

Shadanga Yoga — The Way of Surrender

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The Gita is considered to be the Yoga Text par excellence. Lord Krishna gives clear and explicit instructions regarding the three paths of Yoga. After expounding upon them in great detail, and acknowledging their difficulties, in the 18th Chapter Verse 66 the Lord makes the Ultimate Statement (*Charama Sloka*);

*Abandoning all other means (dharmas) take refuge in me alone;
I will liberate thee from the effect of all sins, grieve not.*

This is the highest path and the Supreme Means to God — called *Sharanagati* or “the way of surrender”. It is not actually a *Yoga* or a *process* as such, but a total resignation of oneself to Sriman Narayana, and reliance upon His Grace alone. It is greater than all the other 'Means' and includes within it all the three.

Taking refuge in the Divine (*Prapatti*) is the easiest way to God-realisation and Liberation. In fact it is the *means par excellence*. In the Scriptures we find the anecdotes of *Prapatti* performed by animals such as Gajendra, Hanuman, Jatayu and Jambavant and women such as Draupadi and Kunti. Arjuna and his brothers performed *Prapatti* as did low-born characters like Sabari and Guha and myriads of other beings. It is a means open to everyone and has no restrictions of any kind. There are no restrictions as to time — Gajendra the King of the elephants performed *Prapatti* as he was about to expire. There are no restrictions as to place — Arjuna performed *Prapatti* on the field of battle, and not even restrictions as regards states of purity — Draupadi performed *Prapatti* when she was menstruating!

So in this present age, when life is so short and filled with all kinds of responsibilities, difficulties and limitations; *Sharanagati* is the path of choice. It consists of taking *refuge* in the Supreme Person; an act of total *self-dedication*. Even *ONE* sincere act of self-surrender is enough to elicit the Grace of the Lord. It is taught that Divine Grace is given to those whom the Lord chooses, but this does not mean that the Lord is capricious or partial — Divine Grace is given to those who surrender to it and accept it.

The only qualification is that the postulant (*Prapanna*) should understand and realise his/her intimate relationship with God. A relationship of complete dependency and subjugation. The only prerequisite for *Prapatti* is a feeling of total helplessness (*akinchina*) and an understanding that there is no other refuge than the Lord (*na-anyagati*). The prospective *Prapanna* should have a sincere change of heart or contrition, and absolute confidence in the saving Grace of the Narayana.

It is not merit (*punya*) which is the operative cause of Grace (*daya*) but the sense of one's unworthiness (*akinchina*), one's deep entanglement in materialism and the inability to follow the three conventional Yogas. The Lord Himself is the way, the means (*upaya*) as well as the goal (*upeya*) and *Prapatti* is the act of self-surrender to His Grace. There is an intimate relationship between the act of self-surrender to Narayana and the flow of Divine Grace. The act of sincere surrender opens the flood gates of Grace. Although taking refuge means essentially Liberation through Grace it also includes works because surrender requires the resolve to perfect one's act as well.

The Three Components of Taking Refuge

The procedure of taking refuge consists of three components;

Phala-samarpana — Abandonment of the hedonistic motive that self-satisfaction in some heavenly realm is the supreme end of religious practice, and the rejection of the concept that surrendering to God is a *means* to achieve this end. The true Prapannas realise their complete dependency on the Lord and recognise that the jiva proceeds from, depends upon, and exists for the pleasure of the Lord alone. They then give up all forms of egoism and spiritual self-gratification. One should understand that one is nothing to oneself, owns nothing, and does nothing independently of the Lord. One should renounce the ideas of agency (*kartrtva*), proprietorship (*mamata*) and self-interest (*svartha*).

Bhara-samarpana — Renunciation of the sense of personal responsibility in the act of Liberation. Liberation is effected by the Lord Himself who is the Way and the Goal. It does not come by the will or desire of the individual. Prapatti or the Way of Surrender obviates the burden of guilt, self-effort and the consequences of error.

Svarupa-samarpanam — The actual surrender of oneself to God with the mindfulness of one's true nature (*svarupa*) — being a mode or ray of the Divine, essentially pure and perfect and accepting that existential fact.

The act of Taking Refuge

The actual act of taking refuge (*Saranagati* or *Prapatti*) consists of 6 components enumerated in the following verse;

*anukulya sankalapah prati-kulasya varjanam |
rakshishyati iti vishvaso goptrtva varanam tatha |
atma-nikshepa karpanya sad vidha saranagati ||*

1. *anukulya-sankalpah* — The resolve to act in harmony with the Divine Nature. It includes the abandonment of ego (*ahamkara*) and entails vowing to be benevolently disposed towards all beings (*sarva-bhuta-anukulya*) based on the firm conviction that the Lord dwells within all beings. The qualities of a Prapanna that please the Lord are enumerated in detail in the 12th Chapter of the Bhagavad Gita entitled “Bhakti Yoga” (The Yoga of Devotion):—

13. Not hating any living being, friendly and compassionate to all, free from the notions of 'I' and 'mine', and regarding all pain and pleasure with equanimity, and forbearing;

14. contented, constantly contemplating, self-restrained and firm in one's convictions, dedicating the mind and intellect to Me — such a devotee is dear to Me.

15. He by whom the world is not disturbed, and who is not disturbed by the world, who is free from joy and jealousy, fear and repulsion — he is dear to me.

16. One who is free from expectations, who is uncontaminated, skilled, impartial and free from anxiety, who has renounced every undertaking — is dear to Me.

17. One who is full of devotion to Me, who rejoices not, nor hates, nor grieves, nor desires, and who renounces both merit and demerit — such a devotee is dear to me.

18. He who is impartial to both foe and friend, honour and dishonour, who is indifferent to both cold and heat, pleasure and pain and who is free from all attachments;

19. to whom both censure and praise are equal, who is silent (when praised or abused) and content with any condition, who has no home, who is steady of mind, and who is devoted to Me — dear to Me is such a person.

20. But those devotees who adopt this ambrosial virtuous conduct (dharma) as taught above, who are full of faith and who regard Me as the Supreme — they are exceedingly dear to Me.

2. *pratikulya-varjanam* — is the resolve to abstain from acts which are not in harmony with the Divine Nature, these are the opposites of all the above virtues and also such prohibited acts which are mentioned in the Dharma Shastras such as intoxication, injuring other beings, despoiling the environment, lying, cheating, stealing, exploiting others etc.

3. *karpanya* — the realisation of, and acceptance of the absolute impossibility to achieve Liberation from the cycle of reincarnation through one's own personal efforts in practicing the three Yogas — karma, jñana and bhakti. It is a feeling of complete helplessness.

4. *maha-vishvasa* — complete faith in the saving Grace of God. It is the faith that He *alone* has the ability to liberate and that He *will* fulfil His promise to liberate those who take refuge in Him. *Maha-vishvasa* is the absolutely clear and distinct recognition of the omnipotence of Mercy and this is the central pivot and ruling motive of Prapatti Dharma. The Yoga of Devotion is the arduous building up of devotion from below, whereas Prapatti is the descent of Divine Grace into the realm of action.

5. *goptrva-varanam* — the sincere request by the prapanna for the Grace and protection of the Lord, abandoning all other *self-initiated* means to achieve Liberation.

6. *atma-nikshepa* — the governing factor of taking refuge is the offering of oneself to the Lord with the conviction that the opportunity for such self-dedication is in itself the result of Divine Grace. The postulant is fully aware of negative Karma; its causes and its results, but there is no act in the entire universe so evil as to exhaust the redemptive compassion of God!!

The forgiveness of the Redeemer presupposes the quality of *being forgiven* in the jiva, and a *change of heart* as well. The bestowal of Grace may be *unreserved*, but it cannot be accepted *undeserved*. The theory of “pretext” (*vyaja*) for granting Grace reconciles the 'justification by works' with the “justification by faith”, on the principle that a trivial cause can precipitate a mighty effect. The pulling of a lever can cause a dam to flood an entire valley. Similarly a sincere display of remorse, no matter how small, is enough to open the flood gates of Grace and Divine Mercy. The seed can only sprout in suitable soil and so too, Grace needs a pretext or an *excuse* to manifest itself. Even an act of unintentional merit is enough to elicit the flow of Divine Grace from the ocean of compassion — Sriman Narayana.