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LESSON 1, TEXTS 1-17: THE EASE OF DEVOTION—FIVE STAGES OF PROGRESSION

A METHOD FOR REALIZATION OF THE ABSOLUTE [TEXTS 1-9]

- Review of the principles of sambandha [Text 1]
 - First 4 sandarbhas [tattva-, bhāgavata-, Paramātmā-, and Kṛṣṇa-sandarbhā] ⇒ JīvaG discussed sambandha (ontology)—the nature of and relationship between the Supreme Being (the Absolute Reality or Truth), His potencies and the Jīvas
 - The AT ⇒ three-fold manifestation as Brahman, Paramātmā, and Bhagavān, the complete whole ⇒ His various incarnations ⇒, but Kṛṣṇa is Svayam-Bhagavān
- Ignorance is the cause of bondage
 - The material miseries of the Jīvas, who is the marginal potency of Paramātmā, although conscious by nature, but their true knowledge about the intrinsic nature is covered by Paramātmā's external potency, Māyā ⇒ she causes them to identify themselves with pradhāna and its 3 modes

आत्मापरिज्ञानमयो विवादो ह्यस्तीति नास्तीति भिदार्थनिष्ठः ।
व्यर्थोऽपि नैवोपरमेत पुमसां मत्तः परावृत्तधियां स्वलोकात् ॥

- “The controversy as to whether the Lord exists or not is rooted in argumentativeness and betrays a basic ignorance of the Supreme. Although such controversy is meaningless, those whose intelligence is averted from Me, the ultimate shelter, cannot give it up.” [11.22.34]
- **Instructions are for those in ignorance**
 - Scripture ⇒ instructions for the enlightenment of bewildered souls in ignorance, who are in state of ignorance of the Lord
 - Out of those Jīvas, who had some realization of the Absolute thru’ sādhu-sanga in their past lives, but remained in its latent form + some graced by sādhu-sanga in their present lives ⇒ both of them revive their Bhagavān realization as soon as they hear His instructions in SB ⇒ immediately and simultaneously become devotees [1.1.2]

- **The need for a methodology and goal**
 - **Scriptural instructions about the AT \Rightarrow**
 - i. What is to be done to approach the AT
 - ii. What is the goal to be attained w.r.t. AT

\therefore Need for instructions in two further topics as the secondary import of the scripture \Rightarrow known as **ABHIDHEYA**, the methodology by which one realization of the AT, and **PRAYOJANA**, the supreme goal to be realized in relation to the Supreme
 - **ABHIDHEYA \Rightarrow turning one's awareness towards the AT [साम-मुख्य], the opposite of the former attitude of apathy towards AT \Rightarrow worship of the Supreme \Rightarrow knowledge of Him manifests**
 - **PRAYOJANA \Rightarrow experience of the AT, or direct witnessing of Him both internally and externally \Rightarrow all miseries are directly dispelled**
- **Shifting awareness towards the AT is the methodology**
 - **Scripture again explains that our apathy towards AT, rooted in our beginningless ignorance of the Lord, which is the cause of our misery**

- “A person who is not devoted to the Lord because of the influence of Māyā, succumbs to forgetfulness, misapprehension, and fear arising out of absorption in that which is secondary to the Lord. Therefore, the wise should worship the Lord with exclusive devotion, considering their teacher as their worshipful deity and object of love.” [11.2.37]
- **Bhakti [abhidheya] is the methodology that cuts bondage [Text 2]**
 - “In this way, with determination and joy, one should worship the unlimited Lord, who is most dear, loving, real and naturally existing in one’s heart. By doing this, the cause of material bondage is destroyed.” [2.2.6]
- **Bhakti is the complete method of focusing on the Absolute [Text 3]**
 - Hearing and deliberating on the scripture, the part of abhidheya, the path of jñāna, or non-dual awareness ⇒ instrumental in Brahman realization
 - Sāṅkhya-, aṣṭāṅga- and karma-yoga ⇒ indirectly to Brahman realization ⇒ bhakti

- **Bhakti is the supreme duty of humanity**
 - 1.2.6, 1.2.22, and 1.2.12
- **Knowledge and detachment follow in the wake of bhakti [Text 4]**
 - When bhakti is performed to Lord Vāsudeva, it quickly bestows detachment and causelss knowledge [1.2.7]
- **Dharma is fruitful only when it leads to bhakti [Text 5]**
 - “If the proper execution of prescribed duties for humans does not induce attraction for the narrations of the Lord, such performance is indeed fruitless labor.” [1.2.8]
 - Bhakti is independent, whereas knowledge and detachment depend on bhakti ∴ dharma or prescribed duties is fruitful only when it results in bhakti.

- **Dharma is meant for ultimate liberation, known as bhakti [Text 6]**
 - Misconception ⇒ the object of dharma is wealth ⇒ material enjoyment ⇒ sensual pleasure
 - “Transcendent dharma is not meant for amassing wealth. Wealth that is meant only dharma should not be used to facilitate enjoyment. The objects of enjoyment should not be used for sensual indulgence, but only for preservation of life. The goal of life is to know the Absolute and not to acquire wealth in this world by carrying out one’s prescribed duty.”[1.2.9-10]
- **Bhakti bestows complete realization of the Absolute [Text 7]**
 - The Absolute, which is manifested in Brahman, Paramātmā and Bhagavān, can be realized only by devotion
 - “The sages, endowed with faith in Ultimate Reality, see the Absolute, the Supreme Soul, in their own self by bhakti invested with knowledge and renunciation, and acquired by hearing.” [1.2.12]

- What is the nature of the Absolute?
 - It is the fountainhead of all potencies of which most prominent are: His internal or spiritual potency, the conscious Jīvas as His marginal potency, and Māyā, His external or material potency.
 - The sages see the Absolute with or w/out attributes, in accordance with their own desire.
 - Upon hearing and deliberation on scriptural meanings received from guru-parampara, one may understand that bhakti is the absolute supreme duty.
 - “After thoroughly studying and deliberating upon the Vedas 3X with focused awareness, the venerable Brahmā thoroughly concluded that the best duty is that which evokes love for Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the Soul of all.” [2.2.34]
- **Bhakti is the supreme fruit of duty (Text 8)**
 - This bhakti, which is so rare, can be obtained even by performing one’s prescribed duty (sva-dharma) for the satisfaction of the Lord.

- “Therefore, O best of the twice-born, the highest perfection of duty properly performed by human beings according to the divisions of varna and āśrama is to satisfy Lord Hari.” [1.2.13]
- **Sūta advocates direct bhakti (Text 9)**
 - Bhakti is essentially a taste for hearing about the Lord and His pastimes.
 - Knowledge and detachment stem from bhakti. Therefore, why not directly engage in bhakti?
 - “Therefore, with resolute attention one should continuously hear about, glorify, meditate on, and worship the Supreme Lord Kṛṣṇa, the guardian of His devotees.” [1.2.14]

THE EASE OF DEVOTION: FIVE STAGES OF PROGRESSION [TEXTS 10-17]

- A taste for hearing topics of the Absolute—the 1st step in bhakti [Text 10]
 - There is no need for varnāśrama duties for one who inspires a taste for hearing kṛṣṇa-kathā
 - “The wise and self-controlled slit the knot of karma with the sword of meditation on Lord Hari. Who would not feel attracted to His pastimes?” [1.2.15]
- Association of devotees leads to taste in hearing [Text 11]
 - For those who do not have this natural taste, Sūta offers an easy method to awaken this taste. In 5 verses, he delineates the progression of bhakti, beginning from taste in kṛṣṇa-kathā [16-20]

शुश्रूषो श्रद्धधानस्य वासुदेवकथारुचिः ।
स्यान्महत्सेवया विप्राः पुण्यतिर्थनिषेवणात् ॥

- “O learned ones, by visiting or dwelling in a holy place a person gets an opportunity to associate with great devotees and to render service to them. By such service a person awakens faith and an interest in hearing narrations about the Lord and thus develops a taste for such narrations.” [1.2.16]
- Hearing uproots unwanted desire from the heart [Text 12]
 - What happens once a taste for hearing has been awakened?
शृण्वतां स्वकथाः कृष्णः पुण्यश्रवणकीर्तनः ।
हृद्यन्तःस्थो ह्यभद्राणि विधुनोति सुहृत् सताम् ॥
- “To hear about & glorify Lord Krsna is itself virtue. Being the benefactor of His devotees, He enters within the heart of those who hear His pastimes and destroys the inauspicious desires therein.” [1.2.17]

■ Becoming steadily fixed in devotion [Text 13]

नष्टप्रायेष्वभद्रेषु नित्यम भागवतसेवया ।
भगवत्युत्तमश्लोके भक्तिर्भवति नैष्ठिकी ॥

- “When almost all material desires have been destroyed then by regular service to the devotees and REGULAR hearing of SB, one is endowed with unwavering bhakti unto Lord Krsna, who possesses pure fame.” [1.2.18]

■ Spiritual awareness illuminates the heart [Text 14]

तदा रजस्तमोभावाः कामलोभादायश्च ये ।
चेत एतैरनाविद्धं स्थितं सत्वे प्रसीदति ॥

- “At that point the heart, no longer overpowered by the effects of passion and ignorance, such as lust, greed, and so on, becomes established in pure awareness and experiences delight.” [1.2.19]

- Direct experience of the Absolute [Text 15]

एवं प्रसन्नमनसो भगवद्भक्तियोगतः।
 भगवत्तत्त्वविज्ञानं मुक्तसङ्गस्य जायते ॥

 - “In this way, direct experience of the truth regarding the Supreme Lord manifests to a person who is free from all material desires and delighted in mind, by engaging in bhakti unto the Lord.” [1.2.20]
- The potency of awakening of भगवत्तत्त्वविज्ञानं, or the science of who Krsna really is [Text 16]

भिद्यते हृदयग्रन्थिशिच्छिद्यन्ते सर्वसंशयाः।
 क्षीयन्ते चास्य कर्माणि द्रष्टु एवात्मनीश्वरे ॥

 - “Only after seeing the Lord, the Supreme Soul, the knot in the heart is cut into pieces, all doubts are dispelled, and the reaction to all karma is destroyed.” [1.2.21]

- Devotion is the activity of the awakened [Text 17]
 - Sūta (and thereby JīvaG) concludes this section by pointing out the conduct of sages, which relates to the topic under discussion:

अतो वै कवयो नित्यं भक्तिं परमया मुदा ।
वासुदेवे भगवति कुर्वन्त्यात्मप्रसादनीम् ॥

- “Therefore, with supreme delight the thoughtful sages continuously engage in the service of Lord Vāsudeva, which brings satisfaction to the self.” [1.2.22]
- The composite word, आत्म-प्रसादनीम्, or “nourishing the self,” as an adjective of bhakti, means, “that which purifies the mind.”
- However, this is not the only virtue of bhakti. It is also परमया मुदा, or “performing with supreme joy.” The word, “नित्यं” again reinforces the absolute necessity of the sense of regularity in virtually all phases of bhakti.