

## Devarshi Narada.

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अहो देवर्षिर्धन्योऽयं यत्कीर्तिं शार्ङ्गधन्वनः ।

गायन्माद्यन्निदं तन्त्रया रमयत्यातुरं जगत् ॥

( *Srimad Bhagavata*, I. vi. 39 )

“O blessed is, indeed, Devarṣi Nārada, who goes about playing on his *Vīṇā* singing the praises of Śrī Hari and getting intoxicated with it, scattering joy throughout the afflicted world.”

Kāraka Puruṣas ( Agents of God ) appear on earth for the good of the world in the same manner as God Himself takes His incarnation. It becomes their natural function to prepare the ground for the sports of the Lord, to bring together appropriate materials for the sport, and thus help the Lord in His sports. Such Mahāpuruṣas ( great souls ), though liberated themselves, do not make use of their privilege of salvation, and move about in the world among ordinary souls for the latter's spiritual welfare. Although this function of theirs continues at all times without any break, yet during the advent of some special incarnations their activities become more extensive and more intense. They live their auspicious lives for the highest good of the world. Absolutely devoid of ignorance, egoism, sense of 'Mine' and attachments to worldly objects, etc., these Mahāpuruṣas act as instruments under the control of God. All their activities are, in fact, the activities of God

Himself. Devarṣi Nārada is a Mahāpuruṣa ( great soul ) of this type. He has free access to all the Yugas, all the regions of creation, all scriptures, all societies and all activities of man. He was present in the *Satyayuga* and also in the Yugas of *Tretā* and *Dwāpara*, and, it is said, that even in this dark age of *Kali* qualified souls are now and then blessed with his *Darśana* ( sight ). From the highest region like Goloka, Vaikuṅṭha, the region of Brahmā, etc., to the lowest like Tala, Atala upto Pātāla, he is free to move without any restriction. Through the power of *Yoga*, he can go wherever he likes in the twinkling of an eye. He is mentioned in all the scriptures, such as, the Vedas, the Smṛtis, the Purāṇas, the Saṃhitas, as well as in the ancient books on Astronomy, Music, etc. From Bhagavān Viṣṇu Himself, Śiva and other Devas down to the terrible Rākṣasas all show him honour and respect and give him their confidence. While, on the one hand, the Lord of Devas, Indra, shows deference to his opinion, on the other Kayādhu, wife of Hiranyakaśipu, who was a sworn enemy of the gods, trusting his words regards herself protected in his *Āśrama*. While, on the one hand, he is observed delivering instructions on the Supreme Truth even to Mahāpuruṣas like Vyāsa, Vālmiki and Śukadeva, on the other he is found engaged in the

attempt to create misunderstanding and quarrel between two rival parties. But, really speaking, he does nothing for himself. He takes up a work when he finds that this will lead to some good to somebody, or when he observes it as a beautiful act of the drama of divine sport. The misunderstandings and quarrels he creates are all intended for the good of the world and with a view to help forward the sport of the Lord. This is so, because every act of his is verily an act of God. Truly speaking, he should be regarded as the very 'mind' of God Himself; this may be clearly revealed through the grace of God when the personality of the Devarṣi is deeply pondered over. There are some writers who contend that there were several Ṛṣis bearing the name of Nārada among whom the following seven are considered to be principal:—(1) Brahmā's son, born out of His mind; (2) maternal uncle of Parvata Ṛṣi; (3) brother of Arundhatī (wife of Vaśiṣṭha), and husband of Satyavatī; (4) the master in the art of carrying tales and creating quarrels among people; (5) a courtier of Kubera; (6) one among the eight scriptural authorities in the court of Śrī Rāmachandra; (7) a member who participated in the sacrifice of snakes performed by King Janamejaya.

We have neither the desire to enter into a controversy whether there was one Nārada or many, nor do we possess the qualification to arrive, through discussion, at the truth about the matter. In our view, we

see one and only one Nārada, who performed different acts, as the instrument of God, in the different Kalpas and Yugas, and who is engaged in performing the same even today. It is our intention on the present occasion to say something about that aspect of the Devarṣi's activities which has relation with the propagation of *Bhakti* (Devotion). Really speaking that is the primary function of the Devarṣi. Although learned in all the scriptures and master and teacher of all the truths, in the end the Devarṣi instructs only on Devotion. It was he who inspired Vālmiki, Vyāsa, Śukadeva, Prahlāda, Dhruva and other great souls to engage themselves in the practice of Devotion. Not only this, with the *Vinā* in hand and singing the sacred Divine Names, he moves about freely and fearlessly through all the Yugas and all societies, purifying men and women throughout creation and drawing their minds towards God. The Devarṣi himself has described the incidents of his life during two Kalpas. The portion of the *Bhāgavata* bearing this description is extremely interesting. For my own as well as the reader's delectation a summary of the same is given below:

Maharṣi Vyāsa, possessed of the supernatural vision, divided the Vedas into four parts for the benefit of the people at large. He composed the *Mahābhārata*, which is full of ancient stories and is known as the fifth *Veda*. He brought forth the Purāṇas. Thus though he had done all he could for the spiritual good of all

beings, he was not quite satisfied, his heart was not completely at peace; he felt within himself that there was something lacking. In a somewhat dejected mood he went to the bank of the river Saraswatī, and having seated himself there began to reflect as follows:—"I have done all I could, and yet why do I feel something lacking within me? Have I failed to deal at length with that aspect of *Dharma*, which is known as *Bhāgavata Dharma*? This *Bhāgavata Dharma* is the dearest object of God and of His beloved *Paramahansa* devotees." No sooner did these thoughts arise in his mind there appeared before him Devarṣi Nārada with a happy countenance, singing the praises of Śrī Hari. After mutual greetings and exchange of courtesies, Maḥarṣi Vyāsa described his mental condition to the Devarṣi and asked the latter about the remedy. Thereupon, Devarṣi Nārada said:—

"O best of Munis! In all your books, you have not sung the praises of God to the extent you described the other aspects of *Dharma*. That is why your mind is covered with the cloud of dejection. Words or poems which do not describe the glories of God, though they are soft, sweet and full of poetic beauty are known as *Kākatīrtha* (sacred to the crow) by men of wisdom, who know what is true and what is false. That is to say, such poems attract the mind of lustful men attached to the gross enjoyments of the world, who belong to the same category as the crow which strikes with its beak at

ordure, but they cannot attract the Bhāgavatas and Paramahansas, who are like the swan floating on the sacred Mānasa lake. But words which contain a discussion on the Divine Name and Divine Glories are regarded as supremely delightful and capable of destroying the sins of men though they may sound harsh to the ear, may be devoid of poetic embellishments, or may even be full of grammatical errors. Therefore, all men of virtue and Mahātmās make it a point to hear, repeat or sing words which express the Divine Names and Glories. O chief of Munis, you are unerring in your vision; there is nothing concealed from you. Now, therefore, you describe the sports of Śrī Hari for the good of the world. Men learned in the scriptures have pointed out that the supreme fruit of man's austerities, practice of 'hearing', performance of daily obligatory rites and possession of a sharp intellect lies only in describing with reverence the glories of Śrī Hari. Please hear the story of my previous birth and then reflect what a change was effected in me through the practice of hearing of the glory of Śrī Hari.

"O great Muni, I was the son of a female servant in my former birth. During a certain rainy season a large number of Mahātmās came to our village to spend their four months of obligatory rest. I was a small child at the time, and my mother engaged me in the service of those Mahātmās. I never exhibited any form of childishness in the

presence of those Mahātmās, giving up my plays I began to spend quietly all my time at their feet, and I was very sparing in the use of words. These are the reasons why though looking upon all with an equal eye, the Mahātmās were pleased with me and began to show me exceptional kindness. As ordered by them I used to eat the leavings of their food left by them on leaves after they had partaken from the same. The effect of this was that all my sins were destroyed. Through the continuity of this practice for some time my heart became pure, and I began to take relish in the *Dharma* practised by them (*Bhāgavata Dharma*). The Mahātmās used to discourse on the stories of Śrī Kṛṣṇa every day and through their kindness I used to hear those beautiful stories with reverence. When I had done this for some time I developed *Bhakti* (Devotion) to God. O chief of Munis, at the first stage I began to take relish in God, and then my understanding became steady and firm. With the help of that pure and firm understanding and through my undefiled form of supreme *Brahma* beyond *Māyā*, I began to perceive the whole of this real and unreal creation as an imaginary projection through *Māyā*. Throughout the rains and autumn those Mahātmās continued to sing the stainless glories of God, hearing which there grew within my heart the Sattvic type of *Bhakti* which is destructive of the other two Guṇas, viz., *Rajas* and *Tamas*. At the time of their leaving the village those Mahātmās who were ever kind to

the poor and distressed, finding me to be attached to them, sinless and possessing reverence and control over the senses, delivered to me the most secret knowledge, which was delivered by God Himself, through which I came to understand the power of the *Māyā* of Lord Vāsudeva, an understanding which leads to the attainment of the supreme state of God-realization.\*

\* Following the above order laid down by Devarshi Narada, Madhusudana Saraswati, the famous commentator of the *Gita* has divided *Bhakti* into eleven stages in his book entitled "Bhakti-Rasayana". Thus:—

प्रथमं महतां सेवा तदयापात्रता ततः ।  
 अद्वाथ तेषां धर्मेषु ततो हरिगुणश्रुतिः ॥  
 ततो रत्यङ्कुरोत्पत्तिः स्वरूपाधिगतिस्ततः ।  
 प्रेमवृद्धिः परानन्दे तस्याथ स्फुरणं ततः ॥  
 भगवद्धर्मनिष्ठातः स्वसिंस्तद्गुणशालिता ।  
 प्रेम्णोऽथ परमा काष्ठेत्युदिता भक्तिभूमिकाः ॥

1. Personal service of Mahapurushas.
2. Acquiring of qualifications so as to draw their compassion.
3. Faith in the *Dharma* practised by them.
4. Hearing the Divine Glory with reverence.
5. From hearing, growth of the germ of Divine Love.
6. Divine Love leading to Self-realization.
7. Self-realization leading to increase of Love in the Supreme embodiment of Bliss.
8. Through increase of Love germination of supreme Bliss.
9. Firm adherence to *Bhagavata Dharma*.
10. Development of the qualities of a *Bhagavata* within the devotee.
11. Attainment of the highest stage of Love. This is how the eleven stages have been described.

“The Mahātmās, then, went away, and I continued to practise *Bhajana* as instructed by them. I was the only child of my mother, hence she was extremely attached to me. She knew me to be her only refuge in life. One day a deadly snake sent, as if, by the God of Death bit her, and this caused her death. I regarded the incident as an act of special grace arranged by God, who ever seeks to do good to His devotees, and leaving the village began to travel towards the north. Reaching a thick forest, I came upon a Peepul tree on the bank of a river, sitting under which I collected my mind and began to meditate with reverence on the lotus-feet of the Lord. At that time my eyes were filled with tears of joy under the influence of Love. I observed that Lord Śrī Hari had revealed Himself in my heart. The sight of God swelled the flow of Love into a flood. The hair of my body stood erect through excess of emotion. I totally lost myself in the ocean of bliss, and forgot all about the world and even the consciousness of my own existence.

“Then, suddenly, that extremely beautiful and captivating Form vanished from before me. This caused me terrible sorrow. I attempted, again, to have the sight, when I heard a voice from heaven saying:— ‘O child, you cannot again gain My sight in the present birth; I revealed Myself once before you in order to increase your Love. Through the influence of *Satsang*, even for a short while, you have developed strong

Devotion to Me. When you leave your present body, you will be one very near and dear to Me, your understanding will be unshakably attached to Me, and through My grace, you will remember the incidents of your present birth even after the termination of this *Kalpa*.’ Thus I learnt that I had gained the favour of God, so bowing myself low to the ground, I left the place and began to move about in the world thoroughly gratified, giving up egoism and jealousy and cultivating innocence, remembering, and singing loudly, without any delicacy, the most secret and blessed Names and Glories of the Lord. Attaching my mind to Śrī Kṛṣṇa, I gave up association with the world. In course of time, that body of mine got destroyed and I attained the pure, divine body of a companion of God.

“At the end of the *Kalpa*, I entered the heart of Brahmā through His breath when He lay down on the ocean of dissolution, withdrawing the entire creation within Himself. At the end of a thousand Yugas, when Brahmā began to re-create the world, I came out from His breath with Marichi and the other Ṛṣis.

“Since then, observing the vow of *Brahmacharya*, I move throughout the three regions, both inside and out, wherever I like. Through the grace of God, my admission is nowhere restricted. I go everywhere singing the praises of Hari to the accompaniment of this *Vṃā* which is adorned by *Brahma* in the form of sound, and is a gift from God Himself. God’s compassion on me is so infinite that

whenever I merge myself in Divine Love and sing on His sports, that very moment He appears before me and gives me the privilege of His sight, just as an ordinary person appears when called aloud.

“Repetition of Śrī Hari’s Name is like a strong barque to those who are deeply attached to worldly enjoyments to take them across the ocean of existence. That is why I move about singing constantly the praises of Hari for the good of the world as well as my own good. Through *Yoga* and other practices the minds of men attached to the world cannot be as quickly pacified as through the practice of *Bhajana* of Śrī Hari.” Saying this, the Devarṣi started from the place singing the Name of Śrī Hari.

According to the *Mahābhārata*, Devarṣi Nārada possessed knowledge of all the truths of the Vedas, was honoured and venerated by the Devas, was a specialist in Itihāsas and Purāṇas, was acquainted with facts of previous Kalpas, knew the laws of *Dharma*, was exceptionally learned in the sciences of Vedic pronunciation, rules and grammar, was a master of music, knew how to decide between two conflicting scriptural injunctions, was fully capable of analysing words, was an eloquent speaker, was wise, possessed of a good memory, possessed of high morality, was a poet, a man of wisdom, capable of coming to a conclusion after scrutinizing all evidences, capable of

removing the doubts of learned men similar even to Bṛhaspati, knew the truths of *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kāma* and *Mokṣa*, possessed a direct vision of all the regions of creation through his power of *Yoga*, recognized those who were qualified for *Mokṣa*, created quarrels for the good of the world, was a master in the arts of forming alliances and of war, was capable of arriving at truth through inference, was a complete master of all the scriptures, an expounder of laws, a repository of all qualifications and a man of infinite power and brilliance. He was the very embodiment of knowledge, a store-house of learning, the very aggregate of bliss; sustainer of good conduct (सदाचार), unmotivated lover of all souls, a natural friend of the universe, a great teacher of Devotion and the very embodiment of Devotion.

After finishing his instruction on every other subject, the Devarṣi by saying ‘अथतो मक्तिं व्याख्यास्यामः’, takes up *Bhakti* (Devotion) as the last and final subject of instruction. This proves that *Bhakti* occupies a very high position.

Bowing to the feet of Devarṣi Nārada, who moves about the three worlds singing the praises of Śrī Hari out of sheer unmotivated kindness to Jivas (souls), let us carefully read his instructions on his beloved subject of *Bhakti* (Devotion) and try to mould our lives according to the same.\*

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\* The Aphorisms on *Bhakti* by Devarshi Narada appeared as a series entitled “The Philosophy of Love” which was concluded in the June, 1939 issue of the *Kalpitaru*.