

Sincere Questions, Serious Answers

— The Path from Śravaṇa-daśā to Sampatti-daśā —

(from the perspective of mādhyura-rasa)

Gosvāmī, “The Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, 11.14.26, states:

*yathā yathātmā parimrjyate ’sau
mat-puṇya-gāthā-śravaṇābhidhānaiḥ
tathā tathā paśyati vastu sūkṣmaṁ
cakṣur yathāivāñjana-samprayuktam*

When the eyes are anointed with medical ointment they gain the ability to see even the most subtle objects, similarly as a living entity **cleanses his consciousness of material contamination by hearing and chanting** the transcendental narrations of My glories, to that same extent he sees Me, the Absolute Truth, in My subtle spiritual form.

The purport is that by being in constant touch with kṛṣṇa-līlā through śravaṇa, kīrtana, and smaraṇa, the ātmā of the seer becomes increasingly purified. To that same degree of purification, kṛṣṇa-līlā and the supramundane nature of kṛṣṇa-līlā become gradually manifest to the vision of the seer.

A similar idea is found in the *Brahma-saṁhitā*, 5.38:

*premāñjana-cchurita-bhakti-vilocanena
santaḥ sadaiva hṛdayeṣu vilokayanti
yaṁ śyāmasundaram acintya-guṇa-svarūpaṁ
govindam ādi-puruṣaṁ tam ahaṁ bhajāmi*

I worship the primeval Lord Govinda who is endowed with inconceivable potencies. He is perceived within the heart in His eternal form of Śyāmasundara by pure saintly souls whose eyes have been anointed with the salve of unalloyed love and devotion for Him.

In bhāvapāñā-daśā, svarūpa-siddhi is attained, which means that the devotee receives transcendental vision and perception of his transcendental form as a gopī maidservant of his guru whom he sees as a sakhī of yūtheśvārī, Śrī Rādhārāṇī. However, even though at this stage the devotee sees Kṛṣṇa, the Lord of Goloka, and his own relationship in transcendence, until and unless he is promoted to *sampatti-daśā*, where both his gross and subtle material bodies are completely terminated, his perception of transcendence is not continuous and perfected. In *bhāvapāñā-daśā*, the pure soul develops control over the subtle and gross material bodies, but when Kṛṣṇa completely showers His ultimate mercy upon the devotee, his relationship with this material world is totally severed. **Another name for bhāvapāñā-daśā is apāñā-daśā and svarūpa-siddhi, the attainment of one’s original, spiritual identity. And another name for sampatti-daśā is vastu-siddhi, the securement of the ultimate and absolute transcendental reality, Śrī Kṛṣṇa in eternal relationship with Him.**

Vijaya-kumara, pondering deeply concluded, “By hearing the pastimes of Vraja, I have naturally developed *lobha* within my heart for that *līlā*, and thus I will be gradually elevated to *sampatti-daśā*, the perfection of life — attainment of the ultimate transcendental goal.” Understanding this and inspired by it, Vijaya now considered it important to clarify some points on the **gradual ascension to *sampatti-daśā***. With this in mind he approached Śrī Gopāla-guru Gosvāmī, humbly enquiring, “**Gurudeva, how many *daśās*, levels, are there from *śravaṇam* on up to the stage of perfection known as *sampatti-daśā*?**”

Gosvāmī, “All in all there are five *daśā*: *śravaṇa-daśā*, hearing; *varaṇa-daśā*, acceptance; *smaraṇa-daśā*, remembrance; *bhāvapāñā-daśā*, attainment of ecstatic spiritual emotion; and *prema-sampatti-daśā*, attainment of the ultimate goal, *kṛṣṇa-prema*.”

Vijaya, “Kindly describe *śravaṇa-daśā*.”

Gosvāmī, “When a person develops faith in hearing Kṛṣṇa conscious topics we understand that his taste for the inane and mundane has decreased, and that correspondingly his desire for esoteric transcendence has increased. Kṛṣṇa conscious topics should be heard from an elevated devotee, as explained in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*, 4.29.40:

*tasmin mahan-mukharitā madhubhic-caritra-
pīyūṣa-śeṣa-saritaḥ paritaḥ sravanti
tā ye pibanty avitrṣo nrpa gādha-karṇais
tān na sprśanty aśana-trḍ-bhaya-śoka-mohāḥ*

O king, if one gets the chance to hear from elevated saints the topics of the qualities of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, which are like a flowing river of nectar, and drinks this nectar with single-minded absorption and faith, then hunger, thirst, fear, lamentation, illusion and other such unwanted detriments will never be able to assail one.

Vijaya, “Occasionally, materially engrossed people feel interested to hear Kṛṣṇa conscious topics, what is the nature of such hearing?”

Gosvāmī, “There is a gulf of difference between a person who is *bahirmukha*, constantly attracted by external material nature, and a person who is *antarmukha*, looking inwards to the real self and the Supreme Lord. For *bahirmukha* materialistic persons hearing about Kṛṣṇa occurs by chance, not because of applied *śraddhā*. However, such hearing is designated as *bhakty-unmukhī-sukṛti*, piety based on recent devotional inclination, and if continued may eventually beget *śraddhā* in some later life. However, having gained *śraddhā* the eager *sādhaka* thirsts to hear the qualities and pastimes of Śrī Kṛṣṇa from an elevated devotee; this is the required condition for hearing at *śravaṇa-daśā*. **Śravaṇa-daśā is of two types: *krama-śuddha-śravaṇa-daśā*, hearing in proper sequence; and *krama-hīna-śravaṇa-daśā*, hearing in a haphazard fashion.**”

Vijaya, “Kindly explain *krama-hīna-śravaṇa-daśā*.”

Gosvāmī, “Hearing the different pastimes of Kṛṣṇa in an improper sequence and manner is known as *krama-hīna-śravaṇa-daśā*. In addition, hearing without aspiration to a particular *rasa* results in a barrier to the flow of *rasa*, thus preventing the hearer from finding entrance into the pastimes.”

Vijaya, “Kindly explain *krama-śuddha-śravaṇa-daśā*.”

Gosvāmī, “*Kṛṣṇa-līlā* should be heard in proper sequence with resolute enlightened intelligence by a soul thirsting to augment *rasa*, then such focused hearing becomes conducive to the actual evocation of *rasa*. **In this manner hearing the *nitya-līlā* of *aṣṭa-kālīya-līlā* and the *naimittika-līlā*, such as of the birth of Kṛṣṇa, is *krama-śuddha-śravaṇa-daśā*. On the path of *bhajana*, constant engagement in this *krama-śuddha-śravaṇa* is essential for the proper and successful unfolding of *bhakti-rasa*.**

“The sweet relish of the Lord’s pastimes is progressively manifested through committed *krama-śuddha-śravaṇa*, and thus the hearer’s latent taste for *rāgānuga-bhakti* is spontaneously aroused. The hearer thinks, ‘Oh, how wonderful is the *sakhyā-bhāva* of Subala. I wish to serve Kṛṣṇa in that mood of camaraderie exhibited by Subala.’ This eager tendency is called *lobha*. Pursuing with *lobha* the devotional sentiments of the residents of Vraja is the essence of *rāgānuga-bhakti*.

“I have given an example of *sakhyā-rasa*, similarly in the other three *rasas* — *dāsya*, *vātsalya*, and *mādhurya* — *rāgānuga-bhakti* also finds full expression. You are eligible for *śṛṅgāra-mādhurya rasa* by the mercy of Śrī Nīmāi, the Lord of my heart. Hence, you have developed *lobha* inspired by the service and mood of the *vraja-gopīs*, and this *lobha* has brought you to your present path of attainment. **The confidential instructions given by the guru to his disciple for the evocation of *rasa* are in essence called *śravaṇa-daśā*.**”

Vijaya, “At what level is *śravaṇa-daśā* completed?”

Gosvāmī, “When the *sādhaka* comes to perceive *kṛṣṇa-līlā* as transcendental and eternal, he completes *śravaṇa-daśā*. Since *kṛṣṇa-līlā* is on the platform of pure transcendence, the *līlās* are enchanting, and so the devotee becomes eager to gain entrance into them. Then, **seeing the dexterity of his disciple, the guru enumerates to his disciple** — who is still a *rāgānuga-sādhaka* following the *rāgātmikā-bhakti* of the *vraja-vāsīs* — **the *eka-daśa-bhāva***. When the disciple’s consciousness has become appropriately tuned to the ecstatic transcendental dynamism of *kṛṣṇa-līlā*, *śravaṇa-daśā* is consummated. The disciple’s *lobha* and *ruci* are then unrestrained, and he is promoted to *varaṇa-daśā*, the stage of acceptance.”

Vijaya, “What are the symptoms of *varaṇa-daśā*?”

Gosvāmī, “The heart’s spontaneous attraction is linked by the chain of the *eka-daśa-bhāva* to *kṛṣṇa-līlā*. The heart of the disciple in whom the *eka-daśa-bhāva* is established is inundated with thirsting spiritual emotions; he comes weeping and throws himself at the lotus feet of his guru. At this juncture, the guru reveals his *sakhī* form, and the disciple

realizes his form as the *gopī* maidservant of his *guru-sakhī*. The disciple-turned-young-*gopī* is yearning to serve 'her' dear Śrī Kṛṣṇa; and the guru is a beautiful *vraja-gopī-sakhī* who has already attained the highest perfection. The disciple gives expression to his *bhāva* at this juncture by the following *ślokas*, eleven and twelve, from **Śrī Śrī Premamarandākhya-stava-rāja**, *Regal Prayers Bearing the Nectar of Pure Love*, of Śrīla Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī:

*tvām natvā yacate dhṛtvā
trṇam̐ dantair ayaṁ janah̐
sva-dāsyāmṛta-sekena
jīvayāmum̐ su-duḥkhitam
na muñcec charaṇa-yātam
api duṣṭam̐ dayāmayah̐
ato gāndharvike hā hā
muñcainam̐ naiva tādr̥sam*

O Rādhikā! This most despicable and fallen soul throws herself at Your feet. Holding straw between my teeth I beg You, to shower upon this inconsolable wretch the immortal nectar of servitorship at Your feet, thereby resuscitating her. The kind-hearted never abandon those who are surrendered to them. Thus, compassionate as You are, do not forsake me, a soul surrendered to You. I am anxious to serve the Divine Couple in Vraja under the shelter of Your lotus feet.

“This mood of surrender and heartfelt yearning for the intimate service of Śrī Śrī Rādhā Kṛṣṇa permeates the devotee’s heart in *varaṇa-daśā*. Now the guru in his form as a *sakhī* gives his disciple residence in Vraja, instructing him to meditate upon *aṣṭa-kālīya-līlā* and to take full shelter of chanting *harināma*. And he assures him that soon his heart’s desire of intimate loving service to the Divine Couple will be realized.”

Vijaya, **“Kindly elaborate upon *smaraṇa-daśā*.”**

Gosvāmī, “Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī states in the *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, *Purva Vibhāga*, 1.2.294-6:

*kṛṣṇam̐ smaran janam̐ cāsya preṣṭham̐ nija-samīhitam
tat-tat-kathā-rataś cāsau kuryād vāsam̐ vraje sadā*

One should always think of Kṛṣṇa within oneself and should choose a very dear devotee who is a servitor of Kṛṣṇa in Vṛndāvana. One should constantly engage in topics about that servitor and his or her loving relationship with Kṛṣṇa, and one should live in Vṛndāvana. If one is physically unable to go to Vṛndāvana, he should live there mentally.

*sevā sādḥaka-rūpeṇa siddha-rūpeṇa cātra hi
tad-bhāva-lipsunā kārya vraja-lokānusārataḥ*

In the transcendental realm of Vraja-dhāma one should serve the Supreme Lord, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, with feelings similar to that of His associates, and one should place himself under the direct guidance of a particular associate of Kṛṣṇa, following in his or her footsteps. This method is applicable both in the stage of *sādhana* and in the stage of *sādhya*, when one is a *siddha-puruṣa*, a spiritually perfected soul.

*śravaṇotkīrtanādīni vaidha-bhakty-uditāni tu
yāny aṅgāni ca tāny atra vijñeyāni manīṣibhiḥ*

According to spiritual preceptors, the essential accessories of *vaidhī-bhakti* such as *śravaṇam*, loud *kīrtanam*, and so on, are still most suitable and should be continued for the cultivation of *rāgānuga-bhakti*.

Gosvāmī, “As a *sādhaka*, the aspirant must continue to perform *śravaṇam*, *kīrtanam*, *smaraṇam*, *pāda-sevanam*, *arcanam*, *vandanam*, *dāsyam*, *sakhyam*, and *ātmā-nivedanam* in his external gross body though they form the limbs of *vaidhī-bhakti*. However, having acquired the *eka-daśa-bhāva* of intimate worship, the *sādhaka* evokes in meditation his spiritual identity as a perfect *vraja-gopī* and executes his specific duties in the *aṣṭa-kālīya-kṛṣṇa-līlā* that are allocated to him by his *sakhī* leader. The *sādhaka* must maintain and discipline his external life upon earth according to scriptural norms and internally nourish his *siddha-deha*, spiritual identity, by *bhāva*. Such an arrangement will ensure a growing distaste for things and subjects not related to *vraja-līlā*.”

Vijaya, “Gurudeva, I desire to understand the system of *vraja-vāsa* still more clearly.”

Gosvāmī, “**The purport of *vraja-vāsa***, residence in Vraja, is to live in solitude with a consciousness steeped in transcendence and *bhāva*. Chanting *harināma* a designated number of rounds while meditating on practical devotional service in the *aṣṭa-kālīya-līlā* is essential. Furthermore, one should be always alert that one’s external activities of bodily maintenance and the like do not neutralize or deprecate one’s *bhajana*. Thus, all external work should be carried out with the consideration that it must be conducive to further development in devotional service.”

Receiving these instructions somewhat gravely, **Vijaya** said, “Śrīla Gurudeva, I have understood your instructions, but how do I steady the mind in such *aṣṭa-kālīya-līlā* meditation?”

Gosvāmī, “**The mind becomes equipoised automatically as soon as the devotee actually attains *rāgānuga-bhakti***, because at this level the consciousness naturally flows to *vraja-līlā*, being spontaneously attached to *bhakti*. Concomitantly, there is a lack of interest in mundane matters, and thus the *sādhaka*’s consciousness shies away from materialistic involvement. However, if there are still hindrances and material perturbations upon this path, then one should carefully follow the *krama*, gradual course. Then, once the mind and consciousness are fixed and steady as a result of purification, nothing will be able to unsettle them.”

Vijaya, “**Kindly explain *karma*, the gradual course.**”

Gosvāmī, “Every day, confining himself to a solitary place and determinedly repelling the attacks of material attraction, the devotee must spend a fixed period sincerely chanting *harināma*, while maintaining within his heart *bhāva*. Gradually, this period of chanting should be increased. Eventually, the stage will come when the devotee begins

to feel continually engulfed *alaukika-cinmaya-bhāva*, uncommon transcendental emotion, then any impediments or disturbances will be afraid to approach him.”

Vijaya, “How long should this stage last?”

Gosvāmī, “One should continue until all distractions vanish, and there is not the faintest possibility of the distractions reoccurring.”

Vijaya, “Gurudeva, kindly clarify what you mean by chanting *harināma* while maintaining within the heart *bhāva*.”

Gosvāmī, “To begin with, chant *harināma* with *ullāsa*, joy, in your heart; then, gradually combine *mamatā*, possessive attachment, with that *ullāsa*; next, to this nectarean mixture add *viśrambha*, loving intimacy based on firm faith and confidence in the Lord. Chanting in this manner will gradually purify one’s consciousness and increasingly strengthen one’s *bhāva*, until finally *śuddha-bhāva* will begin to manifest.

“*Bhāvapāñā-daśā* commences from this point. In the state of *smaraṇa*, *bhāva* is interpolated and not spontaneously evoked. However, when the devotee attains *bhāvapāñā daśā*, then *śuddha-bhāva* appears by the natural course of devotional practice and is known as *prema*.”

— Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, *Śrī Jaiva Dharma*, Ch. 40