

# PRAPATTI OR SELF-SURRENDER

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A special feature of Hinduism, is that though it accepts the One Supreme God, it is not dogmatic about His name or form or the path that leads to Him. The Vedas declare that the Truth is one but the sages call It by various names. The Light is one, but It shines in different ways. Sri Ramakrishna puts the same truth in his own inimitable way: 'As one and the same water is called by different names by different people, some calling it "water", some "vari", some "Aqua" and some "Pāni", so the one Satcidānanda is invoked by some as God, by some as Allah, by some as Hari and by others as Brahman'. What holds good for the name, holds good for the form also. He can reveal Himself through any form the devotee likes, even as water takes the form of the vessel into which it is poured. This being the case, by whatever name we call upon Him, through whatever form we think of Him, through that name and form He responds. Does not the father respond to the baby which lisps his name in the same way as he does to the grown up children who can pronounce his name perfectly? The same universal attitude is extended to the field of sādhanas (spiritual disciplines) also. Though the ultimate goal of life is one and the same, viz., Mokṣa (liberation), the paths that lead to it can be many. Sri Ramakrishna goes to the extent of saying that there are as many paths as there are convictions. This is understandable even as the simple truth that the same cap cannot fit everybody. This is possible even as the same hilltop can be reached by several roads from different directions. This has to be so, since people differ from one another in their nature and nurture. As Puṣpadanta describes in his famous Śivamahimna - stava, 'Devotees follow these diverse paths, straight or crooked,

according to their different tendencies'. This obliges the Lord—He being the Universal Truth—to respond to the prayers of His votaries as promised in the Gītā (4.11): 'In whatever way men worship Me, in the same way do I respond.'

This doctrine gives a tremendous hope to one and all. If spiritual aspirants of a superior order have their paths to perfection, so have the less fortunate and the less regenerate ones. With regard to the life of the spirit, nobody is denied the opportunity or damned for ever. If it is conceded that the doer of good never comes to grief (Gītā:6.40), it is asserted that the wicked man who worships the Lord should be deemed as a saint for the very fact of his right resolution (*ibid* 9.30). Lord Krishna goes to the extent of even swearing that His devotee never perishes (*ibid* 9.31).

The reason is not far to seek. According to Vedānta, the bedrock of Hindu thought, all beings—including the subhuman species—are essentially divine. All are Ātman, whose intrinsic nature is Sat (the eternal existence), Cit (pure consciousness) and Ānanda (unalloyed bliss). Hence none is a sinner. According to Swami Vivekananda, it is a sin to call man a sinner! It is a standing libel on human nature! He even asserts that Vedānta recognises no sin, but only mistakes. All this boils down to this simple fact: we are essentially divine. We have temporarily lost that consciousness of our divinity due to self-forgetfulness, brought about by the inscrutable power of Avidya (ignorance). To rise above our weaknesses, it lies in our power, in our flesh and blood, as it were.

If this is true, it is equally true that we come across people who are captives in their 'own house' (the body and the mind), being

the slaves of their pride, prejudices and passions. Even after becoming aware of their pitiable plight, however much they try, they are unable to 'strike off their fetters, the bonds that bind them down!' It is precisely for such people as cry out in despair, that the path of Prapatti or self-surrender is laid down.

No doubt, Prapatti is a path of the weak, but it is not certainly a weak path! The patient may be undoubtedly weak but not the tonic that is prescribed to strengthen him. The weaker the patient, the stronger the tonic. No path that effectively takes one to God can be dubbed as weak or lowly.

Has Prapatti obtained—if we may use Sri Ramakrishna's idiom—a 'licence?' Has it been sanctioned by the scriptures? Undoubtedly! The Mahānārāyaṇopaniṣad declares that nyāsa is the most excellent means to liberation (79.16). Nyāsa can be interpreted here as Prapatti. The Śvetāśvataropaniṣad (6.11) uses the word Prapatti: 'Saraṇam ahaṁ prapadye' (prapadye = I take refuge). So does the Gītā (2.7): 'śiṣyastehaṁ sādhi mām tvām prapannam' ('I am your disciple. Teach me, who has surrendered himself to you.'): 'māmeva ye prapadyante māyāmetāṁ taranti te' ('Those who take refuge in Me alone, will transcend this māyā'). The famous verse 'sarvadharmān ...' (*ibid* 18.66) known as the 'caramaśloka' (the terminal verse in Śrīvaiṣṇavism (of Śrī Rāmānuja and others) forms the finale to the message of the Gītā, according to it. According to this school of thought the word samrādhanam in the Brahmasūtras (3.2.24) implies devotion and self-surrender. The episode of Vibhīṣaṇa's surrender to Śrī Rāma and the latter's renowned words of assurance to him (Rāmāyaṇa 6 18 33) have earned the epic the title of 'Prapat-tigrantha'. Added to these primary scriptural sources there are a good number of secondary works, some of which are exclusively devoted to the propounding of this doctrine.

A conviction that is invariably associated with Prapatti is that Lakṣmī the Mother Divine, intervenes with Lord Viṣṇu on behalf of the devotee and gets his desires fulfilled.

Being the consort of the Lord and the Mother of creation, she enjoys the love and confidence of both. It is she that turns the minds of the Jīvas (individual selves) towards God, and that of God towards the suffering Jīvas. But for her intervention, the prospects of relief would be rather bleak!

The path of Bhakti or devotion to God has often been eulogised as the easiest and most effective path. Then what is the speciality of Prapatti? The advocates of Prapatti adduce several reasons to prove that Prapatti is easier than even Bhakti and hence preferable. Bhakti can be practised by even animals. Sugrīva the monkey, Jaṭāyu the eagle and Gajendra the elephant are cited as examples. Even in the path of Bhakti, the votary has to lead a strict life and has to observe several rules. Its practice can be quite hard. But it is not so in the case of Prapatti. It is done only once and that eliminates the need for any further efforts. Again in the practice of Bhakti, a certain amount of self-effort is inevitable. The saṁskāras of previous lives (hang-overs of evil tendencies can prove to be quite a bugbear. But the follower of Prapatti has no such problem or fear. Has not God Himself taken over his entire responsibility?

Prapatti can be of three types: (1) Svani-ṣṭhā:—The devotee has acquired some knowledge about it and has performed it by himself. 2) Uktiniṣṭhā:—Fully believing in the words of the preceptor (ukti = word), he surrenders himself at the feet of the Lord. This is like the child doing as the mother bids it (3) Ācāryaniṣṭhā:—The ācārya or the preceptor does it on behalf of the disciple. This is like a courtier of the king pleading on behalf of an ordinary citizen and getting the latter's needs fulfilled.

Whatever be the mode of Prapatti, the core of the discipline is to make God one's own. To put it in Sri Ramakrishna's language, one should not waste one's life in counting the mango leaves but should form friendship with the owner of the mango grove from whom one

can easily get not only the statistics but also the fruits of the grove!

Prapatti has five aspects: (1) *ānukūlyasya saṅkalpaḥ*—to take a vow that one will act according to what is acceptable to God. How to know it? The scriptures, the preceptor and one's own conscience are the means of determining it. (2) *Prātikūlyasya varjanam*—to eschew what is against the will of God. This also can be determined with reference to the same authorities mentioned above. (3) *Rakṣiṣyatīti viśvāsaḥ*—cultivation of tremendous faith that God will never forsake one who has taken refuge in Him and is bound to protect him. (4) *goptrtva-varaṇam*—choosing the Lord deliberately and voluntarily as one's protector. The purpose of such choosing should be to get liberation. (5) *ātmanikṣepa*—totally surrendering oneself at the feet of the Lord.

Sometimes, a sixth aspect viz., *kārpaṇya*, a feeling of extreme humility, is also added. This becomes possible only when one gives up pride and vanity, and realises one's incapacity to perform the duties ordained in the scriptures.

*Ātmanikṣepa* (self-surrender) again has three parts: (a) *Svarūpasamarpaṇa*—Being fully convinced that he is a *śeṣa* or part of God, the aspirant has to surrender his self unto Him. (b) *Phalasarpaṇa*—He has to surrender the fruits of all actions also. (c) *Bharasamarpaṇa*—He has to place the entire responsibility of protecting himself and his dependents, on God. This *bharasamarpaṇa* or *bharanyāsa*, as it is also called, is the central factor in self-surrender. The baby monkey holding on to the bosom of its mother may fall down and be injured. Not so the kitten which is held by its mother. To put it in Sri Ramakrishna's words, the child walking along the road, holding his father's hand may slip and tumble, but not if the father himself is holding the child's hand. Hence the importance of *bharanyāsa*.

The aspirant who wants to follow the path of Prapatti is expected to be aware of the 'Rahasyatraya', the three supreme mysteries,

and adopt them in his life. The first of the mysteries is the *Aṣṭākṣarī* mantra ("Om namo nārāyaṇāya"). 'Om' describes Paramātman (God), the *jīvātman* (the soul) and their mutual relationship. The rest of the mantra is just an exposition of this secret. The second mystery is the *Dvayamantra* ('śrīman-nārāyaṇacarāṇau śaraṇam prapadye', 'śrīmate nārāyaṇāya namaḥ'). The first part of the mantra means 'I take refuge at the feet of Nārāyaṇa and His consort Lakṣmī. The second is obeisance to the divine couple. The third mystery is the *Caramaśloka* (*Gītā* 18.66) already referred to, which gives the assurance of the Omnipotent Lord to the devotee who surrenders. Since these three mysteries explain and elaborate the theory of Prapatti, a knowledge of them will help the aspirant greatly.

Prapatti is like the *Brahmāstra*, the ultimate weapon. Once it is adopted as a way of life and as a mode of *sādhana*, all other disciplines become meaningless. The *Brahmāstra* does not brook a competitor. After Hanumān was subjugated by the *Brahmāstra* of Meghanāda, the ignorant and foolish demons of Rāvaṇa tied him up with ordinary ropes. The result was that the *Brahmāstra*, feeling insulted, left him.

There is repetition of effort in all other spiritual disciplines, but not in the case of Prapatti. It should be done once only. One can only imagine the intensity with which it should be done!

Since Prapatti is a means to an end, the Prapanna, who has done it, is not a *Jīvanmukta* (liberated soul). Hence, how should or how does he live in the world? He studies the sacred texts with holy men with the sole intention of deriving the pleasure of listening to the Lord's names and glories. He performs sincerely all the duties of life that accrue to him as a result of his status in the family and the society. But there is always a strong undercurrent of his being an instrument of God. He is always kind and affectionate to his fellow beings including animals. He may spend much of his time and energy in service

in the temple of the Lord. Meditating on the Dvayamantra is another act that is pleasing to him. Eschewing the enjoyment of sense objects and serving the holy ones is another discipline dear to him. Whenever he is in doubt with regard to works or conduct, since he has not yet reached the state of knowing the will of the Lord directly, he follows the commands of the holy books.

Before concluding the topic, attention is to be drawn towards an important point. Realisation of God can be got only by His grace. No spiritual discipline can ever effect

it. God is not like vegetables which can be purchased in the market by throwing a few coins. 'yamevaiṣa vṛṇute tena labhyaḥ' (He is attained by him whom He chooses!) (Kaṭhōpaniṣad 2.23). The face of the porter at the village railway station cannot be seen unless he graciously consents to turn the lantern in his hand, towards his face! Similarly God can be seen only if He graciously chooses to reveal Himself. Is it not definitely better that God-realisation depends upon God's grace rather than on our efforts? There are limitations to our efforts, but not to His mercy!



## SADHANA IN SRI MADHVA'S PHILOSOPHY

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[In the following article Dr. P. Nagaraja Rao who has taught Philosophy in many universities in India condenses in a nutshell the sadhana prescribed by Sri Madhvacharya in his scheme of realisation of God through devotion and service.]

Śrī Madhva's philosophy is not merely a theory of reality but is also a way of life outlined to obtain Mokṣa. Mokṣa is a state of existence wherein the soul is free not only from all sorrows but is full of bliss, and there is no return to 'Samsāra' (the cycle of births and deaths). In the state of Mokṣa all doubts are dispelled and we live in joy with heavenly bodies in the house of the Lord i. e. *Vaikunṭha*. The attainment of Mokṣa is the aim set before all men in the different schools of Vedānta. Mokṣa is regarded as an End-value and is described as Parama Puruṣārtha. *Artha* and *Kāma* (possessions and desires) regulated by Dharma enable us to practise devotion to the Lord, which, when continued for a long time, with love and ardour, disdaining worldly pleasures and sensuous longings, with the knowledge of the Lord's surpassing excellences, generates the grace of the Lord. The grace of the Lord is instrumental in liberating the soul from the bondage of Samsāra.

Bondage is beginningless and real. The soul in its unregenerate nature is unaware of two

things namely, (1) his own intrinsic nature (2) the Lord's vision. He has first of all to obtain the vision of the Lord's form encased in the soul. The form of God encased in each soul is not one and the same form in all. It is called *Bimba-rūpa*. When the time for liberation nears, the destined Guru (niyataguru) of each individual makes known to the aspirant, the disciple, the *Bimbarūpa*. He has first of all to obtain the vision of that form. Only after that, he must go on intensely practising devotion to the Lord to obtain His vision immediate; with the onset of the Lord's vision (Aparokṣa Jñāna) devotion further intensifies and the grace of the Lord flows, resulting in making known the soul's real nature, and which realisation or experience is Mokṣa. The Lord alone can grant Mokṣa. Hence, he is called Janārdana (one who cuts births and deaths).

It is of no use to merely obtain the knowledge of the Lord or His majesty. We must know the eight-fold attributes (creation, sustentation, destruction, ordering, bestowal of ignorance, knowledge, bondage and liberation) of the