaningless). The householders must serve the Deity to the best of their ability with the costliest items they can afford. If they serve only in meditation like the penniless recluse they fall under the category 'vitta-shâthya' (cheating of wealth). If we make someone else perform the pujâ as our representative, it shows we are lazy and just 'keeping the routine'. This signifies irreverence and hence we should avoid it.

31.Paricharyâ – (to serve directly) –

'Paricharyâ' indicates that we should serve the Deity like a king – give Him royal treatment. We should clean the items used for seva and serve Him with fan etc.

Sriman-Nârad Muni has said –

"muhurtam vâ muhurtârdham yastishtheddhari-mandire, sa yâti paramam sthânam kimu shushrushane ratâh." – (B.R.S.)

Meaning - "Who resides in the temple of Sri Hari for a moment or even half a moment, he attains the supreme abode; then how much more a devotee who serves the Deity will gain – can we guess?"

There are many points in archanam and paricharyâ. Sri Hari-Bhakti-Vilâs has described them in detail. If we can engage even in one such seva our life is blessed. We should serve the Lord with objects suitable for the time and place¹.

¹ For example in winter we should use warm water to bathe the Deity and should not fan Him. Also He will feel more comfortable with woolen garlands than flower ones. In summer we should dress Him in light clothes.

32. We should sing songs pertaining to Sri Hari's Holy Name, beauty and pastimes -

"The scriptures say - Do not sing any song other than Sri Bhagavân's glory. Therefore the brahmin sang Sri Vâsudev's glorification constantly and attained His abode. That song yielded better result than even the glorification of Sri Rudra (Shiva)." – (B.R.S.)

33. Sankirtan or Congregational singing of the Holy Name – Sankirtan means to take Sri Bhagavân's name, qualities and pastimes loudly. Also when many devotees unite and sing the Holy Name together we call it 'sankirtan'. Sankirtan is the 'yuga-dharma' in the Kaliyug. Hence we should follow the other rules of bhajan always accompanied by Sankirtan.

"When we perform the nine types of bhakti we have to accompany them with Nâm-sankirtan, otherwise our endeavor will not be successful."

– (C.C.Madhya.15.107)

Often we cannot perform some parts of bhajan (e.g. archanam) perfectly. However it becomes perfect when we take the Holy Name along with it. The Holy Name itself is Sri Bhagavân. It is the 'Sound-incarnation' of Sri Hari. It is absolute. Therefore it has the ability to fulfill our short-comings while performing the other parts of bhajan. With the help of Nâm-sankirtan we can easily get Bhagavat-prem (divine love) and side-by-side we also get rid of material attachments.

"The nine types of Bhakti are the topmost Bhajan and have great power to give us Krishna-prem and Krishna. However Nâm-sankirtan is the best of all - if we chant the Holy Name inoffensively we get the treasure called 'prem'."

– (C.C.Antya.4.65-66)

Nâm-sankirtan is so powerful that nothing can stop it. Only aparâdh has the strength to pose obstacles on its path. Srîman-Mahâprabhu has Himself instructed us how we can avoid aparâdh and attain the main objective of Nâm-sankirtan, that is 'prem' –

"Hear O Swarup and Râmânanda Roy! This is the manner in which we should chant the Holy Name so as to attain prem –

trinâdapi suneechena taroreva sahisnunnâ,

amâninâ mânadena kirtaniyah sada harih.

Srîman-Mahâprabhu has explained this verse as follows –

A devotee should have excellent qualities and yet consider himself more worthless than a blade of grass. Also he should be as tolerant as a tree in two aspects – a tree never protests when you cut it and it dries up, yet does not ask for water. Moreover it gives its fruits to whosoever desires them. It bears heat

and rain, all the while lending shelter protection to others. Similarly a Vaishnav should possess excellent qualities and yet be devoid of pride. He should respect every living being because he is aware that Sri Krishna is present in all.

When a devotee takes the Holy Name in this manner he gets love for the sacred feet of Sri Krishna." – (C.C.Antya.20.16-21)

Srila Krishnadâs Kavirâj Goswâmi has mentioned the verse that the Lord has uttered with His Holy lips and has commented –

"I give a clarion call with upraised arms – knit this verse with the Holy Name and wear it like a garland round your neck. Obey the Lord by following this verse and you shall most certainly attain the sacred feet of Sri Krishna."

– (C.C.Âdi.17.32-33)

This means that if we behave according to Sriman-Mahâprabhu's instructions and chant the Holy Name, the one and only obstacle – it is also tremendously powerful – Vaishnav-aparâdh will never occur. We shall never commit a Vaishnav-offence. Then we can very easily gain the good fortune of attaining prem.

There are different types of kirtan (hymns) such as 'leelâ-kirtan' (glorifying the divine pastimes) and 'guna-kirtan' (glorifying the divine qualities) -

"Sri Prahlâd said – O Lord Narsimha, I am your humble servant who has received Your mercy. You are my dear well-wisher and the Supreme Being. Brahmâ glorifies Your pastimes. I shall hear them constantly in the company of blessed paramhansas who reside at Your lotus-feet. Then I shall get rid of material attachments and easily cross over mountainous sorrow."

– (S.B.7.9.18 quoted in B.R.S.)

The power of 'guna-kirtan' is as follows –

"The great devotees say that our tapasyâ, Vedic-study, performing nice yagnya, uttering Vedic hymns perfectly, knowledge and alms-giving - all yield just one result – and that is we start glorifying Bhagavân Sri Hari's excellent qualities"

– (S.B.1.5.22 quoted in B.R.S.)

34. Jap –

When we utter a mantra very softly it is called 'jap'. It is part of meditation. Jap is of three types –

- a. Vocal – when we perform 'kirtan' we take the mantra loudly
- b. Soft –in this we take the mantra so softly that only we are able to hear it

- c. Mental – we take the mantra without vibrating the tongue. In 'mental jap' we meditate on the meaning of the mantra and repeat it. It is part of meditation.

Taking the Mantra¹ in mind is better than repeating it softly and it is better than loud utterance. Whereas in the case of chanting the Mahâmantra, loud chanting is better than soft chanting which is better than chanting in the mind. We should learn the rules of taking the mantra and its meaning from Sri Gurudev.

35. Talking –

We should talk to Sri Krishna and tell Him about the feelings in our heart. This is praying.

"Whatever little you have spoken to Sri Hari has opened the doorway for your liberation." – (Padma Purân quoted in B.R.S.)

This talking is of many types such as praying, stating humility, displaying eagerness etc.

Example of praying –

"My dear Lord, just as a young man gets deeply attached to a young woman and vice versa, please makes my heart engrossed in You."

– (Padma Purân quoted in B.R.S.)

Example of humility –

"Dear Purushottam, none in the whole world is as sinful and offensive as me. I am embarrassed to even request You to please forgive my sins."

– (Padma Purân quoted in B.R.S.)

Example of intense eagerness (lâlasâmayi prârthanâ)–

kadâham yamunâteere nâmâni tava keertayan,

udvâshpah pundarikâksha! rachayishyâmi tândavam?"

"Dear Pundarikâksha, when will that day arrive in my life when I shall burst into a tândav² with tears flowing from eyes on the banks of the Yamuna while singing Your Holy Name?"

¹ Here 'mantra' refers to Kâm-beej, Kâm-Gâyatri, Gour-mantra/Gâyatri, Radha-mantra/Gâyatri etc. and not to Mahâmantra.

² A vigorous dance of frenzy or delirium

Only when the sâdhak attains the stage of rati such prayer is possible. Lâlasâmayi prayer is the right prayer for a râgânugâ devotee.

36. We should recite glorification in front of Sri Bhagavân –

There are many eulogies in Gitâ, Srimad-Bhâgavatam, and bhakti-texts such as Goutamiya Tantra. The mahâjans have composed many sweet glorifications. We should recite them repeatedly. The râgânugâ devotees who wish to perform intimate and intense bhajan should recite the stavas¹ from Stavamâlâ by Srila Rupa Goswâmpâd, Sri Stavâvali by Srila Raghunâth dâs Goswâmi, Prârthanâ and Prem-Bhakti-Chandrikâ by Srila Narottam dâs Thâkur Mahâshay.

37. We should relish mahâprasâdam –

It is the food-offering we make to Sri Krishna with love and devotion accompanied by mantras. What food should we offer to Sri Krishna? All that is pure, pleasing, fit for human consumption and nutritious. A devotee should always accept only mahâprasâdam. We must never ever accept what is not mahâprasâdam. It is divine; when we take it, we are rid of material tendencies and ultimately we gain prem and bhakti.

In fact we should never accept food, water or medicine without offering to Sri Krishna. Accepting unoffered food is detrimental for a Vaishnav.

We may think that refusing mahâprasâdam or neglecting it is a sign of material detachment. That is, it shows we have overcome sense-gratification. However it only shows Phalgu-vairâgya². When we do not beg for mahâprasâdam (say, when we see someone distributing it) it indicates false-pride. After getting mahâprasâdam if we neglect it, it is an aparâdh. It is better we accept mahâprasâdam eagerly. In fact we should be interested in accepting anything pertaining to Sri Krishna, for only in this manner we can truly overcome our sensual desires.

38. We should relish the charanâmritam (foot-wash) of Sri Hari –

“Who do not give alms, nor recite the Vedas, nor worship nor perform any sacrifice, yet drink the foot wash of Sri Hari will attain the highest realm.”

– (Padma Purân quoted in B.R.S.)

39. We should smell the fragrance of incense offered to Sri Krishna –

Its glory is as follows –

“We are bitten by the snake of material desires and attachments. If we wish to rid ourselves from the poison of this snake it is our foremost duty to smell the scent of incense offered to Sri Hari.” – (Tantra quoted in B.R.S.)

¹ Panegyric, tribute, adulation

² River Phalgu in Bengal appears dry since all we can see is a sandy spread which actually is a very thin layer. However the river flows quietly underneath. If a person tries to walk on the sand, he falls into the water. Similarly a person may display detachment, yet have desire for sense gratification inside. This is ‘phalgu-vairâgya’.

This goes for Sri Hari's garland and Tulsi as well. The fragrance of flowers and Tulsi offered to Sri Bhagavân enters our nose and destroys all anarthas. It transmits bhakti in us. The sages such as Sanak were situated in the bliss of submerging in Brahman. Yet when they smelt the Tulsi offered at Sri Nârâyan's lotus feet, that fragrance crushed their Brahmânanda and transmitted supreme devotion in them. Srimad-Bhâgavatam (3.15) describes this incident.

40. We should touch the Deity during archanam –

Earlier we have stated that it is compulsory for every initiated devotee to perform archanam. When we do archanam we should be physically and mentally pure and worship with faith, love and devotion.

“srishtvâ vishnoradhushtânânam pavitrah shraddhayânvitah.”

– (Vishnu-dharmottar quoted in B.R.S.)

Srimat Jiva Goswâmpâd has explained this verse as follows –

“Let us learn the wonderful benefit of touching the Deity. However everyone does not have the right to touch Him. Only those who have got dikshâ can touch the Lord.

Skanda Purân says –

evam sri-bhagavân sarvaih shâlagrâma-shilâtmakah,

dwijaih sribhishcha shudraishcha pujoyah bhagavatah pariah

Meaning – All bhagavat-parâyan¹ brahmîns, women and shudras can worship Sri Bhagavân Who is in the form of Shâlagrâm.

Here 'bhagavat-parâyan' means 'those who follow the rules of bhakti or the Vaishnavs. It naturally follows that those who are without love for Sri Bhagavân have no right to touch Shâlagrâm. Hence when we read in the scriptures that women and shudras should not touch Shâlagrâm we should know that it refers to non-Vaishnav women and shudras. Such statements do NOT indicate women and shudras who follow Vaishnav-etiquette and have love for Sri Vishnu (or Sri Krishna).

41. We should take darshan of the Deity –

When we do not get an opportunity to touch the Deity we should take His darshan. We get a lot of benefit from this –

“O Vasundharâ, those who go to Sri Vrindâvan and take darshan of Sri Govindadev do not go to the abode of Yamrâj (the Lord of death), in stead they attain the realm of pious people.” – (Varâha Purân quoted in B.R.S.)

¹ Those who have taken the path of bhakti, which incidentally, commences with initiation.

Here 'realm of pious people' definitely refers to Sri Bhagavân's abode since we can get only one blessing from the darshan of Govinda dev – and that is prem. Srimat Jiva Goswâmpâd has explained this verse as follows –

"The author (Srila Rupa Goswâmpâd) has instructed the wonderful benefit of taking darshan of every worshipped Deity of Sri Bhagavân. After this due to his immense bhakti he has stated the special glory of taking darshan of Sri Govinda dev Who is Sri Bhagavân in His true form. Here 'they go to the realm of pious people' means 'one attains the state of Sri Krishna-bhakti' for we should realize that bhakti is the topmost achievable goal."

42. We should take darshan of âratrika (ârati)¹ –

Âratrika or ârati as we commonly call it is a very loving affair. If we take darshan of the Deity during ârati, great sins too get destroyed and we gain very good result in our devotional life.

43. Hearing –

As soon as Sri Krishna's name, description of His beauty, qualities and associates touch our ears we call it 'hearing'. It spells the beginning of Bhajan and the best bhajan. Without hearing we cannot learn why we should perform bhajan and its glory. Especially when we hear Sri Krishna-kathâ, He enters our heart, destroys material desires and manifests bhakti. Also it is very beneficial to hear about Sri Bhagavân from great devotees.

Srimat Jiva Goswâmpâd has written –

"Hearing Srimad-Bhâgavatam is the topmost hearing, since the words of Srimad-Bhâgavatam have immense power. The great sage Vyâsdev has commented in the very beginning of Srimad-Bhâgavatam that forget hearing Srimad-Bhâgavatam, if we merely wish to hear it – immediately Sri Bhagavân gets imprisoned inside our heart. (S.B.1.1.2) Also Srimad-Bhâgavatam is the complete summum bonum of the Vedas. The Vedas are like a wish-fulfilling tree while Srimad-Bhâgavatam is its ripened fruit. Therefore its every bite is delicious."

- (Bhakti-Sandarbha).

Here Srimad-Bhâgavatam refers not only to Srimad-Bhâgavatam, but also all the 'Rasa-granthas²' composed by our Goswâmis since they are in accordance with Srimad-Bhâgavatam. We are worshiping in the mood of Vraja-ras; hence if we are fortunate enough to hear about Sri Bhagavân from a pure devotee who is in the same mood then it is really a great blessing. Also when we hear Sri Krishna-kathâ we should hear with love, faith and attention, since then only we shall gain passionate love for Sri Krishna's lotus feet. Later on we should ruminate on what we have heard.

"If we follow this rule for hearing, Sri Hari will come spontaneously and enter our heart. We do not have to make any special effort in this regard."

¹ Offering of lamp, incense etc.

² Delectable texts

– (Sri Shridhar Swâmi)

44. We should wait for Sri Bhagavân's merciful gaze –

All our devotional efforts will be successful when the Lord gives us His bounty. Although sugarcane is sweet a machine is required to squeeze the juice out. Similarly Sri Bhagavân is full of 'kripâ-ras', yet we cannot get this ras without eager and enthusiastic bhajan. We have to work hard for it. Hence we should anxiously and constantly wait for Sri Krishna's mercy while performing bhajan so that it will bear fruits.

Sri Brahma glorified Sri Krishna by saying –“My Lord, when a devotee bears his share of joy and sorrow (they are the results of his own deeds) and continues to perform bhajan with body, mind and speech, all the time simply praying ‘Dear Lord, when will I get your mercy?’ he naturally inherits You (the greatest treasure) just as a good son inherits his father's wealth.”

– (S.B.10.14.8 quoted in B.R.S.)

Srila Vishwanâth Chakravartipâd has explained this verse as follows –

“Who has forsaken all other paths and follows only bhakti – he alone will gain You. Knowing this one may question – what sort of bhakti should I perform? The answer is – the one who performs bhajan with body, mind and speech while enjoying whatever life offers him – be it sorrow or joy. Bhakti gives happiness and aparâdh brings suffering. The devotee goes through these experiences and eventually considers both as Sri Bhagavân's mercy. A loving father feeds his child milk as well as Neem¹-juice to maintain her health. Milk is palatable while the child abhors Neem-juice. However the father forces the child to drink both since they are nutritious. Similarly he sometimes hugs and kisses the child and at times may even slap to correct her. A surrendered devotee feels that I do not know what is good for me, only my Lord knows best. I am His devotee, time and karma have no effect on me – it is my Lord Who takes mercy on me and gives me joy and sorrow. When a devotee firmly believes in this and serves Sri Bhagavân with body, mind and speech , he gets liberation from material attachments (this is secondary result) and the right to serve the Holy feet of Sri Bhagavân (chief outcome). If we wish to inherit our father's wealth all we have to do is – continue to live. Similarly to gain the treasure-like sacred feet of Sri Bhagavân, all we need to do is – continue in the path of bhakti. Therefore we should humbly live a life of bhakti and patiently wait for His causeless mercy.

45. Meditation – It means we should connect our mind in any manner with Sri Bhagavân's name, beauty, qualities and pastimes. Remembering Sri Hari is the soul of bhakti-sâdhanâ. If we do not remember Him during bhajan it means bhajan is lifeless and we are just like robots.

“I seek shelter unto Sri Hari Who is without beginning and end, and Whom as soon as we remember we gain all welfare.” – (Vishnu Purân quoted in B.R.S.)

Srimat Jiva Goswâmpâd has written in Bhakti Sandarbha –

¹ Azadirachta indica, syn. Melia azadirachta L., Antelaea azadirachta (L.)

“Sri Krishna is the universal guru. When a devotee meditates on His lotus feet, Sri Krishna appears before him and offers Himself to the devotee. It indicates that He surrenders unto the devotee on His own. Then what more can we say about the devotee’s material desires that he does not desire much anyway?”

Meditation has five stages –

- ☛ Smaran – this is the primary level. In this stage the devotee thinks of Sri Hari’s name, beauty etc to a small degree.
- ☛ Dhâranâ – in this stage the devotee drags his mind away from other topics and concentrates on Sri Bhagavân’s beauty etc. This is an ordinary level of concentration.
- ☛ Dhyân – when the concentration is deep then we call it ‘dhyân’.
- ☛ Dhruvânumritu – in this level the remembrance is continuous like the flow of oil – the mind does not wander.
- ☛ Samâdhi – in this stage the devotee experiences ‘sphurti’ (spontaneous revelation).

Hearing, glorifying and remembrance are intermingled with each other. We cannot tell when one will lead to another. We may be hearing or taking the Holy Name, and suddenly it absorbs us in His remembrance! Therefore taking the Holy Name and meditation are often inseparable and one leads to the other. We shall discuss this in detail in ‘A scientific Study of Râgânugâ-bhajan.’

46. Dhyân¹ – Since ‘dhyân’ is the most important part of bhajan (since no bhajan is fruitful unless and until we perform it with deep concentration), Srila Rupa Goswâmpâd has given it as a special point.

‘Dhyân’ means ‘extremely deep concentration’. It is the soul of devotional practice. Its outcome is extremely marvelous. Whatever we do, whether hear, take the Holy Name, sing glorification, do archanam or for that matter any sevâ, we have to do it with dhyân. We find in Srimad-Bhâgavatam –

“Sri Avadhut Gitâ describes the inconceivable effect of dhyân. When a living being fixes its mind on anything – be it out of fear, love or envy – it attains the state of the ‘object of meditation’. Let us explain with an example – there is an insect that catches another smaller insect and imprisons it in its nest. The tiny insect is in constant fear of the bigger insect and hence constantly thinks about it. Therefore it starts looking like the insect even before leaving its body. This signifies that we can get a similar body like that of our ‘object of meditation’. Then do we have any doubt that if we meditate on sac-chidânanda Sri Bhagavân, we too shall gain a sac-chidânanda form?”

– (S.B.11.9.22-23)

Dhyân is of four types –

¹ The third level of meditation or very deep concentration

- Rupa¹-dhyân – The scriptures have declared that if we meditate on Sri Krishna's lotus feet all our sorrows will be alleviated. Sri Krishna has 19 symbols on His soles – such as flag, thunderbolt, elephant-goad etc. Each symbol is capable of destroying anarthas that cause obstacles on the path of bhakti. It also has immense power to offer prem to the meditator.

Sri Krishna has infinite beauty and sweetness. When we meditate on His form our mind is attracted to it like a honey bee is dragged by a pitcher of honey – so much as – that we naturally give up thinking about objects other than Sri Krishna.

- Guna²-dhyân – Sri Krishna has excellent and sweet qualities such as love for His devotees, compassion etc. If a devotee meditates on these qualities constantly with devotion even colossal amount of anarthas get destroyed and he attains the abode of Sri Hari.
- Leelâ-dhyân – Sri Krishna is heart-stealing and His pastimes are even more tempting. They are the essence of all sweetness. If we meditate on them we shall immerse in sweet ras.³
- Sevâ⁴-dhyân – to serve 'manomayee⁵' Deity in meditation.

"Certain devotees have served Sri Hari continually in their mind and have actually got his darshan although He is beyond all conception." – (Purân quoted in B.R.S.)

Srimat Jiva Goswâmpâd has explained this point further by quoting an incident from Sri Brahma-Vaivarta Purân –

"There lived a simple and poor brahmin in Pratishtânpur (present day Paithân in Maharashtra). He was extremely eager to serve Sri Bhagavân. However due to poverty he was unable to buy the ingredients necessary for pujâ. One day he attended an assembly of Vaishnavs to hear Bhagavad-kathâ. There he heard that if someone is unable to get the items needed for external seva, he can manifest the Deity in his mind and can simply worship Him with all the paraphernalia mentally. When the Brahmin heard this he was delighted. He decided that he would worship his manomayee Deity everyday. One day, after bathing in the Godâvari, he sat in a secluded place. In his mind he built a nice temple for Sri Hari, installed manomayee Deity, worshiped Him with royal ingredients and he felt supreme happiness. He continued to worship in this manner everyday. On one occasion he decided to offer paramânnâ⁶ with ghee to the Deity. So he cooked it in his

¹ beauty

² excellence

³ We have discussed leelâ-dhyân in detail in 'A Scientific Study of Raganugâ bhajan'.

⁴ Loving service

⁵ When a form of Sri Bhagavân manifests in our mind (man) and we worship Him mentally, such a Deity is called 'manomayee'.

⁶ Rice cooked in milk and sugar

mind, poured it in a gold vessel and started fanning to cool it. After sometime, he mentally dipped his finger in it to check whether it had cooled or not. His finger got burnt. He felt sorry that now the paramâna had become unfit for Sri Bhagavân's sevâ. His samâdhi¹ broke. He saw that his finger had really got burnt and he could feel the pain. When Sri Hari saw His bewildered devotee, He smiled, called for a vehicle and brought His devotee to Him."

47. Dâsya² – When we serve thinking "I am Sri Krishna's servant" such a mood is called 'dâsya'.

"When we are engrossed in the mood that "I am Sri Krishna's servant" we get so much bliss – it is like an ocean – and even crores of Brahmânanda cannot equal a drop of this ocean." – (C.C.Antya.6.44.)

Srimat Jiva Goswâmpâd has written –

"Forget doing paricharyâ, if we are simply engrossed in the mood of a servant we shall attain success, that is, gain prem-bhakti." – (B.S.304)

He has quoted evidence Itihâs to prove his point –

"janmântar sahasreshu yasya syânmatireedrisi,
dâso'ham vâsudevasya sarvân lokân samuddharet."

Meaning - "After gathering the good fortune of thousands of births one get the feeling 'I am Vâsudev's servant' - such a person can deliver the entire world."

What is 'dâsya'?

Srimat Jiva Goswâmpâd has explained it as follows –

"'Dâsya' means to pay obeisance, glorify, surrender all our activities to Him, do paricharyâ, remember His holy feet and hear about Him. Sri Hari's servants always accomplish all sâdhanâ and achieve their goal – they never fail in anything. Srimad-Bhâgavatam says –

Sri Bhagavân's name is so exalted that simply by hearing it once man gets purified. Then how great is His servant? Forget accomplishing complete success in bhajan, there is nothing he cannot achieve. – (S.B.9.5.16.)"

We, the Goudiya Vaishnavs are proud to consider ourselves Srimati Râdhârâni's maidservants and worship the Divine couple in this mood. We shall discuss this in detail in 'A Scientific study of Râgânugâ Bhajan'.

48. Sakhya – It means to have faith and treat one another with friendly love. We should have faith in Sri Krishna and be friends with Him. We can express our sakhya-mood by endeavoring for His welfare and happiness. Some great devotees

¹ The highest level of meditation

² Dâs = servant; dâsya = the mood of servitude.

have such friendly and loving bhâv towards Sri Krishna that they sleep inside the temple (to guard Him).

Sakhya-bhâv is not only a goal, but also a sâdhanâ since we can gain prem by practicing this mood. Sri Bhagavân is everybody's friend, yet He has special love for His devotees. The devotees too always wish Him well. This loving relation between Sri Bhagavân and His devotees is unbroken. Therefore when we practice being friendly with Him, our natural love for Him blooms further. Hence this is the goal (to gain prem as well as a sâdhanâ.)

49. Self-surrender - This means we should surrender everything to Sri Bhagavân – body, soul and everything we possess. When we surrender it indicates that we do not try anything for ourselves. We leave our goal and sâdhanâ to Him – He will take care of my goal and also to my sâdhanâ – this is the feeling. We will only take great care of Him and He will see to the rest. This is self-surrender. It is like selling your cow. Suppose you possess a cow. Till you own it you are bound to worry about its food, health etc. But once you sell the cow you need not worry anymore; now it is a trouble for the man who has bought the cow. Similarly as long as we are proud and think this body to be 'I' and material possessions to be 'mine' we have to worry about their maintenance. Once we have sought refuge in the path of bhakti and we have surrendered unto Sri Krishna's lotus feet we need not be anxious for ourselves or our possessions (relations) any more. Our minds should just be deeply absorbed in Him and perform His bhajan - free of stress. Then we shall be blessed.

"When we seek refuge of Sri Krishna and self-surrender unto Him, He immediately makes us His own." – (C.C.Madhya.22.54.)

50. We should offer Sri Krishna what is dear to us –

"When an object is permitted by the scriptures, it is lavish and it is also our favorite – and we offer such an object to Sri Krishna then the outcome is immeasurable." - (S.B.11.11.41. quoted in B.R.S.)

Here 'favorite object' refers to those items permitted by the scriptures since an object forbidden by the scriptures can never be a devotee's favorite. In the above statement 'and' indicates Sri Bhagavân's favorite as well. When we offer such items we get immense results.

51. All our endeavors should be directed towards Sri Krishna - A devotee labors only to please Sri Krishna.

"O sage, who wishes to gain bhakti should direct all his activities – be it worldly or spiritual – to serve Sri Hari alone." – (Pancharâtra quoted in B.R.S.)

If we are following the path of pure devotion we should not offer our activity to Sri Krishna after performing it, rather before doing anything we should question ourselves whether it is for Sri Krishna's pleasure or not? If it is, then we perform that deed – this is seva. Then it is worthwhile.

52. Sharanâgati¹ – Taking refuge is the main pillar of devotional practice. Our progress in bhakti is directly proportional to our sharanâgati. We should seek the refuge of Sri Krishna with body, mind and speech.

“The devotee who says – ‘My dear Lord, I am only Yours’, knows the same in his mind (he really feels he belongs to Sri Krishna) and physically lives in his dhâm, he has indeed taken refuge and enjoys happiness.” – (B.R.S.)

There are 6 rules of Sharanâgati–

ânukulyasya samkalpah prâtikulya-vivârjanam,
rakshishyatiti vishwâso goptritve varanam tahtâ.
Âtma-nikshepa-kârpanye shada-vidhâ sharanâgatih.

Meaning –

- ☛ Determination to do all that is favorable for bhakti
- ☛ Reject everything that is unfavorable for bhakti
- ☛ A firm faith that “Sri Bhagavân will protect me”
- ☛ To feel that “Sri Bhagavân is my sole maintainer”
- ☛ Self-surrender
- ☛ Pray with humility

Amongst these “Sri Bhagavân is my husband or sole maintainer” is the main point, other rules follow suit. Sharanâgati is wonderful and without this we can not say we belong to Sri Krishna. Srimat Jiva Goswâmpâd has said –

“Our bhajan processes become successful when we adopt sharanâgati.”

– (B.S.237.)

53. We should serve Sri Krishna’s dear ones –

“‘Sri Krishna’s dear ones’ refers to Tulsi, Vaishnav, Vrajamandal and Srimad-Bhâgavatam; we should serve them.” – (C.C.Madhya.22.71.)

Let us discuss the importance of these seva in detail.

54. We should serve the bhakti-scriptures such as Srimad-Bhâgavatam –

“Even the devatâs worship those who adore Vaishnav-scriptures. They are liberated from all sins. When we keep written Vaishnav-scriptures in our home, Sri Nârâyan resides there.” – (Skanda Purân quoted in B.R.S.)

¹ refuge

The Vedas are like a wish-fulfilling tree and Srimad-Bhâgavatam is its ripe fruit (it is the essence of the Vedas). Therefore it is the original Vaishnav-scripture. When we develop a passion for the sweet ras of Srimad-Bhâgavatam we do not feel interest in other books. Our preceptors – the Goswâmis of Vrindâvan – have composed many texts following the dictum of Srimad-Bhâgavatam. They are Brihad-Bhâgavatam, Laghu-Bhâgavatâmtitam, Bhakti-Rasâmrita-Sindhu, Gopâl-Champuh, Ânanda-Vrindâvana-Champuh etc. They are also 'Bhâgavat'. When we read, hear and worship these texts, we are serving Srimad-Bhâgavatam.

55. We should serve Vraja-mandal (also called Mathura-mandal) – We should hear the glory of Vraja-dhâm where Sri Krishna has manifested His sweet pastimes. We should visit Vraja-dhâm, take darshan, touch the earth of that place, reside there, sweep and wash the place. Then we shall achieve our goal easily.

"Who forsakes Vraja-dhâm, develops attachment for another Holy place and resides there, he is a fool. He has fallen in the grip of mâyâ and wanders in the cycle of birth and death." – (Âdi-Varâha Purân quoted in B.R.S.)

"Even if we serve all the Holy places in the three worlds, we cannot get supreme bliss (or prem – the topmost achievable goal); however it becomes easily available simply if we touch Vraja-dhâm." – (Brahmânda Purân)

56. We should serve the Vaishnavs – We can please the Vaishnavs in two ways

- By arranging Sri Hari-kathâ and Sri Harinâm
- By doing paricharyâ such as offering mahâprasâdam, massaging the feet etc.

Sri Krishna has told Uddhav –

"Vaishnav-sevâ is more pleasing to me than my own seva."- (S.B.11.19.21)

Srila Vishwanâth Chakravartipâd has explained this statement as follows –

"I am more pleased when you serve my devotees; therefore you should serve the devotees."

Sriman-Mahâdev has told the Mother Goddess –

"Worshiping Sri Vishnu is greater than all adoration. Worshiping the Vaishnavs is greater than that. Sri Bhagavân is easily pleased when we serve the Vaishnavs."

– (Padma Purân)

The Lord Himself has stated –

"Dear Pârtha (Arjun), who claim to be my devotees are not really so, but those who love and serve my devotees are my devotees in truth." – (Âdi Purân)

"O sage, when we serve great devotees such as you, we get the immense joy of extremely deep love for the lotus feet of Lord Madhusudan." – (S.B.3.7.19.)

This proves that if we want Sri Bhagavân's mercy we should diligently serve the Vaishnavs.

57. We should arrange grand feasts to the maximum extent we can afford

A grand feast is a happy event in which there is a lot of Harinâm-sankirtan and Vaishnavs are fed mahâprasâdam. The saints glorify such feasts. We should procure objects according to what we can afford and hold such feasts for the Vaishnavs. A householder who has the funds yet does not arrange such feasts fall under the category 'cheating of money'. A grand feast achieves two targets – spreading the Holy Name and Vaishnav-sevâ.

58. We should observe Niyam Sevâ vrata in the month of Kârtik - The month of Kârtik is more important than other months. We should keep some Niyam during this month to read, hear, glorify and serve Sri Sri Râdhâ-Dâmodarjiu with special love and care. In this period, even a small amount of bhajan gives Sri Râdhâ-Dâmodar more pleasure. Whatever bhajan we may perform, the outcome is much more as compared to the same bhajan performed in other months.

If we reside in Vraja-dhâm during Kârtik and observe Niyam Sevâ, all of a sudden we get Sri Hari-bhakti that is otherwise extremely difficult to gain.

“bhuktim muktim harirdadyâdarchito'nyatra sevinâm,
bhaktintu na dadâtyeva yato vashyâkri hare.
sâ twanjasâ harerbhaktirlabhate kârtike naraih,
mathurâyâm sakridapi Sri-dâmodara-sevanât.”

– (Padma Purân quoted in B.R.S.)

Srimat Jiva Goswâmpâd has explained the above statement as follows –

“When a devotee who is devoid of deep love and unqualified, worship Sri Krishna in any place other than Vraja-mandal, He grants him material pleasures and liberation, but does not give him bhakti, that will make Him subjugated to the devotee. Sri Krishna grants bhakti only to a devotee who has deep love for Him, and to no one else. If a devotee does not have deep love for Sri Krishna, he is unqualified for bhakti. This is because He does not think it is right for Him to surrender to one who does not have deep love for Him. So He waits for the devotee to become qualified. What is that qualification? The devotee should realize that his welfare lies in bhakti alone, and he should become disinterested in everything else. However, if we reside in Vraja-mandal even once and perform Niyam-sevâ and worship Sri Sri Râdhâ-Dâmodarjiu, then all of a sudden we can get Sri Hari-bhakti, in spite of being unqualified. This happens although Sri Hari-bhakti is extremely difficult to obtain.”

Srila Vishwanâth Chakravartipâd has added –

“If we serve the Dâmodar month (= observe Niyam-seva) in Vraja-mandal, in spite of not having performed any sâdhanâ, all of a sudden we get bhakti.”

59. We should celebrate Vaishnav festivals –

Appearance days of Sri Krishna, Sriman-Mahâprabhu and divine avatârs are joyous occasions. We should observe fasts on these days and blissfully enjoy Sri Harinâm, hearing Sri Bhagavân's sweet pastimes, qualities and glorify them. On the next day we can have a mahâ-mahotsav (more than a grand feast) for the Vaishnavs. Sri Bhagavân is pleased with such celebration and if we do not take part in it, it is an offence.

60. We should take pleasure in serving the lotus feet of the Deity –

"Who takes my name constantly and is always happy to serve me – I grant him bhakti, and not liberation." – (Âdi Purân quoted in B.R.S.)

"bigraha noho tumi sâkkhât brajendranandan"

Meaning - "You are not a Deity but the Son of Nanda Mahârâj in real form."

– (C.C.)

When we feel like this, then our sevâ naturally becomes loving. The best worshipers are those who serve the Deity in this mood.

61. We should relish the meaning of Srimad-Bhâgavatam in the association of rasik pure devotees –

In the very beginning Srimad-Bhâgavatam lovingly invites the rasik and pure devotees to relish the highly delectable fruit of the Vedas which are like wish-fulfilling tree.¹

"Dear connoisseurs ras, dear bhâvukas (those who are expert in ras-realization), Srimad-Bhâgavatam is a drink that is devoid of any adulteration. The Vedas are like the wish-fulfilling tree and Srimad-Bhâgavatam is the extremely ripened fruit of this tree. It is flowing out of the Holy lips of Sri Shuka and has revealed itself to this world on its own (since eternity). Although you are in the state of self-realization, please drink repeatedly of this marvelous ras." – (S.B.1.1.3)

The sweetness of Sri Bhagavân's leelâ-ras is much more remarkable than the bliss of merging with the Brahman. Shuka Muni was absorbed in the Brahman-realization which has no characteristic whatsoever. However when he heard Srimad-Bhâgavatam he was highly attracted by its ras. He came to Vyâsdev and studied Srimad-Bhâgavatam. He has admitted to Parikshit Mahârâj –

"O Râjarshi², I was immersed in Brahman-realization which is devoid of any characteristic. Yet Sri Krishna's divine pastimes are so sweet that they dragged me to my father and I studied Srimad-Bhâgavatam under him." – (S.B.2.1.9.)

To relish the ras of Srimad-Bhâgavatam in the company of rasik devotees is an intimate part of bhajan.

¹ The Vedas are like the wish-fulfilling tree and Srimad-Bhâgavatam is the essence of all Vedic scriptures. Hence it is like the ripened fruit of this tree.

² A king who is also a sage

62. Association of pure devotees –

A pure devotee is one who has Vaishnav-etiquette and is firm in Bhakti. We call him a 'sâdhu'. His association is always desirable. We wish ourselves well when we associate with a sâdhu who is samavâsan¹. He should be of a serene disposition and situated on a higher plane of bhakti than we are.

"All scriptures repeatedly exhort us to associate with sâdhus; even momentary association with a sâdhu can enable us to achieve our goal."

– (C.C.Madhya.22.33.)

"Even a very short association with a sâdhu can grant such incredible fruits that the heaven and apavarga cannot give us. It is needless to say that material kingdom and wealth that is highly destructible is nowhere near it."

– (S.B.1.18.13)

Srimat Jiva Goswâmpâd has stated that we have this effect when we associate with savâsan sâdhus only.

Sri Bhagavân's bounties engulf us when we associate with sâdhus and get their kripâ. We cannot get His mercy by independent endeavors. Of course, Sri Bhagavân's mercy is compulsory to get bhakti, however we should know that his mercy comes to us in the form of a sâdhu. It is foolish if we ignore the mercy that has assumed a form² and in stead keep searching for the less mercy (directly Sri Bhagavân's mercy).

Association of a sâdhu and serving him does not mean simply going to a sâdhu, living with him and feeding him prasâdam; we will know that we have really done sâdhu-sanga when we hear Sri Krishna-kathâ from them, meditate on their words, follow their instructions and practice devotion according to their advice.³

63. Sri Harinâm-sankirtan – This is the best bhajan. Srimad-Bhâgavatam says

"na hyatah paramolâhbo dehinâm bhrâmyatâmiha,
yato vindeta paramâm shântim nasyeta samsritih."

Meaning - "The living beings are wandering in various forms of life – they do not benefit more from anything else other than the interest in Sri Harinâm-sankirtan."

Therefore we should have interest in hearing and/or chanting the Holy Name. Its main outcome is love for the lotus feet of Sri Bhagavân and its secondary outcome is the destruction of material desires. It results in supreme peace.

"Harinâm appears constantly only in the mouth of one who has served Sri Vâsudev for thousands of life-times." – (Padma Purân quoted in B.R.S.)

¹ With the same mood. For example, since we are practicing bhajan in the mood of a Manjari, we should desire the company of a sâdhu who has the same mood (that is, of a Manjari).

² Mercy has come to us in the form of a sâdhu

³ Please read the 'Glory of associating with a devotee' in 'A Scientific study of the devotee'.

Srimat Jiva Goswâmpâd has explained this statement as follows –

“A devotee who is firm in serving Sri Vâsudev goes through rebirths repeatedly only because Sri Bhagavân wishes to increase his eagerness and enthusiasm for bhakti.”

“Sri Harinâm Sankirtan results in the destruction of sin and material desires; it cleanses the sub-conscious mind. It is the source of all other bhakti-sâdhanâs that result in Sri Krishna-prem. It also enables us to relish this nectarine prem. It makes Sri Krishna available to us and submerges us in the nectarine ocean of sevâ.” – (C.C.Antya.20.10-11.)

64. We should reside in Vraja-mandal –

This is an intimate part of bhajan. Even the liberated souls crave for Sri Hari-bhakti - and we can get it simply by residing here for one day. To get the real benefit of residing in Vrajadhâm we should constantly hear the loving sweet pastimes of Sri Sri Râdhâ-Krishna. If we stay here lovingly then all of a sudden we shall get bhâv and bhakti. When an inoffensive person merely touches Vrajadhâm he gets bhakti. This is because by Sri Krishna’s wish, prem-dhâm¹ Sri Golok-Vrindâvan that is the highest point in the divine realm, has expressed itself on planet earth.

The highest point in the divine world is Sri Golok-Vrajalok dhâm. It is also called Sri Golok, Shwetadweep and Vrindâvan. It is conscious, all-knowing, infinite, almighty and non-different from Sri Krishna’s body. It pervades all quarters – has no limit. By Sri Krishna’s wish it has appeared in this universe. It exists in the same form as in the divine world. In other words, it does not have two forms.”

– (C.C.Âdi.5.17-19)

Although Srila Rupa Goswâmpâd has mentioned the five points, viz. serving the Deity, Srimad-Bhâgavatam, devotee, Harinâm and Vraja-dhâm – he repeats them to emphasize their importance and power. Forget honoring them, if we merely come in touch with them, and we are inoffensive, it results in awakening bhâv in us all of a sudden.

“The association of sâdhus, Harinâm-sankirtan, hearing of Srimad-Bhâgavatam, residing in Vraja-mandal and faithfully serving the Deities are the most important parts of bhajan. If we perform even little of these we can get Sri Krishna-prem.”

– (C.C.Madhya.22.74-75)

Gradual Progress in Bhakti

Srila Rupa Goswâmpâd has chalked out how we progress gradually in Bhakti, reach state of bhâv and ultimately prem –

âdou shraddhâ tatah sâdhu-sango'tha bhajanakriya,

tato'nartha-nivrittih syât-tato nishthâ ruchis-tatah.

¹ The abode of transcendental love

athâsaktis-tato bhâvas-tatah premâbhyudanchati,
sâdhakânâmayam premnah prâdurbhâve bhavet kramah."

Meaning - "In the beginning we should acquire shraddhâ by hearing the scriptures in the company of sâdhus, then we should learn the process of bhajan by further association with them, after this starts actual practice of bhajan followed by anarthas-nivritti (getting rid of bad qualities), nishthâ (firm determination in bhajan), ruchi (interest in bhajan), âsakti (deep attachment for bhajan), bhâv and ultimately prem. This is the usual process by which prem manifests in a sâdhak."

Best bhakti – Bhakti is classified into two – sâdhya - 'achievable goal' and 'Process'. Can be further classified into –

- ☛ Sâdhan-bhakti –when we are in the stages from shraddhâ to bhakti we are said to perform sâdhan-bhakti. It comprises of hearing, glorifying and remembering.
- ☛ Bhâv-bhakti – When our heart is cleansed by the above process, we reach the stage of bhâv.
- ☛ Prem-bhakti – when we gain prem.

We should remember that bhakti is a property of Sri Bhagavân's swarup-shakti (internal potency) and although it is transcendental it becomes one with our senses and manifests itself on its own.

"nitya-siddha krishna-prem sâdhya kobhu noy,
Shrabanâdi shuddha chitte koroye udoy."

Meaning - "Sri Krishna-prem is eternal and self-manifested. We can never achieve it by any process. When we hear, glorify and follow the paths of bhajan, our heart becomes clean and it reveals itself."

☛ (C.C.Madhya.22.57.)

Now let us study the different stages in bhakti.

1. Shraddhâ – it means to hear the scriptures from the pure devotees and believe in the shâstras. "âdou shraddhâ" - this thing called shrâdhâ is the first step of bhajan and the root of all devotional practice. Only when a person has shrâdhâ he can gain knowledge about bhakti. We have already discussed in brief the characteristics of scriptural faith. The one who has such faith alone is qualified for bhajan. When shrâdhâ arises in us, we cannot remain disinterested in bhajan anymore – we will surely set forth in the path of bhakti. When we gain scriptural faith we become agitated and start searching for a Sadguru so that we may seek refuge at his sacred feet. At last, by the mercy of Sri Krishna we get the shelter of Sri Gurudev. This is sâdhu-sanga - the next step in the ladder of bhakti.
2. Sâdhu-sanga – The first time we do sâdhu-sanga is when we hear the scriptures from the sâdhus and the second sâdhu-sanga occurs when we

crave for bhajan and are eager to take the shelter of Sri Gurudev's feet. Here sâdhu means those who have surrendered themselves at the lotus feet of Sri Bhagavân, they love Him and consider loving Him as the supreme goal of their life.

What is 'sâdhu-sanga'?

'sanga' means serving the sâdhu, doing his paricharyâ, hearing Sri Krishna-kathâ from him, behaving as they behave, glorifying them – and be engrossed in serving them with body, speech and mind – this is sâdhu-sanga. Then amongst these sâdhus we may meet someone whose shelter we sincerely desire; he becomes our Sri Gurudev. We should take dikshâ and shikshâ from him.

3. bhajan-kriyâ – or the actual process of bhajan – Now we start hearing, glorifying, archanam, vandandam etc. bhajan-kriyâ is of two types –

- not firm
- firm

In the beginning stages our bhajan is not firm. We have to cross a few hurdles before our bhajan becomes firm. When a devotee who has shradhâ takes initiation from a Sadguru, and by his mercy starts bhajan, he is highly enthusiastic. He is always eager to practice sâdhanâ. So we call this stage as utsâhamayi or 'enthusiastic'.

However this state does not remain long. Within a short time we find our eagerness webbing. We feel bored and our bhajan suffers a 'low tide'. Sometimes our bhajan is intense and at other times it is slack. Therefore the wise call this state as 'intense-slack' period. during this time we get ideas, such as – I shall leave my family and practice bhajan in seclusion or I will practice bhajan as a householder or out of hearing, glorifying etc. (nine types of bhakti) I will practice only one or I will practice all of them etc. etc. Therefore we also call this state as vyudha-vikalpâ or 'alternate ideas'.

In this stage we have to literally fight with our materialistic tendencies. Sometimes we win and at other times material desires get the better of us. Since this continues, we call it the vishay-sangarâ or 'material association' state.

Devotional practice should force our material desires to wane and increase love for bhajan. However if it does not happen we should realize that it is because we are not following the rules of bhajan

properly (as given by Srila Rupa Goswâmpâd). Therefore we also call this state as niyamâkshamâ – ‘unable to follow rules’.

When we practice bhajan sometimes people are drawn to us; then temptations such as monetary gain, power and position appear on our path. These are the parasitic creepers growing on the Bhakti-kalpalatâ (bhakti is like a divine creeper that can fulfill all the wishes of a devotee). Therefore it is our duty to sever them first.

4. Anartha-nivritti – getting rid of bad qualities – When we are not firm in bhajan, our anarthas force us to slip down the ladder of bhakti. Anarthas are of four types –
 - ☛ Those arising from sinful actions – these anarthas arise from past and recent sinful activities.
 - ☛ Those arising of pious actions – the pious activities we have performed in the past grant us a rich lifestyle. This absorbs us in sense-gratification and causes anarthas.
 - ☛ Those arising from aparâdh- Offenses against the Holy Name and sevâ-âparâdh result in anarthas.
 - ☛ Those arising from bhakti – When we advance in bhakti we may get money, fame and power. They give rise to anarthas. Thus bhakti too can cause bad qualities.

What are the external symptoms that tell us we have got rid of anarthas?

When we lack the following –

- ☛ Laya – we feel sleepy while chanting the Mahâmantra, hearing and meditating. In fact sleepy while doing jap, more sleepy during hearing and the sleepest while meditating. This characteristic is called ‘laya’.
- ☛ Vikshep - when we conduct worldly matters during hearing, glorifying etc. we call it ‘vikshep’.
- ☛ Apratipatti - even though we may lack laya and vikshep, sometimes we do not feel like hearing or glorifying – this is ‘apratipatti’.
- ☛ Kashâya - When we do bhajan such as hearing etc. if we get negative feelings such as anger, greed, pride – it is called ‘kashâya’.
- ☛ Rasâswâd – if we are unable to concentrate on hearing etc. due to material pleasures or attachments, it is called ‘rasâswâd’.

We should not get overwhelmed by anarthas and in stead we should perform bhajan in the company of sâdhus. Also we should be very careful not to criticize pure devotees and be humble in any situation. Then by Sri Bhagavân’s mercy, all our anarthas will be destroyed and we shall enter the next stage, that is - ‘firm bhajan’.

5. Nishthâ – This is the stage of firm bhajan.

“How do we decide whether our bhajan is ‘not firm’ or ‘firm’? When we are lax in hearing, glorifying etc. we are not firm, and when we are strong in these activities we are ‘firm’.” – (Mâdhurya-Kâdambini, 4th shower)

When we become devoid of the five symptoms of anarthas as mentioned above, then we can say we have become ‘firm in bhajan’ or we have gained ‘nishthâ’.

6. ruchi (interest) – When we relish the sweetness of Sri Krishna’s name, beauty, qualities, pastimes and associates we have reached the state of ‘ruchi’. It is of two types –

☛ Depending on the subject – suppose we are hearing a kirtan and we relish its sweetness because it has a sweet tune, proper music, rhythm etc. it indicates we are in the first stage of interest. It is similar to a person who has little hunger and wishes for delicious meal to satisfy himself.

☛ Independent of the subject – This stage is like one who is ravenously hungry. He will eat with pleasure whatever you offer him. Similarly when we develop a higher level of interest we shall relish a kirtan even if it does not have a sweet tune or incorrect rhythm. What simply matters that it contains Sri Bhagavân’s name, and qualities. We feel immensely overjoyed just to hear about Him. Then we step into âsakti.

7. âsakti (deep attachment)–

“When our ruchi (interest) in bhajan becomes extremely intense and our thoughts keep roaming around Sri Bhagavân alone, then this stage is called ‘âsakti’. The process of bhajan is like a graceful wish-fulfilling creeper on which âsakti blooms like a cluster of buds that burst into the colorful flowers of bhâv (âsakti gives rise to bhâv) that finally turns into prem (the fruit).”

☛ (M.K.6th shower)

Âsakti cleanses our chitta so much that it shines like a mirror. It reflects Sri Bhagavân so clearly as if we are actually seeing Him. Earlier, by chance our heart would get torn away from Sri Bhagavân, we would voluntarily connect it to Him again – but not when we have reached âsakti. Now our mind is automatically absorbed in Him. The mahâjans have termed this state as dhruvânumriti (constant remembrance). How a poor man suffering in drought will be attracted by a plate of delicious food and how a honey bee is dragged by the scent of a vessel of honey – like that when we attain âsakti, our chitta is spontaneously attached to Sri Bhagavân and His name, qualities and leelas. This is the pinnacle of sâdhan-bhakti. After this we enter the realm of bhâv-bhakti.

8. Bhâv or rati – Bhakti is like a wish-fulfilling creeper and bhâv or rati is its flower. It is so fragrant that it pierces the envelope of the universe, pervades all divine abodes and drags Bhagavân Madhusudan to the devotee. When âsakti becomes extremely intense we gain rati. When we gain rati, we see Sri Bhagavân in sphurti as if we are actually seeing Him.

We can experience His wonderful words, touch, beauty, ras and fragrance. In this state we become one with our siddha swarup - we identify only with our spiritual body. We live as if we are completely different from the material body and we are existing outside this sâdhak-body. Like a greedy honey bee all set to get intoxicated, our heart too becomes eager to drink the sweet nectar of His lotus feet.

“Nine symptoms of bhâv-bhakti are as follows-

- 1) Although from material point of view we should get agitated but we do not.
- 2) We do not waste a single second in anything not relevant to Sri Bhagavân.
- 3) Disinterest in any topic that is ‘other than Sri Krishna’
- 4) Devoid of false ego,
- 5) Firm faith that Sri Bhagavân will certainly have mercy on me
- 6) Great eagerness to attain His lotus feet
- 7) Always interested in singing Harinâm
- 8) Forever desiring to glorify Sri Bhagavân’s Holy Name, excellences etc
- 9) Extremely enthusiastic to reside in holy places such as Vrajadhâm”

☞ (B.R.S.13.25-26)

Bhâv-bhakti has two characteristics –

- ☞ The devotee considers liberation as nothing
- ☞ Bhâv-bhakti is extremely rare

9. Prem – It is the highest stage of bhakti. When prem arises our heart is completely clean. The devotee very much feels “Sri Bhagavân belongs to me.” Prem has two characteristics –

- ☞ Intense bliss
- ☞ Attracts Sri Krishna

“Prem is the most precious treasure and is the fifth purushârtha¹ of the living entity. It gives us the sweet relish of Sri Krishna. Prem makes Sri Krishna subjugated to the devotee and gives him the immense joy of serving Sri Krishna.” – (C.C.Âdi.7.144-145)²

¹ Goal of life

² We shall elaborate prem in ‘A Scientific Study of Prem’