

Rāgānugā-bhakti: Eligibility Through Harināma

— Excerpts from Bhakti Vikāsa Swami's *Śrī Bhaktisiddhānta Vaibhava*, Vol 2.

Most *bābājīs* and some *jāta-gosāñis* bestowed upon initiates *siddha-praṇālī*, a system whereby a beginner was informed of his supposed *siddha-deha* (perfected body) and personality within the spiritual realm of Vṛndāvana.

Thus from the beginning, novices were hypothetically given admission into the perfectional stage of *rāgānugā-bhakti*, the sublime path of following the behavior and adopting the mood of liberated associates of the Lord. Of course Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura knew that *mañjarī-sādhana* had been introduced and practiced by recognized *Gauḍīya ācāryas* and that *siddha-deha* meditation is stated in *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta* (Madhya 8.229) as the only means to attain service to Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa in *sakhī-bhāva*. However, he explained that this means that to qualify for assisting Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in their delectation of divine love one must first achieve a transcendental body, beyond the constraints of matter. Stressing this point of requisite *adhikāra*, he decried the practice of teaching, even by *gurus* learned in *śāstra*, these esoteric topics to unqualified disciples. Although his differences with the proponents of wide dispersal of *siddha-praṇālī* were not principally over the meaning (*sambandha*) and goal (*prayojana*) of *Gauḍīya* practice, but in the details of attaining it (*abhideya*), this contention became a major source of disagreement with those who considered themselves custodians of the *rāgānugā-mārga*.

Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura upheld that *līlā-smaraṇa* was suitable only for the most exalted devotees and was farcical if attempted by persons of uncontrolled mind and senses, devoid of even basic *sambandha-jñāna*, whose imitative and immature meditation on the apparently concupiscent affairs of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa would mean their downfall into turpitude. He warned that just as anyone except Lord Śiva would perish by drinking poison, a conditioned and thus unfit person will be destroyed by hearing, chanting about, and contemplating intimate pastimes such as *rāsa-līlā*.

Although accepted *Gauḍīya ācāryas* had stated that the qualification for the *siddha-praṇālī* initiation is eagerness to serve Kṛṣṇa in *Vraja-līlā*, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura distinguished between immature desire based on mundane preconceptions, and the mature eagerness that arises from the factual spiritual progress based on *sambandha-jñāna*. He would say (in English), “First deserve and then desire.” He satirized the *sahijiyā-bhāva* of imaging oneself to be privy to arcane pastimes while wholly overlooking one’s enormous lack of eligibility, by likening the endeavor to “teach” *rāgānugā-bhakti* to that of instructing a five-year-old in adult sexual behavior; in due time such feelings arise naturally, but trying to instigate their premature appearance is a perversion.

Those who profess to teach or reveal this identity are deceitful, for it cannot be done. On the other hand, if a devotee receives some realization after sincerely chanting for a long time, he should go to the *sad-guru* or an advanced

devotee and ask that that realization be confirmed and also purified by him. The *svarūpa* has eleven (*ekādaśa*) aspects. There are many cases of unscrupulous *gurus* who artificially force-feed these topics to unqualified practitioners, yet they cannot be called a symptom of spiritual perfection. Those who have achieved *svarūpa-siddhi* gain such realization through internal revelation; the *guru's* only involvement is to assist his disciples' ongoing advancement. As a *sādhaka* progresses towards *siddhi*, all these things are naturally revealed within the *sevomukha* heart.

— **Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura Letter, 17 Nov.1930, *Patrāvalī* 2 p89- 90**

Unlike the *prākṛta-sahajiyās* busily burnishing their profiles as *premis*, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura neither asserted nor insinuated that he had *prema*. Nor did he glibly drop words like “Rādhā” or “*prema*” as if they were everyday topics. Contrary to the *prākṛta-sahajiyās* usage, among Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura's followers discussion of *tattva* and *siddhānta* were considerably more common than those on Rādhā and *prema*. He raised his disciples to the platform of *prema* by first giving them *sambandha-jñāna*, by incessantly delineating the process of *rūpānuga-bhakti* designed to waken *prema*, and by emphasizing *sevā-vṛtti* (service attitude), the inherent characteristic of *prema*. Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura explained that Rādhā could properly be approached only by imbibing at least a particle of the immeasurable *sevā-vṛtti* that constituted the essence of Her existence.

He explained that actual eagerness for realizing Kṛṣṇa's pastimes is characterized by total absence of penchant toward mundane thoughts, for the two cannot coexist. Discussion of *Gīta-govinda* should take place when one is finished with useless talks of family affairs and so on.

— **Śrīla Prabhupādera goloka-vāṇī 1.49-57**

In accordance with the genuine *praṇālī* (path) of *siddhas* (perfect devotees), Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura's approach to *rāgānugā-bhakti* stressed *kīrtana* over artificial *smaraṇa*, emphasizing that all other processes of *bhakti*, including *smaraṇa*, could be properly executed only in conjunction with and by the mercy and strength derived from *nāma-bhajana*; that chanting of the holy name was itself *siddha-praṇālī*; and that Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu had declared chanting of *harināma*, particularly the *mahā-mantra*, to be the only *praṇālī* for Kali-yuga, whereby all persons can attain *sarva-siddhi* (complete perfection).

“Those who give up the process of hearing and loudly chanting the holy names as received from the mouth of devotees who are free from *nāmāparādha*, and to gratify their own senses display artificial resemblance to *līlā-smaraṇa* in their impure, enjoyment-prone hearts, in this way attempting to imitate remembrance of the Lord's pastimes, simply increase the thirst for material enjoyment born from aversion to the lord.

— **CB Ādi 16.172p**

“By chanting the holy name all *anarthas* will be removed. Then automatically *rūpa-guṇa-līlā* (the Lord’s form, qualities and pastimes) will be revealed. There is no point in making a separate effort to artificially remember the Lord’s form, qualities and pastimes. The Lord and His name are one and the same. This will be understood lucidly when the coverings in our hearts are removed. By chanting without offenses you will personally experience that all perfection comes from the holy name.

“Through chanting, the distinction that exists between the self and the gross and subtle body is gradually effaced, and thus one realizes his own spiritual form. Once aware of his spiritual body, as one continues to chant he sees the transcendental nature of the Lord’s form. Only the holy name can reveal the spiritual form of the living being and cause him to be attracted to Kṛṣṇa’s form, qualities and pastimes.

“By “service to the holy name” we do not mean just chanting the name; it includes other duties also. By serving the holy name with body, mind and soul, the direction of that service spontaneously manifests in the chanter’s heart, like the sun in the clear sky. What is the nature of the holy name? Eventually all these realizations automatically appear in the heart of one who chants the holy name. The true nature of the *harināma* is revealed through listening to, reading, and studying *śāstra*. It is unnecessary to write anything further on this subject. All these things will be revealed to you through continued chanting.”

— **Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura Letter, 27 Oct.1915, *Patrāvalī* 1.4-5**

“Without *śravaṇa* there is no *kīrtana*. First *śravaṇa*, then *kīrtana*.”

— **Śrīla Prabhupādera goloka-vāṇī 1.198**

“Unless accompanied by *śravaṇa* any attempt to perform *kīrtana* must be material. Repeated hearing gives rise to *kīrtana* and *smaraṇa*. By hearing *kīrtana* one begins to perform *kīrtana*, and from performing *kīrtana*, *smaraṇa* of *hari-kathā* wakens.”

— **Śrīla Prabhupādera goloka-vāṇī 1.296, 299**

“The name of the Lord and the Lord Himself are not two separate entities, but one. When the sound of the holy name passes over the lips, the conditioned sense of hearing and the conditioned consciousness initially process the sound as if it were material, and that is how it is perceived. As a result, only the external ear hears it. Since the other senses and the mind, which is the collector of sensory experience, are envious of the ear, which they consider to be an equal partner, the result is that such chanting does not affect the cleansing of *anarthas*.

“We do not have the capacity even to theoretically know that the name and the Lord of the name are one. Yet just as piercing of the ear is one of the Vedic rites for a young child, when our spiritual ear has been pierced by the holy name the

other senses give up their envy of the auditory sense. They no longer quibble with the ear, which alone can perceive transcendental sound. Then the flood of *prema* pours forth from all the spiritual senses and cleans away the contaminants of opposition and malice. Thereafter the Lord's beautiful form, qualities, associates, and pastimes are revealed in the name Himself, and experienced by the chanter as something quite distinct from his previous experiences in the mundane world. Then the kinds of worries and distractions of the mind that are typical of the conditioned living being cannot remain.

“We should constantly pray to the holy name for His mercy. A person still filled with *anarthas* should not engage in *smaraṇa* of *aṣṭa-kālīya-līlā*. When we learn to hear as we chant, the opportunity to remember will automatically arise. At that time *aṣṭa-kālīya-līlā-smaraṇa* will become possible. There is no need artificially to try for it.”

— **Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura Letter, 18 Dec.1928, *Patrāvalī*, 162-163**

“*Smaraṇa* is possible by the power of *nāma-saṅkīrtana*. The completely manifested name is *aṣṭa-kālīya nitya-līlā*. Realization of the name and service are not attained without *smaraṇa* based on *nāma*. *Nāmāparādha-kīrtana* is not *nāma-kīrtana*. As the bud of the holy name begins to sprout just a little, the supramundane forms of Kṛṣṇa and His associates become manifest, and when it reaches the flowering stage, the fragrance of Kṛṣṇa's sixty-four qualities is experienced. When the lotus of the holy name fully expands, Kṛṣṇa's *aṣṭa-kālīya nitya-līlā*, although beyond material nature, manifests within this world.”

— **Gauḍīya 13.213, Śrīla Prabhupādera goloka-vāṇī 3.35**

“Those who have no material expectation regarding the *sādhana* or the goal of *sādhana*, who simply desire to become the servant of Rādhā, the dearest of Madan Gopāla, under the control of the highest inconceivable spontaneous love, chant loudly and without offense the names of Kṛṣṇa, the king of *rasa*. As described in *Śrī Bṛhad-bhāgavatāmṛta* 2.3.144, those who desire to serve the lotus feet of Rādhā must constantly perform *nāma-saṅkīrtana*.”

— **Gauḍīya 9.30, 506**