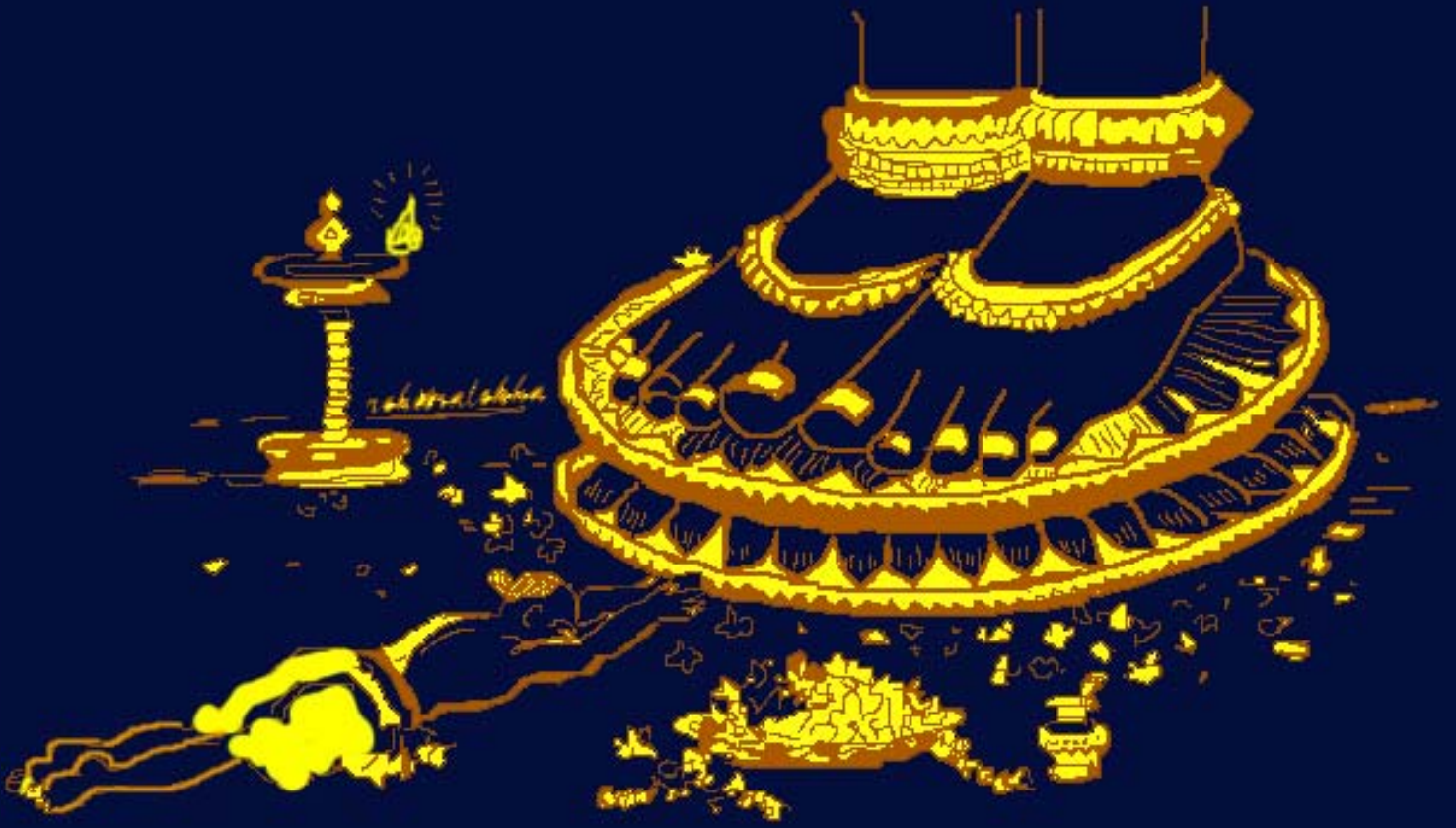


# *Bhakti and Prapatti*



*Excerpts from 'Mystery of Man and the Universe: Divine Grace and Our Surrender'*

*A book by Neduntheru U.Ve Sri S. Kannan Swami*

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"It is His Grace alone that ensures our freedom!"

SrI Perarulala Perumal - Thirukkacchi (Thanks: SrI Kausik Sarathy)

## BHAKTI AND PRAPATTI

(Excerpts from the book "Mystery of the Man and Universe: Divine Grace and Our Surrender" by Neduntheru U.Ve. SrI S. Kannan Swami)

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### PROLOGUE:

Dear SrI Vaishnavas:

Back in October 2010, a fellow alumni of Vivekananda college of Madras holding a post-graduate degree in Mathematics published a most scholarly book entitled "**Mystery of Man and the Universe: Divine Grace and Our Surrender.**" The central message of this extraordinary book in the author's own words is: "**The deep *mystery of man* caught up from beginningless time in this mysterious *universe* is resolved only through *His eternal grace* and with *our one unconditional surrender*, which is again triggered only at His instance at a moment of *His choice*, it is *His grace* alone that ensures our freedom.**"

The author of this "mini-encyclopedia", U.Ve. SrI Kannan Swamy, hails from the Vaidika agraharam of Neduntheru nestling on the bank of Cauvery river near Lord Aravamudan's divya desam of Thirukkudanthai. He is a deep student of Veda-Vedantam and has participated in the sampradayic Grantha Kalakshepams under the sacred feet of stalwarts of SrI Bhagavad Ramanuja Sampradayam like Goshtipuram SrI Ramanujacharyar Swamy, SrI PerukkaraNai Swamy, Purisai SrI KrishnamAchar Swamy, Paiyambadi Chetlur SrI Srivatsankacharyar Swamy and Mannargudi SrI Rajagopalachar Swamy after his retirement from the Central Government service as Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Finance. He is taking part in number of Vidvat Sadas and has received the blessings of the Pontiffs of Sri Ahobila Matam, Poundarikapuram Andavan Asramam, Srirangam Srimad Andavan Asramam and Mysore Parakala Matam. The following excerpts from the Mangalasarana Srimukhams of many Acharyas will provide a fitting prologue to "the intellectual feast" served through Sri Kannan Swamy's matchless monograph.

**HH The 45<sup>th</sup> Jeeyar of SrI Ahobila Matam, Sri Narayana Yatindra Maha Desikan:** "Neduntheru Sri S.Kannan Swamy has explained with appropriate Pramanams the doctrines of Surrender (Prapatti), as expounded by Vedanta Desika to drive home the point that surrender alone is the means to salvation, in other words, liberation from the shackles of karma and reaching the feet of the Lord. This Prapatti, it is emphasized, is only a vyajya and it is only the Lord who grants the liberation ... We appreciate the marathon effort of the author to elucidate our philosophy in a fashion that will appeal to the modern generation exposed to contrary pulls and attractions and enable them to realise the pristine glory of a great heritage deriving strength from the timeless Vedas".

**HH The 46<sup>th</sup> Jeeyar of Sri Ahobila Matam, Sri Ranganatha Yatindra Maha Desikan:** "This is an incisive and critical survey of the findings of Science, with the limits and contradictions

admitted by the Scientists themselves. They are examined objectively with copious references to the deep utterances of Vedic seers on these issues, projected in an entirely different and original light .... We have no doubt that this monumental exercise will motivate students of both Science and spirituality, to delve into Vedic lore, bring out the gems of truth embedded in them and enable more people to reap the full benefit of the treasures " .

**HH Prakrutam Brahma Tantra Svatantra Parakala Matam Jeeyar:** "This treatise on the Mystery of Man and the Universe is a remarkable work that sums up the essentials of Sri Visishtadvaita, the glory of Prapatti and the account of how the thinkers have pushed forward the frontiers of Science but have signally failed to grasp the mysteries of the Universe".

**Sri U. Ve. Vaikuntavasi Anantha Narasimhacharya of Sri Poundarikapuram Asramam:** "This is an intellectual feast to the readers and is a cogent integration of modern scientific ideas with philosophical thoughts and Upanishadic musings."

**Sokatthur Sri. U.Ve. Dr. P.Ramanujacharya Swamy, Asthana Vidwan, Sri Ahobila Matam, Director of CDAC-Bangalore:** This is to express my indebtedness to Neduntheru Sri.S.Kannan for having opened my eyes through "Mystery of Man and the Universe -Divine Grace and Our Surrender", a book which is veritably a touchstone for sincere seekers and scholars alike. The approach taken in the book on such deep concepts like Universe and Man, which are on the two extremities of infinitely large and infinitely small respectively, to arrive at the proper stand to be taken by seekers is strikingly original and hence praiseworthy. Freedom from fear of possible lack of answers to ticklish questions and controversial stands taken by earlier thinkers comes out boldly in Sri Kannan's writing. It has set me thinking on many issues, be they in modern science topics or ancient writings and books, even so for those who have the temerity to think of being experts in either lore. Divine grace and its inevitability in our emancipation and that too through our wilful surrender " in action" have been convincingly argued for.

**Professor K.E. Devanathachar Swamy, Dean Faculty of Darsanas, Rashtriya Samskrit Vidyapeetha, Tirupati:** This book is an endeavour, of which every scholar can feel proud. This could possibly be authored only by one who has deep faith and knowledge in both Vedic system and modern science... The most thorough and awakening part of the book is perhaps the chapter on 'Bhakti and Prapatti revisited'. This section would prove handy for fresh entrants into Vedantic studies, particularly SriVaishnavites... This work can be called the magnum opus of Kannan Swamy and a glossary of Visishtadvaita for reasons such as (1) the book explains the greatness of all Acharyas and Alvars (2) clarifies the means of liberation, namely Prapatti and Bhakti along with Jnana yoga and Karma Yoga, with all supportive scriptures like Upanishads and Gita (3) highlights the relevance of traditional values in the present world with the support from modern thinkers and philosophers and (4) profuse references to Vedas in juxtaposition with the western thought.

**Dr. A.V.Srinivasan, Former Head, Institute of Neurology, Madras Medical College:** Going through Sri S. Kannan's book is an exhilarating experience-- like a flowing river with consciousness as its content and thought as its unity ... The Chapters on Bhakti and Prapatti along with Alvars and Acharyas are a veritable gold find, which would compel in-depth reading and absorption.

**Dr. K. Rangarajacharya, Head of the Mathematics Department, Bharat Engineering College:**

The author, Sri Kannan has evidently done extensive studies with the guidance of eminent preceptors in a variety of fields germane to the ultimate objective of clarifying the eternal validity of the truths enshrined in the upanishads and the utterances of the Alvars. Two areas among many highlighted and elucidated in this monograph are: {1} The elucidation of the mystique of Bhakti and Prapatti and {2} Prapatti as a sovereign prescription, a credible means to be eligible for the certain tryst with His grace and to qualify for liberation at a moment of aspirant's choice.

Above excerpts from the anugraha Mangalasanams of Vedantic Scholars and eminent Acharyas are indicative of their highest regards for the scholarship and versatility of Sri Neduntheru Kannan Swamy. There is nothing more to be added on adiyen's part to persuade the would-be-readers to immerse themselves in the blissful flood of the anubhavam of this ubhaya Vedantic scholar/author.

Sriman Kannan Swamy's command of English language is matchless. He is equally proficient in the handling of Sanskrit during the elucidation of subtle points relating to our darsanam during his debates at the vidvat sadas. His constant and rigorous studies of Vedanta through the traditional Kalakshepam route under the sacred feet of many sadacharyas have borne fruit for the benefit of all of us; his unique skills to distil the essence of such studies spanning many years are admirable.

Sri Neduntheru Kannan Swamy's path breaking monograph is a treasure with 18 chapters; it should be read avidly by the Vedantins and the Scientists alike, who seek the answers to "the deep mystery of man caught up from beginningless time in this mysterious universe". This monograph has 573 pages and is indeed an intellectual banquet. It will however be a daunting task to keep up with the Garuda gati of the gifted author every step of the way at first. Every reader would have to develop his own approach to enjoy the rich banquet (aru suvai uNdi) assembled in this monograph. The sequence that adiyen followed is to study first the chapters 5 (Upanishads), 6 (Lord's word on the battle field), 10 (Alvars and Acharyans), 7 (Refrain of Self-Surrender everywhere), 9 (Bhakti and Prapatti revisited) and concluded with chapter 18 (the Epilogue). During the second stage, adiyen covered chapters 4 (about this book and beyond), 5 (Prologue) and followed it up later with the study of all the other chapters.

Adiyen has assembled below the Chapters on "Refrain and Self-surrender everywhere", "Bhakti and Prapatti revisited" and "Epilogue" for starting this journey of discovery. Please enjoy the above three chapters first. One should however complete the reading of this monograph in its entirety to enjoy the views from the dazzling/dizzying heights that Sriman Kannan Swamy takes us to. Refrain of Self-surrender is heard from everywhere.

SrImat Azhagiya singar Thiruvadigale SaraNam

Dasan, Oppiliappan Koil Varadachari Sadagopan

The following pages contain Chapter Excerpts from the singular monograph  
**"MYSTERY OF MAN AND THE UNIVERSE : DIVINE GRACE AND OUR SURRENDER"**

by

**Neduntheru U.Ve. SrI S Kannan Swami.**

For those desirous of procuring a copy of this monograph for themselves and savor the depth of content presented therein, the contact details for the author is given below:

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For those residing in the United States of America, the book is available for purchase online at  
**Amazon.com**

[http://www.amazon.com/Mystery-Man-Universe-Divine-surrender/dp/1453857478/ref=sr\\_1\\_3?ie=UTF8&qid=1345567085&sr=8-3&keywords=Mystery+of+Man+and+the+Universe](http://www.amazon.com/Mystery-Man-Universe-Divine-surrender/dp/1453857478/ref=sr_1_3?ie=UTF8&qid=1345567085&sr=8-3&keywords=Mystery+of+Man+and+the+Universe)





*Chapters 7, 9 and 18*

*Excerpts from 'Mystery of Man and the Universe: Divine Grace and Our Surrender'*

*A book by Neduntheru U.Ve. Sri S. Kannan Swami*





"The Most Effulgent One!"  
SrI Perarulala Perumal with ubhaya nachimars - Thirukkacchi  
Thanks: SrI Kausik Sarathy

## CHAPTER 7- REFRAIN OF SELF-SURRENDER EVERY WHERE

"He, who at the beginning of creation projected Brahma, who delivered the Vedas to him, who constitutes the supreme bridge of immortality, who is partless, free from actions, tranquil, faultless, taintless and resembles the fire that has consumed its fuel - Desirous of liberation, I seek refuge in that Effulgent One, whose light turns the understanding towards the Atman."

*-Svetasvatara Upanishad [6-18, 19]*

Sankara derived from the Brahma Sutras a school of philosophy that asserts the reality of the Absolute spirit, named Brahman in the Upanishads, conceives the external world as only phenomenally real and declares that man's ultimate perfection lies in the apprehension of his identity with Brahman. There were other schools that refused to deny the reality of the world and thus upheld the distinct identity of individual selves who still seek their ways into blessedness through Karma yoga followed by knowledge and devotional meditation. Ramanuja's elucidation perfects the interpretation of the Sutras so as to remove the areas of apparent conflict, establishes the metaphysical eminence of Brahman, the eternal individuality of the finite selves and the inalienable relationship of Brahman to the whole world of the sentient and the insentient, which are very much real and far from being cast aside as illusory and transient. Ramanuja's commentary known as Sri Bhashya is a systematic exposition of the philosophy of the Upanishads with due regard to supplementary scriptures as well as other sources of knowledge such as perception and inference. The only ultimate reality is Brahman, the repository of all perfections, embodying in entirety the sentient and the insentient. Loving and direct contemplation on the part of the seeker is the pathway to the bliss of communion with Brahman and ultimately, that is the supreme joy of life in God. This path of Bhakti is not a royal road - it is indeed a razor's edge as Katopanishad puts it - demanding exertion and dedication with the preparatory discipline of Karma yoga and Jnana yoga, in other words philosophic understanding and meditational devotion. Kathopanishad sets out the route strewn with hurdles and declares that only one who has a sound intellect and a controlled mind can progress towards the goal.

*"The sense-objects are more important than the sense-organs. The mind is more important than the sense-objects. Buddhi is more important than the mind and the great soul [jivatman] is more important than that buddhi.*

*A wise man must integrate his speech with his mind; that mind he must integrate with his intellect which is in his soul. He must integrate that intellect with the great soul and that soul must be integrated with the Supreme Self."*

Is all this possible for an individual, given even all the preparation, struggle and devotion? Hindrances are many and various, like basic ignorance, impressions left in the mind by karma of previous lives and more importantly, the chastisement from God for disregarding His mandates. This chastisement has already taken the form of punishing association with Prakriti, connecting the soul with a unique body, the senses and the like and subjecting the jiva to the sway of the senses. Ramanuja describes the situation in vivid pithy phrases in Saranagati Gadya - the association with Prakriti obscures the knowledge of the essential nature of God, gives rise to very

firm false knowledge and makes the jiva imagine that the association is really delightful, not to be traded for any other offer of a different happiness elsewhere!

Nammalvar's description is earthy, graphic and touching:

*With the body given by you at the time of creation, I have been wandering about to the satisfaction of the body. [3-2-1]*

*With the strong ropes of my senses, you have bound me tight with the body covering the inside sores with the skin and let me walk away from you! [5-1-5]*

*Is it right on your part to confound my soul and excite my five senses by showing me, who am a sinner, all sorts of petty pleasures? [6-9-9]*

Sin committed again and again destroys wisdom and the man of deprived wisdom begins to sin again. Gitacharya declares that he throws the sinners into asuric birth to let them wander again and again through the cycle of life and death - Gita [16-19]. How does one overcome such a situation that slips out of control? Is there any way to confront the hindrances, especially those of the nature of punishment for disregarding His commands? Ramanuja while discussing the Brahma Sutra [1-4-1] declares that the only remedy for the hindrances is to obtain the favour of the Lord and this can be done only by Saranagati or self-surrender to the Lord. This is in the context of his comments on the Sutra, with reference to the order in which the senses, the mind and the intellect have to be controlled as stated in Kathopanishad. The same Upanishad declares that the Supreme Self cannot be reached either through thinking or by meditation or by much hearing; the Supreme is attainable by him [individual self] whom He chooses. To him He reveals His form. *One who is chosen by the highest Atma is he who is dearest to Him; and he that is dearest to Him is one that loves Him most. Here the love, which the meditator has for the highest Atma, creates a love in Him for the mediator - which love becomes the means for reaching Him.*

Surrender as the upaya is always at the back of Ramanuja's mind, whether it is to confront the obstacles caused by the senses and the like or the hindrances thrown in for the consummation of Bhakti and realization as elucidated in his comments on the Charama sloka of Gita [18-66].

The school that emphasizes the imperative of an upaya with Sastraic basis and the support of Sri Bhashya and Gita Bhashya takes the analogy of the young monkey clinging to the mother for protection by way of illustration of the seeker of release surrendering to the Saviour. There is another school that does not accept surrender as an upaya at all; they respond to the challenge of illustration by replacing the monkey with a cat which carries the kitten in its mouth to the destination, the kitten not at all bothered about its safety, of which it stays assured in the mother's mouth. The illustrations are unexceptionable as telling analogies, useful in the limited context of putting across different points of view. Philosophy is generally learnt and taught through such illustrations, which by themselves do not constitute philosophy. They cannot be relied upon either for the task of firming up philosophical positions. Neither the baby monkey nor the kitten is doing what it does with the mother on the basis of sastras. The bane of philosophical understanding is often its vulnerability to catchy illustrations, which instead of driving home the truth, hijacks the learner into blind alleys of dogmatism and freezes knowledge at the level of the

pedestrian examples - which clever teachers sometimes use perhaps to mesmerise the listeners and render them captive if possible. The infant creatures of the animal world happen to be looked after by the mothers in the characteristic fashion unique to the species but we are here serious humans concerned with our destiny and therefore decide to acquire a degree of sastric knowledge so as to understand our status and our inalienable relationship with the Supreme, from whom we have got ourselves separated thanks to our own folly. We are certainly not in the helpless positions of such babies. *Wisdom demands that it would be better not to emphasize such illustrations while explaining deep questions to people who are otherwise likely to be led away with the impression that the difference between the two arises after all somewhat like the choice of either the monkey or the cat. People instructed through such examples would therefore hasten to transmit that knowledge through such illustrations to others in the same fashion. Needless to add what kind of tradition gets built up and with what consequences.*

Sages, rishis, alvars and preceptors have taught us the eternal truths with utmost compassion and concern for our welfare here and elsewhere. Based on how we have understood them, either we decide to pray and consciously ask for every comfort and happiness which Sastras would permit in this world or to surrender to Him for the assured joy of the *after-life*, from which we do not have to return. Alternatively, we consciously choose to remain wrapped in indifference to the *after-life*, which should worry only the Lord, while at the same time we decide to strain every nerve, without any relaxation, to secure the goods and services of the work-a-day world, till the end comes about, when the Supreme would decide on His own to grant the liberation. God who assures moksha unasked is the same God who sanctions and grants all the prayers relating to this world as well. *In either case, any feeling that the prayer or its absence alone matters and is critical for the end to materialize is evidence of egoism which is fatal to the success of the quest.*

Devotion without surrender in some form is no more tenable than surrender without devotion in any form. In fact it would appear on scrutiny that they coalesce invisibly; the proportions of the devotional process and the practice of surrender are difficult to recognize but it is an irony that it becomes a point of contention on the plane of theory while the actual practices do not strictly conform to the theoretical positions. The practitioner of Prapatti is assured that one-time surrender is adequate and he is not to worry at all about its efficacy; he fancies that the post-surrender prescription of an austere, simple and holy living, although binding, may perhaps be neglected with impunity without any serious adverse consequences. The non-practitioner of Bhakti or Prapatti rests in the comfort of His assured grace irrespective of his performance here in this world. *In reality, however, adherents on both sides of the fence are not at all passive but are found to be active practitioners of elaborate rituals in the name of worshipful service - they do not want to take the risk of missing anything by default - for either the goods and riches of this world or for realizing the ultimate happiness in the other world.*

What emerges clearly is that the two always go together - the inner state of genuine faith, sincerity and total surrender on the one hand and on the other, descent of His unannounced grace. We need to give ourselves, give completely, without demand, without condition and reservation so that everything in us belongs to the Lord, nothing left to the ego or any other power or god. The surrender must be total and seize all parts of the being and behind the façade of devotion and

surrender we should not seek a cover for desires and demands unworthy of the goal. The notion that the divine power will do and is bound to do every thing for us without a submission on our part amounts to inert passivity, mistaken for surrender. Surrender comes about only with a decision to hand over consciously the responsibility of our lives to the Divine. Such decision is not possible without His grace. The other approach is fashioned on the premise that the jiva's knowledge of his unique relationship will ensure His redeeming compassion without any effort beyond cultivating that knowledge. What is more, any further conscious exertion or plea is fatal and does injustice to the assurance of protection from the Lord. As the Lord has to protect his belongings in any case, why should there be any other motivation for Him to redeem the soul grovelling in worldly life? [The staunch Advaitin declares that knowledge is liberation and how is this different from the thesis of mere awareness, without any effort, being adequate for redemption? Swearing by knowledge alone as the means, the Advaitin does not refrain from all forms of devotion in the phenomenal world.] Those, who object to any effort for salvation, do not relax in their practices which are in the nature of kainkarya and also in their prayer for earthly benefits. The two schools - one advocating *effort* and the other ruling out *effort* - rely on the soulful utterances of Alvars to buttress up the respective positions and there is no need to hair-split to conclude one way or the other. The only positive explanation is that devotion and surrender, which are distinct, become inseparable, as they are expressed in action.

The Prapatti School faces a piquant situation, when patent failures are pointed out in the case of Prapatti performed for a legitimate worldly objective. Prapatti is a potent universal weapon, we are assured; how can it fail? The answer is shown to lie in the deficiencies of the performer or the deed or the guiding preceptor. How do we assure a prapanna, who has asked for moksha, that there won't be any failure, because proof of efficacy after death lies beyond observation and verification? Any attempt to oversimplify the rite of prapatti is fraught with the risk of making a mockery of the exercise under assurances, without ensuring the observance of the elements which alone complete the process. The most crucial component is intense faith, which is not generated through a mere declaration or declamation or mandate but through deep conviction arising from reverential devotion to the preceptor and the received wisdom of his instruction in Sastras. In the absence of a proper preparation of the mental frame of the seeker under the guidance of a competent teacher, the exercise becomes a formality with the observance of accessories getting a beating, which is not surely intended - although there is an assurance that short comings will be condoned by the Lord who will eventually redeem the devotee.

Lord with His infinite compassion is no doubt willing to pardon the sinner, who continues to sin, but with an appropriate deterrent punishment. Is He the one who enjoys the sins, like the mother who embraces the dirt-stained child? We are all children of God and His affection for us is so overpowering as to wave aside all the commissions and omissions of those prone to temptation and default. Does He not also grant us the wisdom and knowledge as we grow, so that we may outgrow the initial immaturity and proneness to evil? It is true His grace is assured to be available but does He not expect us to pass through the cauldron of suffering, reflection and improvement before He decides to reward? To deny Him this role is to suggest that irrespective of whether we mend our ways or not, He is bound to lift us. So why should we practise virtue or devotion or surrender? Is it the case then that leading a life of virtue or vice is not material at all and God is

equally disposed to all alike? There ought to be no misgivings between God's unfailing affection and concern for His subjects and the compliance with His commandments for leading a life of virtue and devotion. If however one chooses to be indifferent, it amounts to misunderstanding of the freedom one has been granted and that would only prolong the stay in worldly life.

In this connection Lokacharya's exposition in Srivachananbhushanam - third prakaranam: sutras 276 to 287- needs to be studied closely to grasp the importance the Acharya attaches to kainkarya. The emphasis is on the point that although the Lord is ever ready to ignore our faults - to put it more graphically, He would relish our commissions and omissions - we would not, should not, slip or lapse and give Him an occasion either to enjoy or ignore or condone our deficiencies. The sutras - 295-299 of the same prakaranam are also relevant here. Ramanuja defines Lord's compassion as His inability to bear with the sorrow and travails of the jivatma [Sri Bhashyam]; Parasara Bhattar goes further and declares that His compassion comprises His concern for the removal of the sorrow [Sri Rangaraja Stavam].

The point that emerges very clearly is that only those who devote themselves sincerely would be favoured with His grace at some point of time of His choice - such a grace transcending the credit-debit accounting of the devotee's commissions and omissions. This is not to suggest even remotely that God trades His grace with the initiatives of the afflicted, because there can be neither quantitative nor qualitative equivalence between the sublimity of His merciful generosity and the strength [weakness?] of man's feeble attempts to reach out to Him over the span of a life-time or several lives. Vedanta Desika has forcefully brought out the unequal balance of His justice in Sri Daya Satakam-34. Addressing Dayadevi [Goddess of compassion], he exclaims:

"Our sin-load is so large that it cannot be wiped away by experiencing its results in this life as well as in future lives nor is it possible to expiate and get rid of them. That is why you have brought round Lord Srinivasa to your side and seen to it that we get relief from the fear of samsara and our welfare is also ensured."

The idea is reiterated some what differently by Vedanta Desika in *Sri Abhitistava [16]*: "The Ocean of my failings increases every second; it is so formidable that it cannot be crossed at all. So the only remedy is to resort to expiatory rituals as prescribed in Sastras. But even my expiation is defective as it is not possible for me to perform it correctly without shortcomings. It is therefore for you to devise the appropriate efficacious remedy to redeem me, rendered helpless, with no alternative."

The prescription is Prapatti, *total surrender*. Upasana is contemplation of the Divine Krishna; and Vyasa assures that the surest expiation for all the sins is such constant contemplation. It is so potent. With the commencement of the Upasana, what is actually destroyed is the Karma, which has not yet begun to yield results, namely the Sanchita karma. Prarabdha karma continues to operate and it has to be experienced [*Brahma Sutras: 4-1-15:But only those previous deeds, that is, good and evil, the effects of which are not yet begun, perish; since they, the deeds which have begun to yield fruits, last till death*]. Chandhyoga Upanishad declares:" For him there is delay as long as he is not liberated from the body."

Prapatti can destroy not only Sanchita but also Prarabdha, if one would only opt for the Aarta

Prapatti, that is, for instant liberation from the samsara cycle. If Upasana is expiation and if it is so powerful, cannot it wipe away even Prarabdha karma? Of course it will, but the process has to be spread over several lives, if required. Further, the act of expiation is also not perfect, not definitely free from shortcomings. The verses from Sri Daya Satakam and Sri Abhitistava referred to above bear this out. On the other hand Prapatti assures release instantly, if asked for or after some time or the end of this life, if that is the choice - in any case the effect of Prarabdha karma terminates, when the body falls and there is no question of further births and continuance in samsara. The efficacy of Prapatti, performed with the prescribed accessories, is thus clearly asserted in the Smrtis-Pancharatras without any reservations.

Some misgivings do persist on the understanding of Prapatti as an act of one who is unable to adopt Bhakti Yoga on account of either lack of competence or authority or inability to bear with the delay involved in that route for achieving the goal of liberation. Prapatti is only the motion of placing the Lord Himself in place of Bhakti Yoga and surrendering unto Him for the grant of the goal. If Prapatti is performed with the accessories, Lord takes over and grants salvation either immediately or at the time of body's fall in this very life. It is well understood that Bhakti Yoga does away only the Sanchita Karma, while Prarabdha Karma remains to be experienced out. In the performance of Prapatti, if Lord is placed in place of Bhakti Yoga, which an aspirant is unable to adopt, then why should Lord overstep the limits of Bhakti Yoga and decide to destroy not only Sanchita but also Prarabdha Karma - a privilege not available to the practitioner of Bhakti Yoga? The answer is simple. When a Superior takes charge of a project, which an Inferior will take ten years to complete, it is not expected that the Superior will function only at the efficiency level of the Inferior; The Superior will perform in his own more efficient way and execute the work with incredible speed. The dwarf who plumps for a fruit, which he cannot reach, gives up the fruitless effort of raising his hands to pluck at the source; wise that he is, he seeks the help of a tall friend, who obliges readily and gets him all the fruits he desires [**Saranagati dipika-25**]. In the same fashion, Lord secures the Prapanna against the prolonged uncertainty of Bhakti Yoga and assures him of the desired goal of liberation through the practice of Prapatti.

All the same the clear message is that only His redemptive compassion - our feeble prayer notwithstanding - will rescue us with His generous response to the prayer. That there is no trading or bargaining is further reinforced, if it is realized that the very thought or act of devotion on our part has to come about only through His grace. There is no knowing when the grace would descend and sweep away all the sins, even as we cannot predict the earthquake which all on a sudden levels and flattens all the cherished earthly possessions and acquisitions which correspond to the sins accumulated from beginningless time. The cynicism about the futility of seeking His grace when He is admittedly the instrument for prodding the seeker to seek that grace is misplaced as we have referred to such apparent paradoxes elsewhere--like the same agent being both upaya and upeya, in other words, the endeavour and end and also like Brahman being both the instrumental and material cause of the universe [**Srimad Rahasyatrayasara-Chapter 9 on the classification of the means for attaining liberation**].

Reservations that would arise in this context have been anticipated and cleared in Brahma Sutras, as could be seen in Ramanuja's commentary [2-1-32 to 36]. Since the Lord is all powerful and is self-sufficient, there is no point or purpose in His creating a world of misery with men sinning all



the time and creating occasions or justification for expiation of those countless sins. Lord has nothing to gain because he is self-fulfilled; nor would it be for the sake of individual souls, because in that case the all powerful Lord would have created a world full of happiness for all. The answer is that creation has no motive behind except a sportive impulse. If that is so, with the creation of a world of suffering, is not the Lord vulnerable to the charge of partiality and cruelty? No. Lord creates various beings like gods, man or lower animals, based on the past Karma. It is Karma that accounts for the differences and it is not due to partiality on His part. The Lord is only the operative cause in the creation of beings; the principal cause is Karma. Just as rain helps different seeds to sprout according to their nature, so the Lord are the general efficient cause in bringing the latent tendencies of each individual to fruition. [Sri Vishnu Puranam 1-4-52; Sri Rangarajastava 2-42; Sri Achyutasatakam-13]

Doubts still persist; if before creation, there was Lord alone and nothing existed, no individuals and therefore no Karma, where is the scope for explaining Karma as the main cause for bringing into being an unjust ordering of a world full of suffering? The answer is that the souls and Karma form an eternal stream which is beginningless. Individuals are not created but they existed in a subtle condition before creation, almost non-distinguishable from Brahman. When the scriptural texts declare that Brahman alone existed before creation, what is asserted is the denial of the gross existence of the souls with name and form. These souls very much existed before creation in a subtle condition, each with his own load of Karma; it is a perfectly logical situation, because if it were not so, souls would have to be punished for acts not committed by them, while some others will go scot-free without punishment for the wrongs done by them.

With this background, it is possible to understand how the individual souls need to resort to appropriate means like Upasana and Prapatti for securing freedom from the cycle. The preferable recommended option is Prapatti for the weak, who are neither competent nor have the ability to undertake the Bhakti Yoga route, which is not only tough but also prolonged, with no assurance as to when the liberation will actually mature. Vedanta Desika sums up the situation in the concluding verse of the Introductory Chapter of Srimad Rahasyatra Sara:

'Like the revolution of a wheel, the cycle of karma, avidya and others like vasana, ruchi and association with prakriti succeed one another, in the differing streams of samsara peculiar to each individual from time immemorial. Mostly all systems of religious thought are agreed that at the appropriate moment, varying fruition comes about as a result of past karma. At the time of this fruition, the Lord holds the jiva and bestows His grace. The fortunate jiva surrenders and becomes at once the recipient of wealth like viveka and vairagya, extending up to the sovereignty enjoyed by the liberated souls in Moksha, such as the delight of His company and kainkarya to Him.'



"Enjoy eternal and joyful communion with the Lord!"  
SrI Perarulala Perumal with ubhaya nachimars - Thirukkacchi

## CHAPTER 9: BHAKTI AND PRAPATTI REVISITED

The grand scheme of karma yoga, jnana yoga and bhakti yoga, elaborately enunciated by the Lord, signifies the different stages in the gradual and progressive realization of freedom from the causal cycle of birth and death. Karma Yoga is the path of action and work without attachment, illumined by a clear knowledge of the self in every jiva and the Self which is the supreme self of all jivas. Karma yogi's action is marked by gradual renunciation of egoism or self-conceit as well as the consciousness of the feeling "I" or "mine". Jnana yoga is a process of self-realization, which is not the final goal but a prelude to bhakti yoga which the seeker traverses for attaining eternal and joyful communion with the Lord. Karma yoga and jnana yoga are thus stepping stones to realization or release from samsara through bhakti yoga. The practice of bhakti presupposes seven auxiliary disciplines:

1. Viveka - arising from bodily purity which results from sattvic food
2. Vimoka - which is freedom from desires actuated by kama and krodha
3. Abhyasa - continuous practice, with mental calm and detachment, of meditation on the Highest
4. Kriya - the performance of the fivefold duty in accordance with one's ability
5. Kalyanani - the practice of virtue as the inner side of duty, consisting of truthfulness, integrity, purity of word, thought and deed, compassion, benevolence, non-injury to others in word, thought and deed
6. Anavasada - freedom from despair, disappointment and grieving over past misfortunes and sorrows
7. Anuddharsha - freedom from undue excitement or elation of spirit, a mean somewhat between the extremes of joy and its absence.

It is through absolute devotion to God and not by Vedic study or austerity or work of merit that God is attained, declares Kathopanishad. So the seeker, equipped with these disciplines, has to embark on a life of meditation and cultivate his love of God. Meditation or dhyana is therefore the only divine injunction, hearing [sravana] and reflection [manana] being only the preparatory means. Meditation is a continuous process of mental concentration on the nature and form of Brahman till the moment of death or dissolution of the body. It is this meditation that deepens into upasana or devotion or worship. Upasana matures into bhakti, when it becomes possible to recollect clearly and distinctly the perception of the beautiful form of Paramatman. Ramanuja describes a three-stage progression through para bhakti, para jnana and parama bhakti.

Thirty-two Brahma-vidyas have been enumerated in the Upanishads for attaining liberation. Each vidya is complete in itself, the object in each case being the realization of Brahman. The Upanishads provide option to each seeker to choose his own vidya, which he finds suitable for his equipment and disposition. It is a unique feature of Visistadvaita that it stresses the conquest of avidya and karma through knowledge developed into devotion [bhakti rupapanna-jnana] and only thus liberation is possible through the saving grace of God.

The path of bhakti no doubt leads to the world of God but the path is not easy to traverse, being ridden with pitfalls and set-backs. The four principal requisites for bhakti yoga are a clear understanding of karma, jnana and bhakti; the persevering will to go through the disciplines in that order, the qualification of birth and the endurance to face the fall-out of prarabdha karma till it is exhausted or cleared through expiation as prescribed in sastras. It is not however easily practised in Kali-yuga. Sastras, therefore, recognizing the need for a route suitable for the weak and the infirm, prescribes prapatti, which, preserving the essentials of bhakti, does away with the stringent conditions of pre-qualification and ceaseless practice without deviation or dilution. Vedanta Desika has demonstrated forcefully in his Rahasyatrayasara the efficacy of this direct and independent means to liberation. Here God's grace is not sought on account of merit and qualification but through the meritorious act of self-surrender, realizing one's worthlessness, with absolute confidence in the saving grace of God, the protector. The act has a summary effect, inasmuch as it not only wipes away the load of all sins accumulated during the previous countless lives but also destroys even the prarabdha karma which has begun to operate, its duration being limited to the end of this life or even earlier if so desired. An archer's action in discharging an arrow for hitting a target does comprise several separate movements, like observing the object, taking the aim and releasing the arrow; yet it is accomplished in a single moment. Similar is the act of surrender [to the Lord] of the responsibility of [one's] protection. Sruti declares-"Pranava is the bow; the soul or the self is the arrow; it must be discharged at Brahman, which is the target, with great care and with concentration." [Mundaka Upanishad: 2-4].

The merit of prapatti lies in its universality and applicability to all castes and classes, its intrinsic value as an independent means and the natural ease in securing immediate effect. After the performance of prapatti, one gives up all thoughts of oneself, even the thought of attaining liberation. Vedanta Desika's prescription of the conduct of a prapanna in his Rahasyatrayasara is a moving account - physical purity, freedom from evil thoughts, performance of ordained nitya and naimittika rites, without any thought or desire for the fruits, good will to one and all, service to God and His devotees, contentment with whatever one has and comes one's way unasked, to mention only a few.

It is clear that bhakti as an upaya would not be complete without certain pre-qualifications, rites and duties as indispensable accessories. Prapatti, on the contrary, does not require the performance of any such rites. In fact its potency would vanish if it were accompanied by such rites, like 'Brahma-missile' losing its power if sought to be aided by any other weapon. A question is naturally raised - why should a prapanna perform nitya and naimittika duties, if they serve no purpose to promote or strengthen Prapatti? Lokacharya states in his Mumukshupadi that it is no offence to give up these rites and duties. However he points out that the prapanna, keeping the Lokasangraha in view, performs the rites out of fear of public opinion and also out of compassion in favour of the ignorant, lest they too should give up their performance and thus ruin themselves.

Vedanta Desika states that these rites are no doubt not required for prapatti as such, but the duties, being God-ordained through Srutis, have to be performed necessarily. Non-performance would amount to violation of His commands and therefore incur His displeasure and appropriate punishment.



"The Lord is Himself the upayam and upeyam!" - SrI Perarulala Perumal - Thirukkacchi  
Thanks: SrI Kausik Sarathy

Pillai Lokacharya's *Srivachanabhushanam* and *Mumukshupadi* are brilliant expositions which need close study with the help of commentators, as they are couched in aphoristic style in arcane Tamil. Lokacharya states that although bhakti is described as an upaya in the Upanishads, practice of bhakti is against the essential nature of the jiva. He argues that the jiva is the body of Isvara and is totally dependent on Isvara for all his actions; the jiva is actually His sesha or dasa and so there is no question of any independent capacity for an independent action. If jiva is to resort to bhakti for his release, it would mean that he fancies himself capable of endeavours on his own - when actually every thought and action of his is under His constant control. Speaking of His grace in *Srivachanabhushanam*, Lokacharya points out that it is the sinning attitude of the sinner that induces the intervention of divine grace and this grace is spontaneous and not conditioned by the effort of the self as in the case of the bhakta. Divine compassion is of five forms—para, that of Brahman in Vaikunta, is distant like the rain drops in the clouds; vyuha is like the waters that surround the cosmic egg; antaryamin, the Lord within the self, is like the spring to be located in the field; vibhava or that of the avatara is like the occasional freshes in a river, they come and go; and it is only archa that is the reservoir of divinity, which is always on tap to the thirsty seeker. The Lord is Himself the upaya and the upeya - the means and the end; the true import of prapatti is not winning the Grace of God but responding positively to its free flow, without turning it down. Again, he emphasizes the superiority of *paragata-svikara* to *svagata-svikara*, that is, the superiority of the case of the Lord seeking the sinner, to that of the bhakta seeking the Lord. Like mother's milk, Lord's grace flows freely. Any effort to seek that grace promotes only self-esteem. When man seeks God, prapatti is futile. If God seeks him, even his sinfulness is ignored. Prapatti has its fruition in service to God and to the Bhagavatas in utter humility. In fact devotion and regard for the Acharya is preferred to the grace of God, the reason being, while God is both just and merciful, Acharya is always moved by mercy. Service to the Acharya and the Bhagavatas is the surest and the highest means of attaining God.

Vedanta Desika points out that while the jiva is no doubt dependent on Isvara, the fact that the jiva has been endowed by Isvara with knowledge, reason, intelligence and access to sastras implies that the jiva is expected to use these endowments for complying with the command to perform rites and duties prescribed by sastras. Otherwise why should sastras prescribe these injunctions at all, if they are not to be followed, being against the essential nature of jiva? It would be churlish to suggest that Lokacharya advocates outright rejection of Upanishadic injunctions. The fact remains that bhakti in this Yuga is out of question, being unsuitable for practice and against the competence and inclination of the individual handicapped by many limitations and being vulnerable to hostile temptations. No wonder Vedanta Desika has, in preference to the bhakti route, recommended the alternative which involves less exertion and dispenses with ceaseless practice which carries no definite assurance of success either now or in the following lives. But nowhere has it been intended to suggest that bhakti yoga is an exercise opposed to the svarupa or nature of the seeker's self.

What is the nature of Prapatti? There is no dispute at all about the imperative of Prapatti between the two schools. Vedanta Desika has explained the character of Prapatti, which although simple and easy of practice, does involve, among other things, intense and absolute faith, which can come only through proper knowledge and received instruction. He defines Prapatti as a one-

time consummation of an effort or exercise of specified components including the faith referred to. Lokacharya states that prapatti is merely mental acquiescence on the part of the jiva in Isvara taking the responsibility for his protection. He argues that the jiva being Isvara's body, Isvara on His own would do all that is needed to cleanse His body of impurities and no special effort or prayer is called for on the part of the jiva. Prapatti of this kind does involve the necessary knowledge about the role of the Isvara as in the absence of that knowledge prapatti is not complete. Lokacharya has also stressed that all that is required is that the jiva should refrain from resisting Isvara's eagerness to protect him - this also would put a premium on the knowledge which the jiva should acquire so as to understand his relationship with his natural protector and accept without protest when the grace arrives. If awareness of His grace is sufficient because that grace alone will redeem man from the web of samsara, the awareness has to be learnt or inculcated but what would happen to those who are not fortunate to be put wise about it? Considering the enormity of man's offences, the feeble pretext of an effort to seek His forgiveness is difficult to justify at all, according to Lokacharya. There is great merit in this unexceptional proposition - which is not disputed - because no jiva can run away with the impression that his formal request would make all the difference to the descent of God's grace, like anybody placing an order for his requirements with the shopkeeper, there being no other relationship between the two. On the other hand there is a special relationship between the two; when a seeker is ignorant of how to go about to follow the path of bhakti or is not in a position to follow it owing to his infirmity or inability, he seeks His pardon and protection and surrenders his self to Him with his plea; out of His compassion God stands in the place of expiation, that is bhakti, which the seeker is unable to undertake as the upaya for his liberation. Prapatti here is not mere acquiescence but is an active, positive and vibrant initiative consciously undertaken to seek God's refuge and pleading for His succour. To stress again, God is Himself the upaya and the upeya. The sadhya-upaya or means of attainment is bhakti; the alternative, which is prapatti, is sadhya-bhakti, which means that prapatti is capable of countering hindrances that would arise from time to time in the consummation of bhakti. The siddhopaya is always present - it is His free causality. The prime cause of salvation is His grace because He is the siddhopaya. The seeker has to deserve it - has to justify himself - by seeking His grace. No doubt mother's milk flows freely out of the abundance of her affection for the child, who has however to leap and reach for the breast. Prapatti is the act of casting oneself on the mercy of God under the guidance of a preceptor and seeking that mercy by way of supplication and not out of conceit or self-esteem or as a demand for a right. But Lokacharya would not approve of that approach as that savours of egoism, when, as he stresses, God's grace is absolute and not conditioned by human initiative or responsibility.

Vedanta Desika, therefore, stresses the need for an effort to seek His grace, as in its absence, Isvara is obliged to redeem everybody - without worrying Himself whether jiva is penitent or unrepentant. In the event of His grace descending on one and all alike, by now all the jivas must have been rescued. That has evidently not happened at all, as we are still debating on His duties and not on ours. The grace cannot reach down only to those He chooses arbitrarily - lest there should be a grievance of partiality on His part - a situation which is obviously inconceivable. Lokacharya says that the faults and offences are no doubt agreeable to Isvara; like the cow that licks the slime on the body of the new-born calf, Isvara would enjoy the sins of His protégé. Yet

the sastras lay down rules and regulations to enable man to purify his conduct; the sastras prescribe the punishment schedules as well, knowing fully well that not all will observe the rules and there will always be truants who should be cautioned. The sastras are there for a purpose and not for ornamentation. It is not therefore suggested that man has necessarily to lapse from correct conduct and commit sins in order to invoke and deserve Isvara's pleasure. That would tantamount to an unmerited exaggeration of man's vanity to vaunt his capacity to err. It would be unjust to the individual endowed with knowledge and intelligence to suggest that he is incapable of realizing the folly of an improper conduct and therefore making amends in good time. But Isvara is always ready to condone all the offences which have been committed in the past and continue even now, responding to even a feeble call for succour, because His compassion is so much unbounded that man will not be able even in countless lives to commit such sins and mistakes as will proportionately match His compassion. In fact what is the worth of man's repentance in the face of His matchless grace? At least let man have the satisfaction of being noticed for his lapses and repentance and then courting His grace, which is never withheld.

Ramanuja argues on the basis of certain texts of the Upanishads that mere meditation cannot lead to realization - here meditation is knowledge that has taken on the character of meditation. This liberating knowledge is not the experience of Brahman, which can come about through the fulfilment and the fruition of the process of Sadhana. But meditation is also of no avail, without the grace of God. This grace cannot be arbitrary; it can and will descend only in relation to some special quality of the aspirant - that quality is love, rather, adoration or longing for God. God's will to redeem is an eternal reality but it awaits the express desire for redemption on the part of the aspirant. Man is not an insentient; he has been endowed with autonomy and the discretion to take the initiative. The redemptive plan of God will materialize only through the autonomous movement towards securing redemption. Ramanuja is categorical that the doctrine of grace propounded in Upanishads is related to the nature of the aspirant's adoration of God for his redemption. Again, this adoration is not aspirant-centred but only for the sake of the Redeemer and for his being ever in His service. In that state alone God's eternal compassion flows towards the aspirant and ensures his salvation.

Bhagavan's compassion is thus the dominant motive for His sport of creation, maintenance and destruction. *It is out of His compassion that the inert jivas in the pralaya state are again united with bodies and senses so that they may seek once again their ways out of the cycle of samsara once and for all.*

### *Authorities galore*

Alavandar sings soulfully of the Lord's compassion in verses of matchless beauty and elegance in his Stotraratna:

Whosoever, in whichever way at any time joins his palms in adoration, remembering your lotus feet - that very act instantly removes all his misfortunes and ushers in immense good. He never fails. [28]

A tiny drop of the nectar ocean of devotion to your lotus feet instantly extinguishes the blazing forest-conflagration of samsara and bestows supreme bliss. [29]



Pray, make me your own out of sheer grace - me, who am the repository of a thousand iniquities, who am fallen into the depths of the terrible ocean of worldly existence and who in utter helplessness have sought refuge at your feet.[48]

Hearken to this, my only entreaty. What I say is absolute truth without the slightest exaggeration. If you fail to show pity on me, you shall never hereafter get a man for you to pity - never will you have one, more worthy of your compassion. [50]

Therefore, without you, I am bereft of the protection of a true master. Without me, you are without a worthy recipient on whom to bestow your compassion. Preserve this relationship which destiny has ordained. Do not spurn me. [51]

Whatever be the circumstances in regard to the body and worldly conditions, whatever be my character - I dedicate here and now to you that self of mine which is denoted by the term 'I'. [52]

This sums up broadly the constituents of the performance of Prapatti which readily wins Lord's grace and secures liberation at the desired moment. There is indeed a moving touch of poetry in compassion - which Alavandar brings out forcefully and tellingly.

Perhaps more than Ramanuja, it is his disciple and scribe Kurattalvan who speaks with fervour about the formidable weapon of Bhagavan's compassion, which would at a single stroke retrieve the sinners who might appear unworthy of His grace.

"Considering that the jiva bound in worldly life commits in a moment sins which cannot be wiped away even in thousands of years, you would forgive and pardon him all the same, keeping in view his respite from sinning at some moment!" [Vaikuntastavam-61]. Here Bhagavan has taken into account the seeker's determination for a moment not to sin [Pratikulya varjanam]

"Great indeed is your forgiving love and affection for those who approach you with folded hands with no distinction of whether they are good or bad. It is of no special merit that you should be well-disposed to those who are devoted to you, wanting to reach you." [Vaikuntastavam-62].

The value of 'folded hands', as part of surrender has been stressed by Alavandar in his Stotraratna[28] and developed by Vedanta Desika in his Anjali Vaibhavam and also referred to in Varadaraja Panchasat[30]

"I am worthy of your mercy, for I have done no good deed, I have no faultless knowledge, I am without devotion to you." [Vaikuntastavam-88]. Here the total helplessness [Akinchanya] is proclaimed.

"What is the use of my prattling? Knowingly or otherwise, I have committed sins, big and small, countless times. I have no refuge. Kindly forgive me with your natural compassion." [Vaikuntastavam-89]. The realization that there is no refuge other than He is evident here. [Ananyagatitvam].

"Even the fact of my having sought you as my refuge is not something that I have done

**with any knowledge; at least on this account, if I qualify for your compassion and grace, I could hope for my salvation.” [Varadarajastavam-84]**

In the two preceding verses, Kurattalvan, having proclaimed his surrender to Varada, hastens to clarify that whatever he did was without any understanding or learning or knowledge and for this very reason he has a right to His grace. The point is made that even if the act of surrender is deficient, Lord condones the omission and accepts it without hesitation.

**“That you alone are the refuge - even this thought will not arise in me without your Grace. You are therefore clearly in my favour. Only this knowledge serves as the means for redemption of the likes of me.” [Varadarajastavam-88].**

‘The act of surrender on my part has pleased Him and He is therefore redeeming me’ - such a thought amounts to equating the sadhyopya with siddhopaya, as if He has been made to redeem me in exchange for my surrender! Precisely the notion of this self-importance is what is sought to be removed here. Man’s free action is under His control and without His grace he will not be able to act and ask for refuge in Him. Vedanta Desika has stressed this point while commenting on the Lord’s message - “Surrender unto Me alone” in Rahasyatrayasara with the remark that it ill becomes a seeker to imagine that his surrender [sadhyopaya] is on par with the siddhopaya, who is the Lord Himself. Also in the chapter on Tirumantram [Rahasyatrayasara], Vedanta Desika has brought out that if He is pleased, none will be disposed against him; in other words, none will be Pratikula at all when He has bestowed His grace.

**“I do not have even that minimum faith, energy and inclination to sing of your glory, to bow before you and to meditate on you; I do not even regret my refraining from all these!” [Vaikuntastavam-96].** This is extreme self-devaluation for being unable to accomplish even Pratikulyavarjanam - it is this mood that leads eventually to surrender.

**“That you do redeem those who are competent and thus qualify themselves through any of the means - karma, jnana and bhakti yogas - is not evidence of your greatness, unless you save me, without any worth, incapable of practising the said means and without any other refuge.” [Vaikuntastavam-99].**

Where is the merit or greatness in saving those who follow His dictates scrupulously? It is only a case of rewarding those according to karma as it accords with His will. To provide drinking water to the thirsty in a desert is laudable and well-merited. What is great about supplying water to the fish swimming in the flowing river? This idea has been echoed in Rangarajastava [2-105], a composition of Parasara Bhattar, son of Kuresa. Both Akinchanyam and Ananyagatitvam are emphasized here. Lord’s over-mastering compassion is supreme and flows without stint or reservation and it cannot be matched with comparable effort or merit on the seeker’s part to deserve His grace when it descends.

**“Karma yoga, Jnana yoga and Bhakti yoga - In these paths, whatever the competence to undertake or whatever the effort needed for the purpose or the ability to consummate - it is not at all going to be possible without His grace. So between those who try and still need His grace and myself who am absolutely incapable of trying these disciplines, there is no difference so far as He is concerned.” [Vaikuntastavam-100]**

The point is driven home that surrender unto Him is a must for the one practising the yogas and struggling with the obstacles in the process. Unless He is pleased, all these efforts will not avail at all. This has also been brought out in Vaikunta gadyam - without surrender at His feet, there can be no other means even if it is a struggle lasting for thousands of years.

**"Only those who practise according to prescribed injunctions will be protected and not others - if this is the condition that binds Him, in that case only He should bestow on me the needed competence, ability and aspiration as well as the elimination of all hindrances so that I acquit myself accordingly." [Vaikuntastavam-101]**

That it is only through His grace surrender unto Him is rendered possible is well depicted in this concluding sloka which upholds the doctrine of surrender as preached by Alvars and rishis.

**"O Varada, even Sanantana and others, engaged in the arduous discipline of Ashtanga Yoga could not hope to reach you but the humble folks devoted to you would attain your feet; how can I hope to reach your place, which is beyond all thought and inference and is indeed a magnificent wonder?"**

**I have firmly clasped my preceptor Ramanuja's feet as the upaya for me. My preceptor has the blessed Acharya lineage behind him going upto you and your consort. It is only on account of this link alone that I am entitled to your favourable notice" [Varadarajastavam 101,102]**

This is again a reiteration of Kurattalvan's utter self-effacement and absolute surrender to the Lord through his preceptor to whom he was dedicated totally.

**"There is nothing you cannot accomplish. You are full of compassion and ever ready to grant pardon and bless me. There is no question of my ever being able to experience out the effect of all my countless sins or being qualified to expiate all of them. I belong to you and I have no means other than you; I am absolutely helpless; I am nobody at all. My only strength lies in these plain confessions." [Sundarabahustavam-123]**

Here Kurattalvan spells out the constituents of surrender: intense faith, helplessness, absence of any other means and appeal for His grace.

Parasara Bhattar, son of Kurattalvan, makes it clear how our surrender to the Lord is but natural and inevitable:

**"The Upanishads have declared that the Lord takes in both the sentient and non-sentient beings for the fulfilment of His own purposes, because He is the cause of their existence, their continuance and their control. So far as the sentient being is concerned, the Lord is both the end to be attained [upeya] and also the means of attainment [upaya]. This is an essential quality of His and not an adventitious feature. That is why I seek refuge in the Lord without any selfish interest." [Parasara Bhattar- Sri Rangarajastavam 2-87]**

Parasara Bhattar has written an exhaustive commentary on Sri Vishnu Sahasranama - Thousand names of Vishnu - known as Bhagavad Guna Darpanam. In the introduction we have an exposition of the potency of the chanting of the names of God as an easier means to salvation, in contrast to the meditation discipline in Bhakti Yoga, which is arduous, open only to those who are qualified to



"The Supreme Lord of Perfection!" - Namperumal - SrIrangan  
Thanks: SrI N Santhanagopalan

adopt it. Chanting in praise of God is a unique experience, as the chanter is eager to utter in words the qualities of God and thus experience the same qualities on which he meditates. God's compassion flowing towards the weak, imbecile and impure devotee is what fascinates Bhattar, reminiscent of Kurattalvan's expression in Sristava [5]:

"I am very small; I have wicked thoughts; I have no affection for you; I have not rendered any service to you; yet I am savouring your fame, O Goddess, I have no fear nor do I have any shame, for I am ignorant. The holy river Ganga is not polluted by the dog lapping up the waters; the dog is also not fearful or ashamed. The dog's thirst has to be quenched."

More than the father, Bhattar is astonished by the Supreme Lord of perfection favouring a thoroughly imperfect creature like himself in his several verses praising Lord Ranganatha [Sri Ranganatha stotra-7 and Sri Rangarajastava-1:16, 2:99]. A few more hymns may be referred to for understanding his deep conviction and devotion to the Lord: Ashtasloki 3, 7; Sri Rangarajastava: 2-52, 74, 94, 97,101,102 and 104. In his Sahasranama commentary, he declares that the devotee, however, lowly and unclean, can approach the Lord with devotion and have his sins washed away, as though by the river Ganga. The Lord is not affected by the devotee's impurity, as He is ever ready to shower His grace and purify him, because He is the supreme purifier. To those, who object to this approach and advocate elaborate practices prescribed by sastras, Bhattar responds that while elaborate rituals of worship can be undertaken by those capable of doing so, the critics do not seem to appreciate the greatness of the Lord. Lord's grace is certainly not withheld in the case of worship with simple means if practised with purity of thought, even as He is pleased with worship conducted elaborately and sincerely with extensive practice of meditation. Here it is not between Bhakti and Prapatti that Bhattar makes a distinction. The distinction attempted here is between the elaborate form of Bhakti, which Ramanuja has dealt with in Vedanta Sutras and the comparatively simpler modes of worship, which Ramanuja has approved, as would be seen in his commentary on Bhagavad Gita. The question whether the simpler forms of worship and devotion would lead to the full knowledge of God or only to the beginning of that knowledge after clearing away the obstacles, is not perhaps critical to the devotee, who rests assured of the grace of the Lord in any case. The very experience of chanting His names with devotion or meditating on His infinite auspicious qualities is on its own a grand blessed state, which overshadows the thought of the final goal of release. A similar sentiment is in evidence when Vedanta Desika expressing his deep devotion to Lord Varada of Kanchi declares that if only he is in His vicinity, assured of association with all His devotees, then this very world is a state of liberation for him. What is more, with all this enjoyment here with the Lord, he has no intention at all to desire Sri Vaikunta as his residence [Sri Varadaraja Panchasat-43, 49].

Ramanuja is clear about the distinction between the Lord's general compassion for all His creatures and His special affection for those devoted to Him. Kurattalvan is so overwhelmed with Lord's abundant and unflinching compassion for one and all, whether they are worthy or not, that he appears to be belittling the efforts of those who court Him with devotion. This unequal match finds eloquent expression in Vedanta Desika's Daya Satakam as well. Kurattalvan has thus variously brought home the five accessories of Prapatti - the will to do what is agreeable to the Lord, avoidance of what is disagreeable, intense faith, helplessness and prayer for His protection.

Surrender is declared unambiguously as the only upaya which pleases the Lord. The term *nirhetuka-krupa* - causeless grace - does not appear to have been used by Ramanuja or Kurattalvan anywhere in their works. Tirukkuruhaï Piran Pillan, another disciple of Ramanuja wrote the first commentary on Nammalvar's Tiruvoimozhi, called the Six Thousand, which is believed to contain his preceptor's oral comments; in fact he adopts frequently the phraseology used by Ramanuja. Pillan employs the term *nirhetuka* more than once, not in immediate conjunction with *krupa* but as adjectival to divine action and dispensation. The eternal lila or sport of creation, maintenance and destruction is the supreme act of compassion for His creatures and it may be termed as *nirhetuka-krupa* because He is exercised and concerned about the jivas finding their way out of samsara sooner than later; on the other hand, ready response to the prayer from the afflicted is *sahetuka-krupa*, as the grace is prayer-triggered. In fact the prayer is also caused by the Lord at the appropriate juncture. Without His grace he will not be able to pray and without that prayer His redemptive grace will not descend. Pillan indicates in a number of places that the easier alternative to Bhaktiyoga is the direct and total reliance on the grace of the Lord. If those on death-beds would only remember the Lord with only a single folding of hands [anjali] or just a thought, it would be better than Bhakti yoga [Tiruvoimozhi 1-3-8, 3-2-6, 3-2-8]. What about those who do not adopt any upaya at all? On the verse 6-10-8, Pillan comments: "Can one, devoid of means, desiring to see Him, attain Him at all? Even lower deities, without means, desired to see and saw Him; I wish to reach you and even if you do not come to me permanently, you can come to me, as you did to rescue the elephant caught by the crocodile." On 3-3-6, Pillan: "Pronouncing *namah* to the Lord of Venkatam, which is easy and open to all, all the sins which hinder *kainkarya* as well as sins yet to be committed will get wiped away completely. Thereafter you may do as you please."

### *Rationale of the mandates in Sastras as against the laws of Karma*

Sastras point out that people have to accept - cannot avoid - the consequences of the karma - good or bad - of the countless previous lives and there is no question of fleeing from them. They have to suffer out the karma in the present life as well as in future lives, if necessary. A person who had been committing sins in earlier lives is inclined towards sinning in the present life; if he had been doing good and noble acts, he shows promise of continuing such work in this life as well. The measure of happiness and sorrow he is fated to experience now has already been determined by the good and evil acts of his earlier life. It is the inexorable law of karma. Man may go round all the worlds but he cannot secure happiness more than what his past work would justify. We do see a person endowed with wealth passing away while being very young, without enjoying the blessings of riches; a man mired in poverty lives too long; a woman of beauty and grace suffers the pangs of being ever in want; an ugly woman lives happily long in the midst of plenty and prosperity. Wise men who understand this truth will neither grieve nor be puzzled or worried about all these happenings in life. This is the substance of what the King Mahabali, having been defeated by Indra, tells Indra, who mocks at him in the flush of his victory. Endless misery pursues and torments the righteous Yudhistira, the warrior Arjuna, the strong and mighty Bhima and the noble Draupati, despite the presence and support of the Lord who is always on their side - can there be anything more surprising in this world, asks Bhishmacharya? The long and short of it is that the actions in past lives invariably constitute the *raison d'être* for the joy, grief and

misery in this life.

If Karma is so merciless, should a person stricken with disease refuse to be treated with medicines as prescribed by Ayurveda Sastras or decline to perform propitiatory acts like gifts, charity, rites of fire, prayer with offerings and also refrain from resorting to other remedies prescribed in Sastras? Would that not mean that the prescribing Sastras are futile? If a person is destined to suffer or continue to sin helplessly thanks to his Karma, what is the relevance of Sastras mandating that nobody should sin at all but do always the good in accordance with Dharma? If a person, impelled by the inherited tendency to do well always, is acting correctly on his own, there is no need for any Sastras to dictate a righteous course of conduct for him.

It is explained that the effect of bad Karma creates a tendency to sin again, but it is possible to resist the tendency with the help of knowledge of Sastras and the freedom to act, conferred by the Lord. Sastras, dearer to us more than the mother, however prescribe specific atonements with repentance, penance, gifts and sacrifices to tide over the distress, suffered on account of previous Karma. Such atonement is generally effective either in cancelling out mostly the Karma-effect or at least in mitigating the suffering. It is asked: if such suffering can be easily got rid of through atonement, where is the question of previous Karma having its effect at all, by being experienced in this life? It might appear that going through the motion of atonement will resolve the problem with ease and the sinner gets away without paying for the wrongs he committed. It is explained here that the very act of prescribed atonement with repentance and a determination not to sin again amounts to the sinner experiencing the effect of Karma in the normal course. The atonement here is not a make-believe operation but the turning point to repent and keep away from sinning again.

Is it just and proper that for the same sin, a person should be allowed to suffer from a dreaded disease and also be permitted to escape it by the lighter route of atonement? It is explained that in times and places where sins are committed even when they are avoidable and there is also no repentance, the sinner is generally punished through disease and other sorrows. Compelled by circumstances of time and place, if a sin is committed and due repentance torments the person, he becomes eligible for a lighter punishment through sincere atonement, which would ward off a punishing disease or the sorrow of bereavement.

There are instances where Sastra-ordained atonement proves ineffective, because powerful Karma works relentlessly against remedial action. Exceptions would also arise in cases where the Karma effect has to be necessarily experienced and there is no getting away, as for example, when a person happens to have received a powerful curse. The story of Takshaka biting the King Parikshit and Kasyapa approaching the King for a reward to enable him to remove the poison through Mantra is relevant here. The moment Kasyapa learns that the time is up for the King to depart, he retreats and collects the booty from Takshaka instead.

On the point that Sastras dictating that people should do good are redundant or futile in the case of a person doing good on his own, as a result of his virtuous acts in past lives and that the injunctions against sins will not be effective in the case of an individual bent on sinning as a consequence of his previous sinful life, it should be understood that the effect of Karma is only to create a tendency for good and bad action and it is not intended that the action is required to

be completed as a Karmic effect. As an illustration, a person sells seeds to a buyer and the seller's object is limited to the purpose of the seeds germinating after being duly planted. The seller is not concerned with the nursing of the plants and reaping the benefits of the yield. Similarly, for one who performs the sacrifice prescribed for begetting a progeny, the object is only to have the blessing of a child's arrival in the family and the sacrifice is not to ensure that the child will have a long and a happy life, will be respectful to the parents always and will also have his sons in due course and so on. Similarly, the tendency to an action, right or wrong, as a result of Karma, need not result in the completion of the intended action, since the person has the benefit of Sastraic knowledge for proper action and has been given the freedom to act accordingly.

Bhakti Yoga and Prapatti are different modes of expiation, sanctioned by the scriptures; the former is a tough exercise spread over more than one life-time resting on the perseverance and effort of the aspirant for liberation; the latter is comparatively less arduous but is no less onerous in the sense that it demands intense faith in the means towards the end, with the assured realization fructifying definitely before or at the end of this life, as asked for. Bhakti Yoga wipes away the sins of past lives incurred up to the point of commencement of the exercise but the aspirant has to phase out progressively the effect of Prarabdha Karma starting from that point, through his yoga lasting over more than one life-time as may be warranted. In the case of Prapatti, which is rendered only once, the Lord takes the place of Bhakti and it is ensured that all the past sins and aberrations are written off and realization materializes during or at the end of this life.

### *Lord and the sinner*

God is the supreme Lord of the universe, including the Nityas who were and are never subject to bondage. He loves His beings dearly and His constant desire is that the jivas [beings] - angels and mortals alike - should for ever enjoy His presence and participate in His infinite glory and wealth in an endless bliss of communion. In fact the sentient jiva is described as being as dear unto the Lord as His precious Kaustubha gem, which is worn next to His heart. It is jiva's right to glorify and exalt Him; so it is a royal heritage from Him - The Empire of Service - Kinkaratva adhirajya. But man has unfortunately strayed away and has been ceaselessly and aimlessly rolling in the cycle of births and deaths in the barren land of Prakriti. Slavery to the transient cravings of the senses and the sins committed in the countless lives of the past have deprived him of his native light of pure knowledge and lured him away from the eternal happiness of communion with the Lord. How does the Lord then treat the sinner? The proneness to sinning on the part of man is somehow there, as a result of anadi-karma, which is causally inexplicable. The self is essentially pure and sin is only an incident. It is not to be considered as an inherent depravity or original sin, as described elsewhere in another religion which considers man as an eternal sinner. Every jiva, originally pure, had ignored Lord's mandates and slipped; while he merits punishment for the lapses, he is entitled to seek pardon and liberation. If God is to let off the unrepentant sinner, He would be unjust; it would do Him no credit, if He were to treat alike both the repentant and the unrepentant. It has been said that an All-merciful God is unjust! All the same, the repentance, which should be genuine, is only a feeble pretext for the free flow of His unbounded compassion towards the sinner.



Lord declares:

"I am the same towards all beings. None is My enemy and none is dear to Me. But those who worship Me with devotion dwell in Me and I, too, dwell in them." [Sri Bhagavad Gita 9-29]

"O Mukunda! You are full of compassion. You are indeed impartial, in the face of beginningless, different and unequal karmas of people. You are only looking for some self-created pretext or token for making them realize you. This friendly gesture or quality is inherent in you for ever." [Vedanta Desika in Sri Saranagati Dipika-14]

**The Sarvaloka Saranya, with His infinite compassion, guarantees salvation eventually to all jivas and there need be no reservations on this score.**

The merit of prapatti emphasized by Vedanta Desika derives its sanction from the Upanishads which uphold the Nyasa vidya as one of the several vidyas enumerated and discussed in Brahma sutras. Its central principle is the thought that man is incapable of performing the sastra-ordained rites for the expiation of all his past and present sins and thus attaining the liberation from the cycle of birth and death. Therefore Isvara has to be chosen as the only means or upaya for this purpose, in other words, for consummating an exercise that would otherwise last through many lives. Unlike Vedic rites, this route is open to all alike and is easily understood. The only requisites are sincere revulsion and horror at one's sins and their consequences and an awareness of one's utter helplessness otherwise than believing in God for salvation. A person who places the burden of saving him at the feet of God with such a firm frame of mind and unwavering faith in Him has thereafter no cause for any fear or doubt. God's assurances have been given variously in the Upanishads, Ramayana, Gita and elsewhere thus: "He who offers himself to Brahman by Nyasa attains to eternal beauty", "Nyasa is the greatest of all penances", "I shall never let fall my devotee", "I give the assurance of protection to him who surrenders himself to me - that is my vow", "Take refuge in me alone, I shall purge you of all your sins and liberate you, do not grieve" and so on.

At first sight one might entertain reservations about winning God's grace through Nyasa or Prapatti, because it appears so easy. A little reflection will show that the difficulty in developing the high degree of faith [mahavisvasa] and discipline required as the ingredients of surrender is by no means small, compared to requirements in the other paths to salvation. Prapatti performed, as indicated under the guidance of the preceptor, wins the grace of Isvara without fail and assures liberation forthwith, if so desired, or at the end of this very life. In this process, Isvara is the means and Isvara is the end; this is somewhat paradoxical, as in everyday life we are only familiar with means as clearly distinct from the goal to be reached. One of the elements of prapatti at the time of performance is the determination to do whatever is pleasing to Isvara and avoid what is not pleasing to Him, as laid down in Sastras. It is expected that the Prapanna will abide by this determination during the post-prapatti period but this aspect of conforming to the determination is not part of the Prapatti. If there happens to be a lapse on this account, the goal of liberation at the end of the life will not be denied - so declare the Sastras which cannot be challenged but have to be implicitly accepted. A prapanna is not likely to commit any offence and even if he does unknowingly, he will be forgiven; if done knowingly, an appropriate atonement will have to be performed but he will not be denied the promised liberation at the end of the life.

In the case of a prapanna, who has committed sins knowingly, for which no atonement is made for some reason or other, there will be difference only with regard to the delay in release from samsara. He would perhaps have a longer life, beset with troubles and sorrows and, what is more, the agony of bereavement in the untimely passing away of dear young ones in the family. All the same, prapatti properly rendered will certainly bear fruit at the end of the life, however prolonged.

It should be borne in mind that the comparative simplicity of the route of surrender is not to be overestimated in regard to the due observance of the prescribed components of prapatti. Caution is necessary on this account as some of the zealous instructors put out the assurance of liberation at the end of an exercise that lasts only a few minutes. Even prior to the performance of prapatti, competent and compassionate preceptors insist on thorough and due preparation on the part of the jiva who undertakes to surrender himself totally at the feet of Isvara for the only goal, which is liberation from the samsara cycle. It would be unfortunate if the full implications are not explained and understood with due and equal emphasis on the imperative of the post-prapatti conduct of the prapanna. In fact the conduct of a prapanna is a spartan saga of self-effacement, discipline, absolute contentment, service to Isvara and His devotees and unalloyed satisfaction in looking forward happily to the certain consummation of release once for all from the bondage.

A slight digression is made here to make a point. 'Inconsistency is the hobgoblin of small minds' is a famous favourite quote for the self-serving opportunist in public life. Consistency is worshipped by the self-righteous even at the risk of clinging to shaky theories initially advertised as infallible. Consistency is the youngest of the virtues. It has all the arrogance of the parvenu. Those who boast that they never say one thing and do another are generally people whose sayings and doings matter very little. The man who never hesitates to act on his convictions is a danger to society if he gives up his opinions as lightly as he picks them up. The scientist wedded to logical moves at every stage cannot resist the temptation to make an illogical, yet innovative, initiative to sustain his creed. When the classical physics, founded on consistency, failed to deliver at the quantum level, quantum theory at the unpredictable levels came to the rescue. Niels Bohr refused to bat his eyelid and challenged Einstein till the end, even as the latter spent the evening years of his life in a vain search for a consistent explanation of the universe. The philosophical position is no less enviable. Seeming paradoxes have to be accepted at some stage or the other unquestioningly. Even as the cause of the cyclical expansion and contraction of the universe remains to be satisfactorily explained by the physicist, the Vedantin explains the theory of creation, sustenance and absorption of the universe as the eternal operation of God's determination [sankalpa] in the process of redeeming the dormant souls in pralaya and launching them on again during creation to fend for themselves with his grant of a little intelligence and knowledge and letting them return to the cycle again and again till some of them at least get out once and for all from the circle. This exercise goes on for ever. Why should God do or permit this exercise? Well, it is His sankalpa, it is His prerogative. It is His causeless grace [nirhetuka krupa]. Why should He indulge this particular fancy? That is His sport-lila. No further enquiry is necessary. Now the question is asked - should the jiva [soul] himself exert to get out of the samsara circle or wait patiently till He lets him out one day thanks to His causeless grace? In

other words, should he surrender actively making use of the intelligence bestowed on him or should he remain passive like the proverbial chataka bird? The clever bird incidentally flies about fully aware that with his open mouth he is bound to catch the rain drops! God's endowment of intelligence and knowledge would obviously trigger and justify an effort on the part of the jiva to pray and wait for the result - does he not, in everyday life, actively get absorbed in work without taking any chances? On the other hand, the limitless abundance of His grace would seem to dwarf and stultify the jiva's tiny exertions [squirming!] to merit His grace.

The catch here is the presupposed knowledge of His unfailing grace, without conceding that the knowledge is either a means or a conscious effort. The paradox or quibbling between grace caused and uncaused, like the north and the south standing apart, is not dissimilar to the conundrum of a single entity assuming the roles of both upaya and upeya - in other words, the endeavour and the end. Implicit in this approach is the apparent question of the relevance of another factor and that causes all the confusion about the need for exertion on the part of the jiva in the process. The hapless jiva is caught between the two, having, at long last, acquired a human status after wading through several lower forms of life also, following the mercy release from the dormant condition in the pralaya state. The compassionate Providence, given to sport with a sense of humour, decides to dower the jiva with a little knowledge, an euphemism for self-importance. Instantly the situation changes radically. The jiva springs into action and plunges into the worldly life the whole hog. If His grace flows, it is likely he may work for his salvation; without that grace he continues to go round and round. There is another equally self-conscious person who prefers to stay on in the world with a passive acquiescence in the certainty that the God who lifted him out of the pralaya would also set him free on His own without any exertion or exercise on his part. Who will have the last laugh?

Let us look at some of the authorities:

### *Ahirbudhnya Samhita*

Saranagati is a six-fold act - Intention to do whatever is pleasing to the Lord, the avoidance of whatever is displeasing to Him, the faith that He will offer protection, beseeching His protection, and the feeling of helplessness. The surrender of the self is the sixth - angi - the complete process, which is prapatti or saranagati, while the five others are angas or accessories. [37- 28, 29].

The prapatti that I perform to the Lord is itself eternal fruition to me; I desire no other fruit than this. This absence of the desire for any fruit other than prapatti is itself considered as the chief anga. The desire for the fruit is opposed to this." [52-14].

I am the abode of transgressions; I am without any other means of protecting myself, I have nothing else to attain other than Thee. [37-30].

Be pleased to be my upaya. This thought of prayer is called saranagati; let it be performed to the Lord. [37-31].

### *Lakshmi Tantram:*

No protection would be given, when it is not sought. [17-73].



"I seek the refuge of Thy Feet, O Saranya!" - Sacred Feet of SrI Perarulala Perumal  
Thanks: SrI Kausik Sarathy

Nyasa or self-surrender which has the word nikshepa for a synonym has five angas and is also called sannyasa, tyaga or saranagati. [17-75].

By the determination to do whatever is pleasing and avoiding whatever is displeasing, one would steer clear of transgression of His command. [17-76].

Karpanya is abstention from seeking any other upaya because of inability - almost synonymous with akinchanya [17-77].

From the faith that He will protect arises the performance of the desired upaya. [17-77].

Seeking the Lord as Saviour is to make our mind known to Him. [17-78].

The Lord is omniscient and always compassionate and controls everything; but He does expect a prayer for protection, as He has to look after the process of samsara. The point here is that if He were to redeem everybody, sinner or not, without an appeal from the latter, He would be open to the charge of partiality and cruelty. [17-78].

*Nammalvar: Tiruvoymozhi: [6-10-10]*

O Lord of Venkatam, desired by celestials and great sages! Falling at your feet, this refugeless self has found his refuge.

*Alavandar: Stotraratnam:*

I seek the refuge of Thy feet, O Saranya, I have no other upaya and nothing else to attain than Thee. [22]

*Alavandar: Gitarthasangraha*

Looking upon all disciplines from performance of duty to the practice of Bhakti as meant only for pleasing the Lord and not with any extraneous motive, one should abandon all dependence on any other means than Him [the Supreme Person], and remain without any fear of inadequacy of such resignation in respect of his salvation.[31]

*Ramanuja: Vaikunta Gadyam:*

I am aware that there is no upaya for me in all the thousands of crores of kalpas other than performing prapatti at Thy lotus-like feet.

*Vedanta Desika*

O Varada, you are the permanent causeway, the means of attaining your self, for those who are not able to secure the boat of bhakti and reach the other shore of this ocean of worldly existence. [Varadaraja Panchasat-31]

O Karisa, Why do you have to look for external qualifications, dharmas like Nitya-Naimittika [mandatory and occasional] in me, who am helpless and destitute, just to protect me? Your sankalpa, that is your Will, which is ever alert in protecting the world, is it not efficient on its own to redeem me? [Vardaraja Panchasat-37]

O Mukunda, You are compassionate; you are impartial so far as various unequal and beginningless karmas of people are concerned. You create the pretext yourself and hasten to redeem those caught in the mire of samsara. That shows your natural concern for them. [Saranagati dipika-14]

O Lord, you assume flawless births [incarnations], which are not devoid of your divine qualities, not at all earthly, as a sport only to protect your devotees and destroy the enemies, in other words, to establish the ancient dharma of krita yuga. [Saranagati dipika-17]

These various unimpeachable authorities are unanimous on the imperative of consciously surrendering to Him in the absence of ability and confidence to resort successfully to any other upaya. Upaya stands for the *means* to an end; this *means* may be either sentient or insentient.

In this case the upaya is the Lord Himself. The prayer for protection is addressed with full faith to Him direct, who, though omniscient, does expect the prayer which pleases Him. So here it should be understood that in the place of bhakti the Lord is placed and therefore it is not a case of prapatti being put in the place of bhakti. Whereas bhakti yoga depends on due performance of karma yoga and the like including the remembrance of the Lord at the last moment, prapatti is an independent means, comprising only such prescribed elements like faith which constitute the act of prapatti. Ahirbudhnya samhita makes it clear that it is an address to the Lord beseeching Him to be the upaya. When it is declared by the Lord that He can be attained either by bhakti or prapatti and by no other means, it is clear that while prapatti is an upaya no doubt, it is not an upaya in the sense bhakti is understood to be. Prapatti does not take the place of bhakti but Lord places Himself in the place of bhakti and grants the desired end. This understanding is very necessary because bhakti and prapatti are generally described as upayas, both of which are intended to please the Lord and earn His goodwill to enable Him to grant the goal which is prayed for.

Lest there should be an impression that the seeker who desires moksha is himself responsible for securing it through his effort and prayer addressed to the Lord, Vedanta Desika affirms in Nyaya Siddhanjanam that the understanding or knowledge that the Lord [of Sri] alone is the upaya for realizing moksha rules itself [this very knowledge of the need for an effort for the purpose] out as an upaya. It is argued by some that this statement is itself an affirmation that prapatti is not an upaya at all, and has been so conceded by Vedanta Desika. It is actually to be taken only as a statement to reiterate that the Lord alone is the principal upaya because it is He who bestows directly the fruit. Any other interpretation runs contrary to the consistent stand taken by Vedanta Desika throughout that prapatti as an upaya is only a gesture or vyaja - so is bhakti also in fact - to enable the jiva to court the Lord with full faith and confidence. It is not an upaya in the sense that it is capable of directly securing liberation; it is a means to please Him for it is He alone who can and does grant liberation. The injunction "Surrender unto me alone" is a direction for compliance and in that sense the act of surrender gains the status of a direct Upaya or means; when the direction is followed and practised, the knowledge of it as a direct means disappears in the light of the clear declaration that He alone is the means or

**Upaya for realization.** The understanding of the mandate for surrender gives rise to its perception as a means but the practice of surrender removes the character of its instrumentality. The nuances of the affirmation of Vedanta Desika in Nyaya Siddhanjanam are perhaps intended to alert the scholars who are apt to let slip the truth from their grasp.

Paramatma acts on His own and He is credited with the reputation of conferring His grace without any bargain - this is a position that will be vitiated if it is held that He acts only on the prior action of the seeker, like the practice of Prapatti. Anticipating this doubt, Lokacharya in his Sri Vachanabhushanam clarifies that at the time of adopting the Upaya, there is a dependence on the person as well as the supporting entity but when the Upaya is completed, there is no factoring in of dependence; Paramatma accomplishes the objective without any expectation whatsoever. The conception of non-expectation is thus not related to the Upaya stage but to the stage of completed action on the part of the Prapanna. That Bhakti and Nyasa are only Upayas in the nature of Vyajas - pretexts, which are necessary, have also been clearly brought out in Yatindramatadipika [Seventh avataaram] of Srinivasacharya.

Neither logic nor inference can establish the existence of God. Sastras are the only authority for His existence, as logic and inference, however subtle, are vulnerable to subtler variations of deduction. Sastras proclaim that God alone is the sole pre-existing means [Siddhopaya] for redeeming every one of us out of the system, in which we find ourselves for reasons known and unknown. Can man, fed up with the system, appeal to the Almighty for deliverance? He cannot, unless there is scope for appeal which has to be pre-validated by His general sanction. It is that appeal, provided by the Sastras, that takes the form of upaya [Sadhyopaya] and to that appeal He listens and decides on His own. The famous paradox of a system failing to validate itself on the strength of the axioms within that system is probably anticipated in the pithy and subtle declaration of Vedanta Desika in Nyaya Siddhanjanam referred to in the foregoing para. If "whatever I say is a lie" is a true confessional statement, it is instantly falsified because the maker of the statement is a self-confessed liar. Unless the statement is accepted at face-value, no further appreciation is possible.

To illustrate: an affluent philanthropist takes pity on a poor neighbour who works and sweats all the day for a morsel of food. He asks him to stop working immediately for his food. "Come to my house for your food and eat freely." The poor man is delighted and awaits the call so generously promised. He stops working but the call never materializes. One day he makes bold to remind the philanthropist, who replies without batting an eyelid: "My dear man! I asked you to stop working for food. You have stopped working in anticipation of food from me. This way, by refraining from your customary work and remaining in that state of no-work, you have really *worked* for your food from me! You have thus not stopped *working* for your food. So, no food for you, as you have not kept the word!"

The Lord advised the depressed Arjuna: "Give up all dharmas and surrender unto me." Surrender is also a dharma and therefore, should that also be given up? Again 'giving up everything *including* surrender' is also a dharma - should that be given up? It is absurdity *ad infinitum*!

**In the same fashion, the statement that "You alone are the upaya "cannot be faulted, much**

less twisted to suggest that the statement denies its own validity, when there is an undisputed upaya, namely, the Lord already existing for ever as Siddhopaya, which needs no certification from anybody else and least of all from the one, awaiting the favour of redemption. That He alone is the Upaya eliminates other Upayas is a fact no doubt; but will it also do away with dependence on auxiliary support - Purushakara? The use of the word "eva - alone" does not certainly indicate exclusion of other attributes; this has been established in Braahmadhikaranam [4-4] by the Sutrakara, while explaining that the nature of the individual self is not only consciousness but also consists of other attributes like freedom from sin etc.

Bhakti yoga is a discipline recognized and sanctioned in the Upanishads and authenticated by sage Vyasa in his Brahma Sutras as well as by seers who have practised it as mandated. It is no doubt a tough tract, tortuous and prolonged towards a distant goal promised at an unspecified point of time in the future, probably crossing over several lives. There are no doubt quite a few in our midst, who still practise it but we do not come to know of them; obviously they do not need our recognition or certification which is of no value. Bhakti yoga is not preferred or advocated because of our deficiency and inability to cope with its exacting requirements. It is certainly not because it is a practice essentially against human nature. Sastras, on which we rely, are not expected to suggest anything unnatural or inimical to human interests. To reject bhakti yoga on this ground is little short of disowning Sastras which are dearer to us than the mother. We don't have to fault the teacher for our consistent poor score. Wisdom lies in finding out and adopting the course suitable to us and our nature. Bhakti is upasana, that is, loving contemplation, which is a difficult extended exercise. Prapatti or Saranagati is loving surrender, easy of adoption and practice. Both are Upanishadic means to the attainment of liberation. Prapatti is implicitly brought out by Vyasa in his Brahma Sutras while the Sutras as such carry a detailed exposition of the different modes of Upasana. Ramanuja and his commentator Srutapraksikacharya have explained how Prapatti or Nyasa has also been clearly intended to be conveyed in the Sutras in more than one place. Upasana is implicit in Swamy Nammalvar's Tiruvoimozhi [1-2], while Prapatti is his explicit theme throughout. As the foremost exponent of Prapatti, having practised it ardently, Nammalvar is hailed as the first Kulapathi of those who practise Prapatti as the means to the attainment of Moksha or liberation.

We have not heard of any abbreviated or compressed version of Bhakti yoga to conform to our varying and diminishing abilities. It is not a case of modifying the dosage or the strength of the medicine. On the other hand, Prapatti or self-surrender is altogether a different upaya [its connotation should be correctly appreciated] certainly not designed to replace bhakti, as has been already outlined. Prapatti is a one-time act of surrender to the Lord who readily volunteers to replace the other upayas and stand in their place to confer the benefit. The five components of prapatti culminating in self-surrender are indispensable. These self-surrender amounts to a one-time covenant between us and the Lord, witnessed, as it were, by the preceptor who pleads the case on our behalf. This covenant, once entered into, stands and is proof against revocation. The covenant does not have to be entered into again and again every moment or everyday. The practice is also in accord with the practice prevalent in day-to-day transactions. The sacred contract of marriage is sanctified by declaration of mutual love and commitment, witnessed by the holy fire lit



for the purpose; this ritual is one-time and does bear no repetition, unless the husband chooses to marry again for valid reasons. The most important consequence of the performance of prapatti is the meticulous observance of the prescribed post-prapatti conduct which ennoble the prapanna and rehearses, as it were, his eventual enthronement and opportunity of uninterrupted service to the Lord, assuredly awaiting him *hereafter*.

The point that the omniscient God is fully aware of His responsibility for lifting up the jivas who do not have to exert themselves, has been answered and it bears repetition to assert that God in His eternal sport of creation, sustenance and absorption makes it purposeful, complete and impartial by granting the knowledge and intelligence to every seeker, who is given the opportunity to redeem himself with the guidance of the Sastras and the teachers. But it is He who decides on the appropriate moment to dower every one of us with His grace; that specified moment is withheld from our knowledge; otherwise the truant seeker would prefer to wait for his turn and skirt any discipline which is not palatable. The temptation to remain squelching in the mire of unhappy samsara is irresistible, whatever the prospect of happiness promised later and elsewhere.

**The act of prapatti interpreted as just mental acquiescence in His grace would not correspond to the prapatti enunciated in Samhitas. Further, if His grace is taken for granted, irrespective of our actions righteous or otherwise, there is no need either to postulate even the mere awareness as necessary and sufficient, because, in any case, even in the absence of such awareness, He is going to take care of us at a moment entirely of His choice. This will lead us to the illogical position that creation and sustenance serve no purpose and the jivas would not have to be subjected to the travails of samsara - out of which it would fall to His lot to retrieve the sentient without any exertion on the latter's part. Where is the Lila or sport in this fruitless exercise? Where is the need to make available the Sastras and the gift of knowledge to understand the Sastras and follow them for our benefit or to disobey them at our peril?**

Quiet reflection and calm understanding are paramount when we move from the philosophical plane to details of application. Visistadvaita as a philosophy of mystic love is grounded on harmony and synthesis, without sacrificing individuality and also the concern for universal salvation. On the plane of theology and ritual observances, differences naturally build up and divide. Institutions founded on differences take different directions and are inclined towards conflict rather than tolerance and harmony, more or less for reasons similar to what have led to the situation in Christianity and Islam. Traditions are built around external observances, which take precedence over spiritual qualification and eligibility. Sri Vaishnavism which traces its ancestry to Upanishads - with the affirmation of its authority derived from Visistadvaita forcefully expounded by Ramanuja - has not freed itself from the stranglehold of doctrinal teaching of dogmas, which provoke attempts to resolve the disputes through the prevailing laws of the land. It is not realized that differences are not fundamental but more related to opinions and interpretations. The single issue of Lord's redeeming compassion, which is never in doubt, pitted against an unlikely 'foe', that is, man's surrender, which has never claimed to be a match for His compassion, is causing avoidable agitation even if there is no difference as to the nature of the goal. It is similar to the Christian question of whether salvation is justification by faith or by works. Sri Vaishnavism does not accept the position that the sin is original and it is atoned for by the sole

begotten son of God.

Vedanta Desika resolves the contradiction by affirming that the Lord is Himself the upaya and the upeya and therefore the true import of human responsibility is true contrition which evokes His unfailing sympathy and grace. The fusion of human surrender and divine compassion, the seemingly unmerited shower of His grace on the unworthy and the unrepentant, the inexplicable and contrasting drought when it comes to the religiously penitent and yet suffering, the mutual relationship between surrender and grace, their sequence unexplained in terms of cause and effect or timing or interval, human view of suffering as undeserved infliction and happiness as a deserved right - these are all issues shrouded mercifully in eternal impenetrable mysteries. Mercifully, because, otherwise, the theist and the atheist, the agnostic and the gnostic, the philosophers and the scientists, the grace-only-champions and the prayer-votaries would not have live issues to keep themselves engaged in plying or practising their trades or professions.

Whether it is devotion-cum-surrender or surrender-cum-devotion, the Lord is as keen on redeeming the soul as the soul is keen on attaining the bliss of communion. In fact the Lord's concern for the salvation of the soul is much more in as much as He has gifted all the Sastras for the guidance of the soul lost in worldly life. Alvars and Acharyas have gone through the experience and shared with us this great gift, which we can ill afford to miss or ignore except at the peril of revolving here endlessly through birth and death. Vedanta Desika's picture of the compassionate Lord being both upaya and upeya [the means and the end] in **Varadaraja Panchasat [31]** is at once appealing and complete in conveying the message of Prapatti being the sovereign path:

**"O Varada, you are the permanent causeway, the means of attaining yourself for those who are not able to secure the boat of bhakti and reach the other shore of the ocean of worldly existence."**

In the Brahma Sutra [3-3-24, Adhikaranam 9], there is a distinct reference to the Purusha Vidya occurring in the last anuvaka of the Taittiriya Narayana Upanishad, which describes the whole life of a Prapanna - inclusive of drinking and eating - as a sacrificial Yagna. "Yad asnaati yat pibati" occurring in the Vedic passage is echoed in the Bhagavad Gita as well. Both the commentaries of Sankara and Ramanuja say that this Purusha Vidya is an Anga to the Nyasa Brahma Vidya, described earlier. The Atma-havis is to be offered to Brahman with the Vasuranya Mantra and the utterance of Pranava, which stresses the seshatva of the jiva.

Ramanuja in his Saranagati Gadyam describes Saranagati as Paramarthiki and Yathavasthita and continuing during the whole of life without cessation; he has evidently Nyasa Vidya and Purusha Vidya in mind. Pillai Lokacharya in his Tani Charama Rahasyam explains the import of every word of this Purusha Vidya anuvaka, considering its significance to the Prapanna as showing the way of a wholly dedicated life and as an anga of the Saranagati Vidya.

There is a gripping allegorical account of the actual act of surrender in the Lord's message to Arjuna in a verse, the import of which can be amplified thus: [Sri Bhagavad Gita 4-24]

"This act of surrender of the self is an offering into the fire of Brahman. Brahman is the havis,

the oblation offered. Brahman is the fire into which Brahman makes the offering. The goal to be reached is Brahman itself. The giver is Brahman. The donee is Brahman. The soul given is Brahman. The act of giving is Brahman. The contemplation of Brahman in this fashion in all the acts is the means to attain the goal. Nothing is mine - nothing belongs to me. My act of self-surrender is not mine but His. If Brahman is all, Brahman must be I, the offered havis. It is not a case of my offering what is mine, but of His taking what is His." The following elucidation is in the context of the Lord's earlier delineation of a true Karma Yogi:

"Even the wise call him a sage, whose undertakings are all free from desire and thoughts of the world and whose actions are burnt by the fire of true knowledge. Having given up all attachment to actions and their fruit, he is ever satisfied, does nothing at all, though fully engaged in action. Having subdued his mind and body and given up all objects of enjoyment and free from craving, he who performs sheer bodily action, does not incur sin. Contented with whatever is got unsought, free from jealousy and having overcome the pairs of opposites like joy and grief and remaining balanced in success and failure, he is not at all bound by action. All his actions melt away, when he is freed from attachment, has no identification with the body and does not claim as his own, with mind established in the Knowledge of Self and working only for the sake of sacrifice." [Gita: 4-19, 20, 21, 22, 23].

Precisely all the elements of surrender are brought out vividly by Vedanta Desika in Nyasa Dasakam of ten hymns - the five accessories of Prapatti, the three types of Tyaga, called Sattvika Tyaga, namely Kartritva-tyaga, ascribing all agency to God, Mamata Tyaga, dedicating the act to the Lord alone and Phala Tyaga, ascribing the fruit of the act also to the Lord etc.

Alavandar offers whatever is *his*, denoted by 'I' and 'mine' at the lotus feet of the Lord and immediately explains himself: O Lord, whatever I have, whatever I am, all these, verily are Thine; or what shall I offer Thee, O Madhava, being awakened to the consciousness that all these are Thine own fixed property?" [Sri Stotraratnam-52, 53].

**Isavasyopanishad** compresses this grand truth in the prefatory mantra: "All this, whatsoever moves in this moving world, is pervaded by God. Through such renunciation, you may enjoy. Do not covet; for, whose indeed is wealth?" and concludes with the glorious doctrine of absolute surrender enunciated in the last two mantras 17 and 18.

### *A recapitulation*

The doctrine of surrender - the underlying explicit message of Srutis, Smritis Samhitas and Tiruvoimozhi, stressed implicitly in Brahma sutras, reiterated in the Charama sloka [Gita 18-66] both as an accessory and as an independent means, enunciated graphically in Alvandar's Stotraratnam and asserted as direct means in Ramanuja's Saranagati Gadyam - is extensively analysed and annotated by Vedanta Desika in works like Rahsyatrayasara, Rahasya Grantas, Abhayapradhana Sara, Tatparya Chandrika [commentary on Gita Bhashya], Niksheparaksha, Stotras like Nyasa Dasakam, Nyasa Vimsati, Nyasa Tilakam and Saranagati Dipika and also in Adaikkalappattu, to mention only a few.

Bhakti and Prapatti are only particular forms of jnana or knowledge. The statement that liberation is secured through knowledge [jnaanaat muktih] is applicable both to bhakti and prapatti.

These are only the two alternative ways or upayas by means of which the self may free itself of its past karma and secure the grace of Bhagavan, who being pleased thereby grants liberation.

Prapatti may be adopted as a preliminary way of approaching the Lord for the adoption and performance of bhakti. Prapatti may also be adopted as a direct means of securing God's grace and attaining moksha.

In the former case, prapatti is said to be an anga or accessory to bhakti; in the latter case when it is adopted as the primary and direct means, it becomes angi. It is therefore either anga prapatti or angi prapatti.

Bhakti is constant meditation on Brahman and His qualities, accompanied by proper and due performance of the rites and duties prescribed in the Sastras, such as the nitya and naimittika, appropriate to the Varna and Ashrama. This meditation has to continue day in and day out, through more than one life, till the last breath, almost attaining at the end a visual perception of Brahman.

This bhakti route is certainly difficult for ordinary persons. But if it is taken up and adopted correctly and perfectly, at one stage, all past karma, which hinders attainment of Brahman, is wiped out; that part of karma which has begun to show results - namely prarabdha - is also terminated by experiencing its effects either in this life or later in one or more future lives; at that point moksha is attained. Delay is inevitable in this process as there is no knowing when the prarabdha, which has begun in this life, will get exhausted and come to a close.

Sometimes bhakti is stated to include bowing before the *archa*, muttering His names, singing His praise and similar acts of offering flowers with devotion and love and also rendering service in Temples and so on. **These no doubt go to build bhakti but do not constitute bhakti yoga.**

Seven auxiliary states of mind are set out for bhakti yoga to become operative - i] viveka ii] vimoka iii] abhyasa iv] kriya v] kalyanani vi] anavasada and vii] anuddharsha. With the aid of these virtues, what resembles visual perception of Bhagavan emerges; the three stages of progress described by Ramanuja are para bhakti, para jnana and parama bhakti.

When Bhagavan is pleased with the act of bhakti or prapatti duly performed, He gives up the idea of punishing the devotee for his commissions and omissions against His dictates, namely Sastraic injunctions. This is what is implied, when karma is stated to have been destroyed.

Prapatti is seeking refuge in Bhagavan - seeking Bhagavan as the refuge for one's salvation. It amounts to placing Him in the place of Bhakti, which is beyond the devotee's competence to undertake and consummate. This is also called Nyasa, Nikshepa, Bharanyasa, Saranagati and Bhara samarpanam. Prapatti has five angas or accessories and these are mental attitudes - the will to do what is agreeable to the Lord, avoidance of what is not agreeable to Him, intense faith, utter helplessness and prayer seeking His protection. With these accessories as pre-qualifications, the seeker surrenders his self to the Lord.

The basic principle in Prapatti is that the seeker has realized his incapacity to perform the rites and duties incumbent on him for the expiation of his sins and for the attainment of moksha. Therefore he seeks God as the upaya or the means. Out of His natural compassion, God is pleased

and ignores or pardons all his sins and grants the prayer for salvation either at once, if he so desires or at the end of this very life - no more earthly life for him at all and he is assured of eternal bliss of service to the Lord in Sri Vaikunta. The one who is impatient and wishes to attain moksha without any delay is called *aarta*; the other who is prepared to endure the sufferings of this life until death is called *dripta*. Prayers in both cases are doubtless fulfilled.

It will be seen that competence for performing Prapatti arises either from want of knowledge of the upaya bhakti as prescribed in Sastras or incapacity to adopt it, even if he has the knowledge. In the case of a person who has both knowledge of the Sastras and capacity but cannot endure the delay in the bhakti route, Prapatti can be performed for immediate realization.

This Prapatti has to be performed under the guidance of the Acharya with the prescribed mantras. There are two forms in which it is performed these days. The form in which the disciple is made to repeat the mantras of Prapatti is called Uktinishta. In the other, the Acharya performs it for him; he does not have to utter the mantras. This is called Acharyanishta.

Prapatti is called Sadhyopaya, which means that the person has to adopt it in accordance with the Sastras and with the Acharya's directions. Bhagavan is called Siddhopaya as He is already there for ever to redeem the seeker or the mumukshu, namely, one desirous of release from samsara.

Having performed Prapatti with the determination, at the time of performance, to do what is pleasing to the Lord and not what is displeasing to Him, where is the certainty that the Prapanna will not stray or slip and commit mistakes [after the performance] that will incur His wrath? Human nature is erratic, wayward and unpredictable. True. *Sastras* have anticipated and responded to such reservations. First, there is no doubt whatsoever that the Prapanna will attain moksha in spite of his mistakes, which, however, he is unlikely to make. If the mistakes are not deliberate, but only incurred unknowingly, Lord will ignore. If the offences happen to be deliberate, he should offer expiation which *Sastras* have prescribed and Lord will readily pardon. The prescribed expiation is normally spelt out in *Sastras*; the preceptor knows them and will guide. If they are tough and impossible of execution, Prapatti again, which Lord will accept, will be the solution. This Prapatti is only a specific expiation and not for the goal of moksha, of which he has already been assured. If for some reason or other he does not perform this expiation, he has to receive and suffer the appropriate punishment in this very life. The suffering may take the form of going blind or becoming lame or losing friends or relatives or getting socially or otherwise alienated. Moksha is assured all the same at the end of this life as prayed for by him.

There are two categories of qualified persons: those who adopt Prapatti as the sole and direct means and those to whom Prapatti is auxiliary to the principal means, namely, Bhakti. We can call both as Prapannas because they adopt Prapatti either as independent means or as auxiliary means. We can call them also as Bhaktas - because bhakti is the fruit for the former and in the case of the latter serves as the means. Phala bhakti is bhakti which arises as fruit of prapatti; bhakti which leads to moksha is sadhana bhakti.

The one who chooses to adopt Prapatti as the means to bhakti is not one who is absolutely helpless [akinchana]. He is capable of enduring the delay in the attainment of moksha; which he will realize only at the termination of the effect of the karma, which has begun to yield the fruit



"Place the burden of protection on Him!" - SrI Perarulala Perumal - Thirukkacchi  
Thanks: SrI Kausik Sarathy

[prarabdha], with the intense thoughtful remembrance of the Lord at the last moment before he shuffles off his mortal coil. This termination of the prarabdha effect may take place either at the end of this life or more lives in the future. This bhakti or upasana route is open to the first three varnas only and it has to be performed meticulously in accordance with the prescribed rules and injunctions.

On the other hand, Prapatti is open to all without distinction; is easy of adoption; it has to be performed only once; averts all obstacles to moksha; and can bring about the fulfilment of the desired goal without any hitch. The five accessories are the only requirements, intense faith being an essential element; his liberation will materialize at the desired moment - either immediately or at the moment of the body's fall in due course.

When a desired object is difficult to attain - either through one's own effort or other means - Prapatti is the placing of the responsibility or burden on another capable person with a supplication for his assistance. If this upaya is adopted by a seeker after moksha, the angī is the surrender of his self or atma with a clear understanding that neither in the act of prapatti nor in its fruit, does he have any independence. It is like a person surrendering a jewel belonging to another person to be kept in the latter's safe custody for the latter's own use.

To all aspirants of moksha, whether they are bhaktas or prapannas, the surrender of one's svarupa or self and the rest, namely, its fruit is a common goal. To the prapanna, who is akinchana [helpless], the surrender of the responsibility for protection is an additional requirement. In fact to all prapannas, whatever the desired object, surrender of the responsibility is common. To the prapanna, who desires only moksha, the surrender of one's self as also the fruit therefrom is an additional imperative.

Surrendering of the self to the Lord for protection means that the seeker realizes that the self exists for the sole purpose of the Saviour and the self has no further responsibility for its protection and the fruit of the surrender is not his at all.

The one who adopts bhakti for liberation will no doubt have to put up with the delay caused by the need to expiate past karma in one or more bodies but he has the compensation in the unique happiness of devout meditation and worship for a long time here. The one who adopts prapatti is assured of moksha at the end of this life although the joy of worshipping is limited to the remaining short duration of this life. Vedanta Desika points to the unique privilege of the prapanna, whom the Lord coronates with His compassion and deploys for eternal service in the Divine abode, while granting him the status of a Princehood here till the body's fall [**Saranagati dipika-31**]. In fact, extolling the superior merit of Prapatti, Desika declares that those fortunate enough to practise the different Bhakti Yogas cannot approach anywhere near a hundred-croreth part of the state of one who has, impelled by the wealth of akinchanyam [helplessness], surrendered himself and the entire responsibility at the Lotus feet of Lord Devanayaka [**Sri Devanayaka Panchsat-47**].

In the scheme of upayas for the attainment of moksha, since only bhakti and prapatti are described as upayas, the relevance of karmayoga and jnana yoga explained at length in Gita has to be understood. Karma yoga is the performance of rites and duties, as a result of knowledge

acquired from the *Sastras* in regard to the nature of the jivatma and the Paramatma. The rites and duties which are to be done regularly and compulsorily are nitya karma; those to be performed compulsorily on specific occasions are naimittika; optional rites are kamyā karma, which is ordained for specific results, like svarga. Even as prapatti is indicated as direct means as well as auxiliary means for liberation, without and with bhakti intervening respectively, karma yoga is prescribed as the means directly or through jnana yoga for attaining a vision of one's own self - which is known as *atmaavalokana*.

Jnana yoga is achieved with the auxiliaries of yogic discipline like yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana and Samadhi. Samadhi is the āngi, which is included among the āngas, when it is described as ashtanga yoga. This yoga is the constant and uninterrupted contemplation by one [who has disciplined his mind through karma yoga] of his svarupa or self, as distinct from matter. His svarupa is the mode of the Lord by virtue of its relation to Him as His body. Having gone through karma yoga and jnana yoga reached a state of attaining a vision of his self, he is able to discard all sense-pleasures; then begins the bhakti yoga, by means of which he contemplates on the Bhagavan as the Inner Self or antaryamin of his own self which is His body. Vision of his own pure self enables him to reach its Inner Self, even as the cloth-bag containing a gem has to be seen before it is opened for viewing the gem inside. Prior vision of one's self is a pre-qualification for the practice of bhakti yoga.

Bhakti is of the form of a continuous stream of knowledge in the nature of uninterrupted memory, like the continuous flow of an oil-stream. Day in and day out, it is practised until the day of final departure, with the constant thought of the Lord till the moment of reckoning.

Performance of the rites and duties of one's Varna and Ashrama is integral to the practice of bhakti yoga. Practice of bhakti leads to para-bhakti which in its turn leads to para-jnana maturing into parama-bhakti. At this last stage, the bhakta is seized of an intense desire to experience the Lord without interruption - a condition described by Nammalvar in the Tiruvoimozhi [10-10].

Karma yoga and Jnana yoga are thus indirect and auxiliary means for securing moksha through bhakti. Bhakti yoga and Prapatti are direct and independent means. Unlike others, Prapatti has two forms[i] indirect and auxiliary, facilitating bhakti for securing moksha and [ii] direct means for obtaining mukti at the desired moment or at the end of this life.

To a man, who has a firm understanding and knowledge of his essential nature, of the upaya adopted by him and of the ultimate aim of life [purusharta], the very fact of his recognition of himself in this state is a source of more delight and joy than the knowledge of the certainty of approaching liberation. Such a person will never agree to do what is improper and will always do what is only proper. Such a person may be called an eternal *suri* living on this earth.

### *Further Elucidation*

**Prapatti or self-surrender has three distinct aspects:**

i] *Phala samarpana*, which is the abandonment of the idea that self-satisfaction or happiness is the supreme end of prapatti.

The true follower of prapatti is aware that he is an absolute dependent, subsists entirely in God



and exists only for His satisfaction and for none else. The true sesha is fully conscious that he is free from the selfish feelings of 'I', "my' and 'mine. So there is no question of his seeking aisvarya which is the pursuit of svarga; or kaivalya which is the inner joy of enjoying one's own self.

ii] *Bhara samarpana*, which is the renunciation of the sense of personal responsibility in the act of protection.

The seeker is incapable of protecting himself and therefore he renounces the sense of responsibility implied in the saving act. So He alone is the Redeemer - He is both the means and the end. The redemption does not therefore proceed from the will of the seeker, who is admittedly incapable. Redemption is an independent act of the Redeemer.

While bhakti yoga demands unceasing effort and vigil over more than one life-time, prapatti is not such an arduous path, which among others, involves intense faith in the saving power of His compassion.

iii] *Svarupa samarpana*, which is not only the shedding of ahamkara but also the gift of one's atma, the self to the Supreme Self who is the owner, without any trace of egoism whatsoever.

Everything belongs to Him and is offered to Him.

The quintessence of Visistadvaita is summarized in the first verse of **Vedanta Desika's Nyasa Dasakam**:

**'This self of mine, the responsibility of taking care of the self, the fruit of protecting the self - all these are not mine. They all belong to Him alone.'** With this thought, a wise man should place himself at the feet of the Lord of Sri.

The five accessories of Prapatti are brought out in this short hymn, along with the three types of renunciation - ascribing all agencies to God, dedicating the act to the Lord alone and ascribing the fruit of the act also to the Lord.

**The sanctity, power and glory of Prapatti** cannot be overestimated; Vedanta Desika highlights them on every conceivable occasion to drive home firmly the perennial wisdom of the Upanishads and Srimad Ramayana, in particular, which is considered the Science of Surrender - Saranagati Sastra, as brought out in his Abhayapradana Sara. Prapatti duly performed ensures liberation readily at that very moment or at the moment of departure in this very life; Bhakti yoga accomplishes that liberation sought after, in due course in this life or in one of the later lives. Apart from the observance of the prescribed accessories of surrender, including the essential component of intense faith, what has to be guarded against is committing even the slightest offence against the devotees of God as well as the temptation to propitiate gods other than Sriman Narayana, who is the sole Protector. Offences of this kind can defeat the very realization of the goal, assured otherwise through the simple yet powerful act of surrender. It is like the sage Agastya, who could with ease swallow in one gulp the waters of the huge ocean of whales! A small whale in the sea is swallowed by the bigger one, the bigger one by yet another bigger whale and so on; ultimately the sage could gulp down the ocean of all whales. Prapatti, like that august sage, is capable of wiping away the ocean of all the sins - the effect of all the karma, but is rendered ineffective, the moment the God's devotee is offended and his curse incurred. Yet

there is only one way out, that is, to ask for forgiveness from the one offended. The fish taken out of water can get back to life only by going back into the water. **[Vedanta Desika-Sankalpasuryodaya-3-232-234]**

Prapatti is capable of conferring liberation on the seeker who is keen on securing it immediately as well as when it is sought at the end of this life. This route is open to all without any distinction in the matter of eligibility. Prapatti which seeks God as the end is only to seek His grace for accomplishing it; in the process there is no question of the seeker considering it as the principal means for the end in view. **[Vedanta Desika-NyasaTilakam-10]**

There is no goal which Prapatti cannot secure. Prapatti destroys the effect of all karmas, that generate repeated births here and ensures release at the end of this very life. But the Prapanna continues to suffer grief and sorrow, along with whatever happiness falls to his lot till the end of this life, as a fall-out of the prarabdha karma that has begun to yield the results. Cannot the powerful Prapatti remove even that portion of sorrow and let him enjoy till he leaves at the end? No. If that is done and he is promised unmixed joy for the rest of the life, that would lead to his getting more and more engrossed in the pleasures of the world here, losing sight of his goal and forgetting God altogether. **[Vedanta Desika -Nyasa Tilakam 14].**

A close scrutiny of the scriptural commands reveals that Bhakti and Prapatti are independent means of liberation. However, when Bhakti yoga is practised, the qualities of God to be meditated upon are indeed many. In the case of Prapatti, the only quality for contemplation is the sole awareness that He alone is the means - upaya; it does not depend upon or need any other factor at all. In other words, He stands in the place of all other upayas. Further, in the Upanishads which prescribe Bhakti, the verbal directions are: meditate, worship etc. In the case of Prapatti, the direction is: surrender. So there is a clear difference in the method of prescription [BrahmaSutra 3-3-56]. In regard to the results, there is difference again. Bhakti can wipe away only those karmas, other than the karma which has begun to yield results. Prarabdha karma is outside its purview for destruction. Prapatti, at the very moment it is rendered, wipes away all the past karma altogether; in the case of prarabdha karma, Prapatti can destroy it instantly and liberate the prapanna, if he so desires. Otherwise, his liberation is assured at the end of this life or at any desired moment earlier, if so sought. In Gita Bhashya, Prapatti has been shown as a component of Bhakti Yoga and Prapatti has to be adopted to tide over the hindrances as when encountered. This does not mean that Prapatti is not an independent means. That it is an independent means has been categorically asserted by Ramanuja in his Saranagati Gadyam. **[Vedanta Desika - Nyasa Tilakam 15, Nyasa Vimsati 10]**

Apparently there appears to be no difference between Bhakti Yoga which demands great effort and exertion and Prapatti which calls for intense faith - the suggestion being that both are difficult. Where is therefore the question of asking those incapable of practising Bhakti Yoga to choose the easy route of Prapatti? True. Both are great and difficult for different reasons, arising from the differences between the aspirants. Bhakti Yoga practitioners will choose the vidya [one of sadvidya, madhuvidya, daharavidya etc] that suits them and such aspirants have the qualifications of knowledge, ability and also patience to bear with the delay in achieving the result, besides possessing the eligibility by virtue of birth. The aspirant who chooses Prapatti is one who

is lacking in these qualifications wholly or partially or one who grieves because he is unable or not competent to adopt Bhakti Yoga.

Bhakti Yoga is a matter of arduous effort for a life-time and even more; but Prapatti is dependent on only a few things, intense faith being paramount. If it is only a question of option, why should the Nyasa vidya, that is, Prapatti be singled out, while the other vidyas are grouped together? The point is that only one of the different vidyas has to be chosen for adoption by the competent aspirant, while Prapatti is left for those who are either not competent or despite being competent, are unable to bear with the delay of the Bhakti route, being keen on liberation forthwith. In any case it would be folly for the incompetent to resort to Bhakti Yoga for any reason whatsoever.

Misgivings do and will arise. Prapatti has to be practised only once and the performance also lasts only for a few moments. Such an act destroys at once all the sins of the past lives and even the effect of the karma that has led to the prarabdha in this life, if so desired. The Prapanna is then assured of his goal, which even Brahma, Paramesvara and others have not found it possible to reach. There is this moot point - is it possible at all? How can one have faith, in fact intense faith, in a course of action with such deceptive simplicity - whereas the other tough course is plausibly appropriate for achieving an end that is so great and so glorious, that deserves an effort matching the grandeur of the goal? We are aware that minor gods sanction the fruits without any delay but He is reputed for taking His own time to grant the prayers of the devotees. How do we accept a position that the Supreme, who has no equal and none to surpass Him, who does not discriminate between the small and the weak on the one side and the strong and the great on the other, will grant the same goal of His feet to both?

Only the preceptor will set at rest these doubts. We should bear in mind that He is the consort of Lakshmi. We should learn from the preceptor the precise connotations of the name Sriman Narayana. Lakshmi is ever ready to plead on our behalf and ask Him to forgive all our sins. He cannot resist her plea at all. It is true He has to bestow the results, keeping in view our karma. But there is an inalienable relationship between Him and us; we are His eternal servants; we belong to Him; we are entitled to seek His forgiveness, which He will not and cannot withhold, when His consort has placed our case before Him with Her recommendation. In regard to the plea for liberation, He loses no time to grant, while in the matter of other requests He weighs the consequences and grants accordingly, as He pleases. He is a Sovereign and is not therefore answerable for His actions. He is in fact too happy to take back to His feet the soul lost for so long in the cycle of worldly life. With this background prepared for us by the preceptor, seizure of intense faith is imminent and so where is the scope for not having the faith at all? **[Vedanta Desika-Nyasa Tilakam-16 to 19 Nyasa Vimsati-7]**

A point is made that the idea of Prapatti with five accessories is not acceptable as it runs counter to the statement that Prapatti does not at all depend on anything else. True. But in everyday life it is observed that one who is not in a position to take care of a precious object approaches another who is capable and in whom he has faith, with the request to take charge of the object and hands it over for safe custody, as he is admittedly not able to protect it. Could it be anybody's case that the object in question would be taken care of without a request from the owner for

that purpose? So here Prapatti, that is, the surrender in question is made at His feet with a prayer for the liberation of the surrendered soul and has no other extraneous factor. What is implied is that Prapatti does not have to depend on Karma Yoga and the like. Again, the saying that Prapatti has six accessories is like the use of the term - ashtanga yoga - where eight accessories are enumerated - in which Samadhi the principal is the anga and the other seven are angas. In the case of Prapatti, which is the anga, the remaining five are angas. **[Vedanta Desika-Nyasa Vimsati -11]**

Those who are well-versed in Prapatti-sastra assert that Prapatti is complete only with the fulfilment of the five accessories [angas] and do not approve of any compromise. Those who are of the view that only a few of the accessories would be adequate might have in mind their observance after the practice of Prapatti. Some others consider that a few of the accessories [angas] could be deemed as the principals [angis]. All these statements should be taken to be expressive of the importance of each of the angas and not to detract from the basic structure of prapatti as formulated.

Once the Prapatti is performed with the full complement of accessories, failure to adhere to one or two of the accessories *afterwards* does not affect the Prapatti already done. If any lapse is committed, God's displeasure is incurred but it can be expiated with another Prapatti only for the atonement for the sin and not for the liberation for which Prapatti has already been performed. For instance, if intense faith which was there at the time of performance happens to suffer diminution later for some reason or other, there will be no change in the assurance of liberation. It has to be borne in mind that the five accessories are a must for Prapatti. But continuing to stick to these accessories after once practising Prapatti is not part of Prapatti. A Prapanna is not expected to seek goals other than liberation nor is he allowed to commit lapses unbecoming of his status. If that happens unfortunately, he will have to expiate the aberrations suitably. Liberation, of course, is certain, as assured. He is also not exempt from due performance of compulsory and occasional rites [nitya and naimittika karmas]; he has to perform the ordained duties correctly according to prescription. **[Vedanta Desika-Nyasa Vimsati-12]**

In order to prescribe Prapatti to be performed unto Him, Lord Mukunda declares Himself as possessed of the appropriate qualities and suggests that it should be done to His own self and to Him alone. Here He uses the words "mam" [Me] and "ekam" [Alone] in the Charama sloka [18-66]. Does that mean that Prapatti, which is described as the 'means' for liberation elsewhere, fails to be the 'means', since He alone is declared as the means now? This misgiving is set rest here: the actual import of the statement 'Me, Alone' has to be appreciated correctly. There are six principal clarifications:

1. The Lord of Sri alone is the *means* here. He is also the *fruit*. In the workaday world, however, we are used to distinguishing clearly between the means and the goal. We should therefore understand that the Prapatti we perform is not on par with the Lord Himself.
2. There is no need to go about doing several acts to earn different results, when He alone is ready to confer all the desired fruits.
3. Lord looks forward to nothing else from the aspirant, other than Prapatti. He would Himself

assure him of the result.

4. The aspirant, having understood that He alone is the means, should not fancy that his Prapatti will also have the status of 'means'.
5. Prapatti is an act within the field of action of the seeker and that is why it is termed "Sadhyopaya". The Lord is always there as the principal 'means' and He is therefore described as Siddhopaya. All that Prapatti accomplishes is the removal of His displeasure over the seeker's lapses and failure to adhere to His commands. The word 'alone' thus makes it clear that his Prapatti is secondary and is not to be equated with the Lord who is the principal means.
6. The five components prescribed for Prapatti are self-sufficient and no other act is required to win His grace, because He alone is competent to bestow the fruit.

What emerges clearly is that the statements 'Me' and 'Alone' applicable only to the Lord do not affect the status of Prapatti rendered by the aspirant as a means for removing the Lord's displeasure and thus making himself eligible for the assured fruit. **[Vedanta Desika - Nyasa Vimsati-16]**

After rendering Prapatti in the prescribed manner, how does the Prapanna conduct himself in this world? There is no question of his making any other move for liberation, which stands assured through Prapatti already done. In the first place he should not undertake any action to pursue other desired ends, known as kama rites, nor engage in sinful acts unbecoming of his standing as a Prapanna. He should steer a middle course performing faithfully the nitya and naimittika rites like sandhya-vandana, ceremonies for the departed etc. He has to carry out such compulsory duties [aajnaa-kainkarya] and also permitted services [anujnaa-kainkarya] like worshipping the Lord with flowers, sandal paste etc according to his capacity. If unfortunately he commits sins, he has to expiate and if unable to do so, he can perform a Prapatti for that purpose only. What is more, the Prapanna is freed from the triple debt - the debt to the gods in the form of sacrifices, the debt to rishis through study of Vedas and the debt to the forefathers by raising progeny for the continuance of their propitiation. As the accumulated sin-load has been wiped out through Prapatti, he has only to experience the effect of *papa* and *punya* which have resulted in the prarabdha to last till the end of this life here. He should bear himself with dignity and equipoise during this period.

Can he not beg of God anything at all now? Yes, he can ask of God and His devotees for more devotion, more knowledge, means for serving Him and also the precious riches of the company of noble souls. **[Vedanta Desika - Nyasa Vimsati - 19, 20]**

Like the rim of the wheel following the trodden path, the Prapanna should without fail perform the mandatory duties [aajnaa kainkaryas], following the path adopted by the preceptors of blemishless excellence. He has also to carry out the permitted services in this world [anujnaa kainkaryas] like rendering worship to the Lord with flowers, sandal paste etc in keeping with his capacity. In his case, Prapatti has already wiped out the accumulated sins of the past and also the future ones. What remain to be enjoyed or exhausted are the two classes of karma - punya and papa - which have begun to yield the results to be experienced in this life, namely prarabdha



ஸ்ரீ பூமிதேவி

ஸ்ரீ ஓப்பிலியப்பன்

ஸ்ரீ மார்க்கண்டேயர்

"Like a girl given away in marriage by her father, a prapanna is given away by the Acharya to the Lord!"  
SrI Oppiliappan Moolavar with SrI Bhumidevi thayar and SrI Markandeya Maharishi

karma. Liberation is assured for him at the very moment chosen by him for reaching His Lotus feet to render uninterrupted service. **[Vedanta Desika - Nyasa Vimsati-20]**

To the Prapanna, whose understanding is firmly and properly fixed on knowledge of his essential nature, on the upaya adopted by him, namely Prapatti and on the ultimate aim of his life [purusharta], the very fact of this recognition gives more delight than the forthcoming liberation. The interval between this life and the life after liberation may be compared to a mingling of the state of sleep and the waking state; the Prapanna passes through this destined period, wearing on his head the garland of his *nishta* in regard to *tattva, upaya and purushartha*, bestowed on him by the Compassionate Lord. He follows, until the fall of his body, a course of action which is faultless and agreeable and for the sake of delight, studies Vedanta with good and noble men, teaches the sweet utterances of sages and Alvars and also enjoys listening to them in good company **[Srimad Rahasyatrayasara - Chapters 13, 14, 15].**

Like the girl given away in wedlock by the father, the Prapanna is given away by the Acharya to the Lord; the Prapanna, destined to experience the highest bliss above, renders in the interim period here service to His devotees - that corresponds to the mangala sutra which is securely cherished by the dutiful wife. **[Saranagati dipika - 30]**

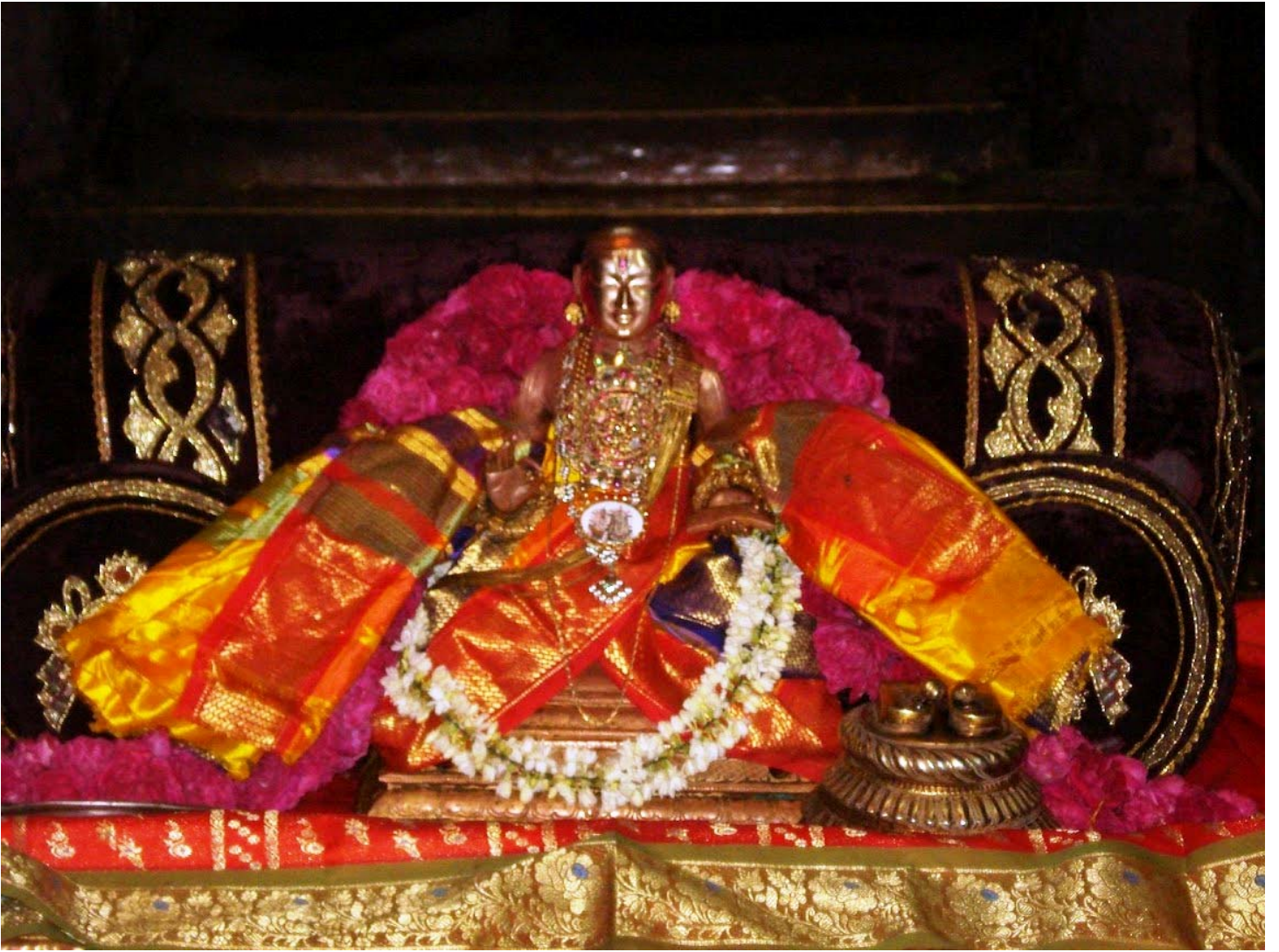
The potency of Prapatti is such that Sanchita Karma is completely wiped out; sins committed before Prapatti are also pardoned, except some of those which have begun to bear fruit in this life. Lapses committed unintentionally after Prapatti are also pardoned. The effect of Prarabdha Karma, which one has agreed to bear, has to be faced. A Prapanna is not likely to commit sins deliberately, but, if he does happen to commit, due atonement will serve to annul its effect. If he does not atone, he will be punished duly and softly but Lord will certainly take the Prapanna to Himself at the desired point of time. For every lapse or aberration, Sastras prescribe specific mode of atonement, which has to be performed, if the Prapanna is competent to do it correctly; if he is not competent he has to render Prapatti for the purpose of atonement. So far as the Bhakti Yoga practitioner is concerned, there is no question of performing specified atonements for mid-way lapses; he has to continue in the Yoga he is determined to perform to the point of completion. If there are hindrances in the way, he has to resort to Prapatti for getting over them. The unintentional lapses will not have, however, any effect as in the case of the Prapanna since the Lord will certainly pardon them. The Prapanna with a clear and free mind, has the unique privilege of ordering his actions and activities in such a fashion that is in accord with the mandates and also free from the possibility of committing any lapse; the free will which is God's grant is capable of being put to proper and prescribed use for His satisfaction which is a source of his joy until the moment of departure, which he will eagerly await. **[Srimad Rahasyatrayasara - Chapter 18]**

We have no idea whatsoever of the multitude of sins we had been committing in past lives, although in current lives, some of us may pass for good men of exemplary conduct, incapable of any misdemeanour or aberration. Only He knows and none else. The eternal cyclic task of creation, maintenance and destruction does not fully engage the Lord's might, which feeling small, seeks to take on a worthier foe, which can only be the colossal heap of our sins, that would warrant His summoning all His abilities for being completely overwhelmed. **[Saranagati dipika - 48]**

A Prapanna should choose a place for his abode, where it is possible to devote himself to service

at the feet of Bhagavan and get lost in His adoration, or in a place where he would have someone or other whose mind is also fixed on Him and serving Him with the same disposition. The place where such devotees reside is verily a Vaikunta. Holy places like Kasi, Ayodhya, Avanti, Kanchi and Madhura do not become worthy unless they are to the liking of those who delight in the nectarine stories concerning Bhagavan. **[Srimad Rahasyatrayasara-Chapter 19]**

When a Prapanna departs from the body, which is as transient as lightning, he has to journey from the central *brahma nadi*, along the bright and beautiful path of *archis* and onwards, free from all impediments. The place in which his body falls and from where he departs is an auspicious place, the day of departure is an auspicious day and the omens sighted, whatever they are, are auspicious indeed. Agni, Daytime, Suklapaksha, Uttarayana, the year, the intervening Vayu, Surya, Chandra, Lightning, Varuna, the king of the devas, Indra and Prajapati - by these the soul of the mukta is entertained on the way with delights and thereafter the soul enters the abode of bliss. **[Srimad Rahasyatrayasara-Chapter 20, 21]**



Swami Vedanta Desikan, author of SrImad Rahasyatrayasara - Thiruvahindrapuram  
Thanks: SrI Shreekrishna Akilesh

Arjuna stands overwhelmed and enthralled, looking at Lord's effulgent, primal and infinite Cosmic form with a mighty dazzling splendour; when no longer he can face that Wondrous form, he



confesses to the torment of a fear and prays for the vision of the gentle form of Vishnu with four arms. Lord tells Arjuna: "In this mortal world, I cannot be seen in this Cosmic form by anyone else than you, either through study of the Vedas or of rituals or again through gifts, actions or austere penances." When Lord resumes the gentle form, Arjuna quickly regains his composure. Again, Lord declares that: "This form of mine, with four arms, which you have just seen is exceedingly difficult to perceive. Neither by study of Vedas nor by penance, nor again by charity, nor even by ritual can I be seen in this form as you have seen now. Through single-minded devotion, however, it is possible to truly know, to see and to enter into me, who am of this form. Whosoever works for me, looks upon me as the highest and is devoted to me, free from attachment without enmity towards any creature, he comes to me." [Sri Bhagavad Gita 11 - 45 to 55]

The injunction '**Seek protection - *saranam vraja***' in the Charama Sloka is a dictate for action. It is not merely to acquire the knowledge that the Lord is the Upaya - that He is the saviour. It enjoins clearly an activity for the man who desires liberation; otherwise the Charama Sloka would cease to have anything to do with Prapatti. It would not be correct to hold that Prapatti is only refraining from activity for protecting oneself and that it means only abandonment of all *dharmas* and *upayas*. **Abandonment of action is also an activity for one's protection and where is therefore the abandonment, without an activity?** Such an approach is inconsistent with the passages which define Prapatti and enjoins its performance with the accessories. Freedom in action is a fact. Freedom from action is an illusion. [Srimad Rahasyatrayasara Chapter-24]

When the learned men have said that Prapatti, referred to in the Dvaya mantra, means only that the faith in His feet is the means for realizing Him, it is only to emphasise that faith is an essential accessory - it does not mean that faith alone is enough. Same is the import of Ramanuja's words: 'Prapatti is faith; it is prayer accompanied by a faith that Bhagavan will grant whatever is desired on account of a single prayer', which echoes Bharata Muni's words: "Prapatti is a prayer for help with faith in the person whose help is sought."

**Ramanuja's Saranagati Gadyam** is in the form of a dialogue between Ramanuja and Sri [Lakshmi] in the first place and then between Ramanuja and the Supreme Narayana. Tradition has it that Ramanuja performed Saranagati on a Panguni-uttaram day in front of the Lord Ranganatha and His consort Sri of Srirangam when they were seated in Aasthanam and that Sri and the Lord spoke to him and granted his prayer. This Gadya which is a major one, while the other two are supplementary, is a masterly exposition of the Dvaya Mantra which is the key to the performance of Saranagati. In fact, even as Ramanuja explains the mystique of surrender, he dwells on the features of the philosophy and religion of Visistadvaita, as embedded in the Brahma Sutras which derive from the Upanishads.

Starting with surrender to Sri, who approves and blesses, he invokes the Lord with a description of all His qualities, His divine form, adornments, weapons, consorts, attendants, His Vaikunta and His recreation and proceeds to render his Prapatti, seeking forgiveness for all his sins, praying for His sole protection and seeking to be blessed with eternal service at the lotus feet of the Lord. Lord responds and assures Ramanuja of His grace and sanction of the prayer to be His servant for ever and ever. The assuring recognition of the Lord in the words "Evam bhutosi "is in

response to the question arising in the mind of the devotee [Ramanuja] as to when the state of service should begin. The past tense [bhuta] used in His words denotes that Ramanuja has already become a servant or can become one at any time desired, according to SrutaPrakasikacharya in his commentary on the Gadyam.

Then follow directions from the Lord as to how the devotee, after performing Saranagati, should conduct himself and spend the rest of his life:

"Always uttering the Dvaya mantra, you shall reside in Srirangam or any place favoured by God and Godly men till the body falls. You will, by my grace, attain true knowledge - confirmation of the knowledge already acquired from preceptors - with no diminution of your capacities of conscious desire for attaining liberation. Shaking off with ease the mortal bond, both physical and subtle, you will attain the blessed privilege of rendering constant service unto me."

This categorical assurance from the Lord is reflected in the realization on the part of the Prapannas: "We were wandering in this worldly life because of His punishment for all our transgressions from beginningless time. It is only due to His compassion that we happened to come under the glances of worthy Acharyas; repeating after them the utterance of the Dvaya, we have completed Prapatti. No further means is necessary for reaching the Saviour. All our sins will be pardoned. The Lord of Sri, who is the *seshi* of all and who is capable of cleansing His devotees and obtaining their service will, for His own glory, protect us. We are free from all care or anxiety or responsibility." Thus explains Vedanta Desika the purport of the Gadya and the assurance of the Lord in the Charama sloka "Do not grieve" [18-66].

### *Nyasa - Doctrine of surrender in Brahma sutras and Alvars' compositions – Nammalvar, Ramanuja and Srutaprakasikacharya*

The first two chapters describe the nature of the goal of Brahman, who is also the siddhopaya, while the third chapter deals with the sadhyopayas, namely Bhakti and Prapatti or Nyasa that facilitate the realization of the goal and the fourth details the glory and bliss of realization. The benedictory slokas with which Ramanuja prefaces his commentary known as Sribhashyam actually enshrine the scope and import of the Badarayana Sutras. Srutaprakasikacharya, the commentator of Sribhashyam brings out that these slokas themselves show that the third chapter - sadhanadhyaya - establishes the distinct route of Prapatti to realisation, along with the other path of Bhakti yoga.

The aphorism "Naanaa sabdaadi bhedaat [3-3-56]" brings out that the different meditations prescribed in the scriptures, like, Sad-vidya, Bhuma-vidya, Upakosala-vidya, Sandilya-vidya, Vaisvanara-vidya and enjoined on parts of the Brahman are all meditations on Brahman, having for the object the final release. In these meditations, through separate words, the differences among the subsidiaries are seen as the cause of distinction among the principal rituals enjoined. But here the idea is to establish that these meditations [Upasanas] are distinct and separate from the Nyasa-vidya, which is the unique doctrine of surrender. This has been elucidated by the commentator Srutaprakasikacharya as the intention in Ramanuja's Sribhashyam. Appayya Dikshita in his work Nayamayukamaalika has also spelt out the clear distinction between Upasana and Nyasa, following the stand of Ramanuja.

Again, in the next aphorism "Vikalpovisista phalatvat", the view that different Upasanas may be combined is refuted; on account of non-difference of fruit, there is option or freedom of choice. Direct experience of Brahman, which is of the nature of unsurpassed bliss, is the fruit of each of the meditations on Brahman that may be adopted by the aspirant. The commentator Srutaprakasikacharya brings out that, likewise, release is the fruit of Nyasa-vidya, having explained in the earlier aphorism that Nyasa is a distinct means for release. Further, Nyasa is not limited to being only an anga of bhakti-yoga but also an independent means for release. Scriptures, it must be understood, prescribe both bhakti and prapatti [Upasana and Nyasa] as distinct means for attaining liberation, even though Nyasa may be viewed as an alternative easier Upasana. The point stressed by the commentator is that both Upasana and Nyasa are each capable of wiping away the sins that have incurred God's displeasure, thus ensuring His favour as a result. This has been reiterated in his elucidation of the Taittiriya Sruti in Anandamaya-adhikaranam.

In Purushaarthaadhikaranam [3-4], there is a discussion whether the highest object of human endeavour can be realized by meditation directly or it accrues from the works whose subsidiaries are meditations. Based on the scriptures, it is conclusively established that the fruit is attained only through knowledge - meditation - Vidya. Vidya denotes both bhakti and prapatti as elucidated by Srutapakasikacharya and therefore each of these constitutes the means [Upaya] for realization.

In the Tadhigamaadhikaranam [4-1], at the stage of realization of Brahma-vidya, not only the load of prior sins is destroyed but also the post-vidya aberrations incurred unintentionally. Srutaprakasikacharya has pointed out that Nyasa-Vidya is also intended to be included in this dispensation.

Ramanuja, in the Aanumanaadhikaranam [1-4-1], draws attention to the imperative: **Winning His grace is only through surrender unto Him.** In Vedarta Sangraha, he is categorical that release from Samsara is not possible without surrendering unto him. In Sri Vaikunta Gadyam, he declares that even through crores of kalpas, realization is not possible through any means other than surrender. These passages might raise a misgiving about the efficacy of Upasana, when Nyasa alone is prescribed and reiterated forcefully as the means for release from Samsara. In his Tatparya Dipika, Srutaprakasikacharya has clarified that Nyasa is resorted to as an auxiliary for the removal of hindrances that stand in the way of the success of Upasana; Nyasa is also adopted as an independent principal means for realization; it is in this context that the primacy of Nyasa as a means is reiterated in Vedarta Sangraha and elsewhere also.

The earliest exponents of Visistadvaita have relied on the works of the Alvars in Tamil, particularly Tiruvoimozhi of Nammalvar, in comprehending the import of the Vedic texts which defied understanding. In holding that Nyasa Vidya is included among the Vidyas in Upanishads and in Brahma Sutras, Ramanuja and his followers have been inspired by the works of Nammalvar, the foremost exponent of Nyasa Vidya. Ramanuja had studied thoroughly the works of Nammalvar under an accredited Acharya of authority and, no wonder, the concepts and nuances of surrender are reflected in his commentary on Brahma Sutras and in his Gadyas.



Bhagavad SrI Ramanuja - Thirukkacchi

## CHAPTER 18: EPILOGUE: RAMANUJA (1017-1137)

"I take refuge at the feet of Sri Ramanuja, our venerable Teacher, the ocean of compassion, who prompted by the impassioned desire for the precious wealth of the lotus feet of the Lord, viewed all other things as mere straw." **Vaikuntha stavam-Kurattalvan**

Ramanuja lived a full life of 120 years, out of which 60 years were spent in Srirangam. When he sought Lord Ranganatha's leave to shed the mortal burden and depart from the world, the wish was granted only after it was pressed persistently. The Acharya then proceeded to his Math, assembled his devotees and disciples, conveyed his decision approved by the Lord, consoled them and gave them his final instructions as well as the quintessence of his teachings:

"Worship Sri Vaishnavas exactly as you would do your spiritual preceptor. Do have sincere faith in the teachings of the great Acharyas of the yore. Never allow yourself to be carried away by the senses. Do not rest content with the acquisition of worldly knowledge. Keep studying the texts on the majesty, accessibility, compassion and all the innumerable qualities of God. With the wisdom you will learn to have through the grace of your preceptor, the senses will gradually lose their grip on you. Learn to be indifferent to feelings. Enjoy the utterance of names and glories of God's devotees speeds up the attainment of God. Never consider the life of a Sri Vaishnava as a means for acquiring any advantage or position.

'Devote a portion of the day to the contemplation of the greatness of your preceptor and also to the study of the work of Acharyas and Alvars. Seek the company of Prapannas and avoid those who say, 'there are paths to salvation'. Avoid people who are all the time after filthy lucre and gratification of the senses. Always associate with God's devotees. Whoever looks upon the sacred image of God as mere stone, his spiritual teacher as an ordinary human being, considering eminent devotees of God as high or low according to their birth or caste, the holy water washing the feet of God as mere water, the sacred mantras as only sounds-let him be considered as fit to live in hell."

The disciples then sought the Master's guidance as to how to live in this world till life departs from the body. Acharya proceeded to list instructions for compliance:

"Whoever has surrendered himself at the feet of God shall not bestow any thought on his future, which He will monitor and take care. Any anxiety or worry on this score would only betray his lack of faith. The present life is governed by past karma; it is not proper to grieve over it. The performance of even worldly duties here should be regarded as service to God.

Study Sri Bhashya and teach it to others -this is most pelasing to God. If this is not possible, study the sacred works of Swami Nammalwar and others and teach them to those willing to learn. Otherwise, spend your days in service rendered to God in sacred places. Else make a hut in Yadavagiri and live there in peace. Or remain wherever you are and casting all burdens on God or your own Guru, be always immersed in the contemplation of the dvaya mantra. If none of these is possible, seek a Vaishnava, who is full of wisdom and devotion and move with him in such a way that he may be kind and considerate towards

you.; root out all egoism, abide by the Sri Vaishnava's words-it is a means for your salvation.

With careful discrimination choose your friends. Sri Vaishnavas are your friends. Those who hate God are your enemies. Association with Vaishnavas and your friends is sure to reward you with illumination. Remember that the compassionate Lord will grant your wishes; never approach the enemies for favour."

It was noon on Saturday, the tenth day of the bright half of the month of Magha of Saka era 1059 (1137 AD). The Acharya laid himself down with his head on the lap of the beloved Govinda and his lotus feet on that of the devoted Andhrapurna and was looking at the sandals of his Guru Mahapurna placed before him as he entered into the realm of the feet of Sriman Narayana.