

## Madhurya Kadamini – VCT – from Chapter 2

### Bhajana-kriya

Bhajana kriya is divided into two parts *aniṣṭhitā* (unsteady) and *niṣṭhitā* (steady). When devotional activities are performed on the *aniṣṭhitā* platform, there is no fear of deviation or lethargy. *Aniṣṭhitā* (unsteady devotional service) is further divided into six gradations:

*utsahamayi* (sudden enthusiasm)

*ghana-tarald* (sometimes enthusiastic, sometimes lethargic)

*vyudha- vikalpa* (a stage when doubts assail one's resolve)

*visaya-sangara* (a stage of internal tug-of-war with material sense enjoyment)

*niyamaksama* (although one practises regularly, full justice is still not done to the process)

*taranga-rangini* (attachment to wealth, adoration, distinction, and so on).

Let us first discuss the beginning stage of *bhajana-kriya*—the stage of *utsahamayi*. When a young student begins higher education he is very proud, thinking himself to be a praiseworthy scholar. Such thoughts encourage the student to apply himself and to perform well. Similarly, when a novice commences spiritual life he takes to it so enthusiastically, thinking himself to be somebody special.

The example of the same young scholar explains the stage of *ghanataral*. At times the student concentrates deeply on his studies, but sometimes, because of his inability to understand something, he becomes apathetic. In devotional activities the neophyte goes through similar spells of opposing attitudes sometimes enthusiasm, other times lethargy.

*Vyudha-vikalpa* is an interesting stage on the path of spiritual life. sometimes the devotee thinks “I shall convince my wife and family to become *Vaiṣṇavas* and serve the Supreme Lord. I shall convert my house into a temple and remain there happily practicing devotional service.” At other times he thinks, “I shall leave my family, home, and the rest of my worries behind me and go to *Vṛndāvana*. I shall reside there, for it is the holiest of places, and I shall cultivate devotional surrender through the nine practices of devotion.” Or he will say, “Ultimately, I have to give up my home and all my other attachments, then should I not first plunge into the pool of sensual pleasures until I am satisfied?”

Or he may think, The scriptures speak of family and wife being like a dark and dismal well. Should I not leave home this very moment? Sometimes the scriptures encourage me to perceive that this material life, family connections, wife, children are abominable and to renounce them. Yet how can I do that? My parents are old and infirm, who will take care of them? Besides, if I should leave home prematurely, with my material desires to enjoy still unfulfilled, my mind will continue to dwell on sense pleasures until my final days. This would be a disaster! Therefore, I can understand from my own thoughts that I am too weak to follow the Lord's instructions and renounce family life. For now I shall live simply. When

the proper time comes I shall hasten to Vṛndāvana and spend my days and nights in deep meditation on the pastimes of the Supreme Lord.”

The scriptures (SB. 11.20.31) say that neither knowledge nor renunciation is helpful in performing devotional service; since renunciation cannot give birth to bhakti, practicing renunciation separately is unnecessary. After one is situated in devotional service, however, renunciation is an asset because then renunciation proves not only the effectiveness of bhakti but also its superiority. It is both wrong and foolish to cultivate knowledge and renunciation separately once a person enters the path of devotional service.

A famous aphorism in logic is, “When the renunciate goes begging from door-to-door, he finds all the family larders full with grains because he is given charity.” Basing his argument on this logic the aspiring devotee thinks, “I must take up renunciation”. Next moment he comes across another scriptural maxim (SB.10.14.36) stating that unless one develops loving devotion to the Lord his home is a prison. So he says to himself, “Must I remain in household life and try to develop devotional surrender to the Lord? Maybe I should practice hearing about Kṛṣṇa or chanting Kṛṣṇa's name and fame. Should I emulate Ambarisa Mahārāja and simultaneously perform all the nine devotional activities?” When bhajana-kriya goes through this state of doubt and vacillating resolve it is known as vyudha-vikalpa.

Visaya-sangara is the stage when conflicting doubts and arguments are resolved in the devotee's heart and he is convinced about the path of renunciation. Scripture states that just as an object lost in the west cannot be found in the east, similarly, a person engrossed in materialistic activities will never become attached to Kṛṣṇa. The devotee feels that his desires for sensual enjoyment are forcing him towards fulfilling them, and so his attraction for chanting and devotional service becomes weak. Therefore he thinks he should immediately discard those desires and wholeheartedly chant the holy name, although even in the process he may sometimes fall victim to sense gratification. The devotee still remains convinced of the scriptural truth that perfection can be achieved through devotional service. And although he may fall prey to sense enjoyment, he rebukes himself and feels remorseful, always continuing his devotional practices. Thus the devotee wages a war against his desire for sense gratification: sometimes the victor, sometimes the defeated. When he does fall victim, the devotee at this stage of unsteady devotional service still feels regret and revulsion at his weakness.

The next stage of unsteady devotional service is niyamaksama, where the devotee vows to increase his devotional activities. He resolves to chant sixty-four rounds daily, offer one hundred prostrated obeisances to the Deities and the Vaiṣṇavas; serve the senior devotees; avoid talking about mundane topics; shun the company of materialistic minded people, and so on. Daily he makes these vows, but at the last moment he is unable to honor them. The difference between visayasangara and niyamaksama is that in the former the devotee is helpless to give up material sense pleasures, and in the latter he is unable to increase and improve his devotional activities.

Now let us discuss taranga-rangini the last stage of anīṣṭhitā devotional service. In describing the nature of bhakti it is said that everyone is attracted towards the reservoir of bhakti, the devotee. The devotee himself becomes a treasure-house of good qualities and mercy. These characteristics attract people who, in turn, crown the devotee with wealth, adoration, distinction and position. Although these accolades come to him as by-products of bhakti they nevertheless may stunt the spontaneous growth of the creeper of devotion if he uses them for his self-aggrandizement. Taranga means “waves” and rangini means “play”. Therefore, in the vast unlimited ocean of bhakti these by-products are waves that create tempests in devotional life. The devotee aspiring for pure devotion sees these waves to be harmless - only gleefully playing and cresting.