

Śaraṇāgati

by Svāmī Sadānanda Dāsa

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Śaraṇāgati = śaraṇāpatti means the following:

The Bhakta, who feels disturbed by his fear of saṁsāra, i.e. the world of change and his rebirth in it and the group of six kinds of vikāra-s connected with it, takes his refuge in śaraṇam.

Likewise does he, who does not ask for anything except bhakti, not even freedom from saṁsāra and the six enemies¹, as he is prevented by his own vaimukhyam, i.e. his being turned away from God.

With *śaraṇam* is understood the place where all suffering is annihilated, including the suffering that arises out of vaimukhyam. Accordingly śaraṇam implies an-anya-gati, i.e. not to proceed anywhere else than to what is signified by śaraṇām.

[The six different forms of *vikāra* are:

1. Janma, i.e. to become visible, “birth”;
2. Sattā, i.e. momentary existence;
3. Vṛddhi, i.e. growth;
4. Vipariṇāma, i.e. alteration, deformation;
5. Kṣaya, i.e. decline;
6. Nāśa, i.e. annihilation, to become invisible, “dead”.]

An-anya-gati is twofold:

1. To express the fact, that beyond this śaraṇam one does not have any other āśraya, i.e. refuge.
2. To refrain from taking refuge (āśraya) in that, which one expected refuge in – due to a lesser degree of judiciousness.

Examples of these two are Bhā. X.3.27 and Bhā. XI.12.14–15 as well as Gītā 18.66.

It’s not that śaraṇāgati only implies taking refuge with Bhagavān, since all suffering ends only by Him, but: to wish clearly and distinctly to have Bhagavān as one’s aim.

¹ The six inner enemies are lust (kāma), wrath (krodha), greed (lobha), pride (mada), powerlessness, confusion, lack of proper knowledge (moha) and envy, jealousy (mātsarya).

The distinctive mark, lakṣaṇam, which shows that śaraṇāgati has taken place, is defined as follows:

ānukūlyasya-saṁkalpaḥ¹ prātikūlya-vivarjanam²
rakṣiṣyatīti³ viśvāso gopṭṛtve varaṇam⁴ tathā
ātmānikṣepa⁵-kārpaṇye⁶ ṣadvidhā śaraṇāgatiḥ

Śaraṇāgati is sixfold [ṣad = six]:

1. *Saṁkalpa*, i.e. the resolve to do that which is anukūla, i.e. in the spirit of Bhagavān and His bhaktas and in the spirit of the bhakta himself, who has taken refuge (śaraṇām), and his bhāva, i.e. inner relation, to Bhagavān;
2. To abandon all that is *pratikūla*, i.e. in conflict with the earlier mentioned anukūla;
3. The firm conviction: He is going to save me (from the loss of my sevā);
4. To choose Bhagavān as one's maintainer (of one's sevā);
5. Total surrender to Bhagavān. The briefest expression for this is the word "namaḥ".

In Padma Purāṇam's Uttara-khaṇḍa it is said: "In the word 'namaḥ', 'ma' means ahaṁkṛti, i.e. the arrogance to consider oneself as the acting person; 'na' means denial of 'ma', thus expressing that the ātmā, who considers himself to be his coverings, as well as the ātmā in itself, is not svatantra, i.e. free or under his own control, but 'bhagavat-paratantra', i.e. dependent upon Bhagavān. For that reason one shall completely abandon the attitude of being capable of existing or acting of one's own accord."

In Brahma-Vaivartta-Purāṇam it is said: "Bhagavān Keśava is not far away from those who have renounced ahaṁkṛti, but entire mountains stand between those who have ahaṁkṛti and Bhagavān."

And in Bhā. III.9.9 it is said: "As long as somebody, oh Lord, regards himself as independent of Bhagavān or considers the coverings of the ātmā to be the ātmā itself – both expressions of the power of Māyā, which causes him to strive for the sensuous objects –, saṁsṛti, i.e. the misconception that the ātmā is situated in saṁsāra, will not cease, despite that all endeavours in the world of change are futile and full of suffering.

6. *Kārpaṇyam*, i.e. depreciation of one's own person, more or less corresponding to the sañcāri-bhāva dainyaṁ.

The word kārpaṇyam originates from kṛpaṇa. In the Upanishads a person is called kṛpaṇa if he dies without knowledge of the ātmā. Accordingly, kārpaṇyam implies: "Oh Bhagavān, there is nobody who has greater karuṇā than You, and nobody is more pitiable than me." In

connection with bhakti, kārpaṇyam does not involve the assertion that, objectively, one does not have any bhakti to Bhagavān, on the contrary – just because, objectively, he *has* bhakti, the bhakta feels himself as somebody who, subjectively, lacks all bhakti.²

Out of these six characteristics, which are the distinctive marks (lakṣanam) of bhakti, the fourth (to choose Bhagavān as one’s maintainer) is aṅgī, i.e. the principal; the other five are aṅga-s, i.e. necessary concomitants of the principal point (aṅgī).

Śaraṇāgati is threefold: physical, verbal and mental.

In Śrī Hari-Bhakti-Vilāsa it is said: “The one who is śaraṇāgata, i.e. has taken śaraṇāgati, says with his voice: ‘I am Yours’, he thinks so in his manaḥ, and resides physically at the places associated with Bhagavān and rejoices.”

The one who has achieved one of all these aṅga-s accompanying śaraṇāgati will indeed promptly share the supreme fruit of prema, in its highest degree. Others, who have not achieved śaraṇāgati to the same degree, will be brought closer to the goal of prema, all according to the degree of their progress in śaraṇāgati.

Śaraṇāgati is praised in the following way in Bhā. XI.19.9:

“I see, oh Bhagavān, for the one whose heart is tormented by the threefold suffering on the dreadful path in the world of change, no other śaraṇam than the shelter and protection of Your lotus feet, because there flow the rainfalls of amṛtam.”

[*Tritāpa* = the *threefold suffering*, consists in:

1. Adyātmika-tāpa, i.e. suffering arising out of one’s own person;
2. Adhibautika-tāpa, i.e. suffering caused by other people or living beings;
3. Adhidaivika-tāpa, i.e. suffering caused by the forces of nature, natural disasters and the devas, who administer the forces of nature.]

Bhagavān’s lotusfeet not only give protection against the agonizing heat of the world of change, but are a shelter that consists of a cooling rain of nectar. Therefore, Jīva Gosvāmī says in his explanation of this verse:

“For the śaraṇāgata, the one who has taken refuge, not only every form of suffering vanishes, Bhagavān even grants him the rain in the form of His Own mādhurī, dvs. ljuvlighet.”

This account of śaraṇāgati corresponds to Jīva Gosvāmī’s Bhakti-Sandarbhā § 236.

² In a letter from 10.12.59, Sadānanda comments concerning kārpaṇyam: Without reservations extend sincere help to others, bhakti-upadeśa, teaching of bhakti.

[Madhusūdana Sarasvatī says in his commentary to the Bhagavadgītā:

“There are three forms of śaraṇāgati”:

1. “I am Yours”;
2. “You are mine”; and
3. “I am You”,

and he considers the last form as the most excellent.

On the other hand he adds: “I am You, like the waves in comparison to the ocean, i.e. both are one, but the ocean has waves, whereas the waves have no ocean.”

In the case of bhakti, śaraṇāgati, as has been stated above, principally is comprised by the formula “I am Yours”. Only in particular kinds of prema-bhakti the bhāva, i.e. the inner relationship to Bhagavān, takes the form “He is mine”. What Sarasvatī calls the third form of śaraṇāgati, belongs, strictly speaking, to ātmānikṣepa, as the bhakta knows that his ātmā and Bhagavān are inseparable and that the ātmā, like the rays of sunlight, is not independent of Bhagavān.

The views of the different schools diverge widely concerning which is the foremost of the three forms of śaraṇāgati, proposed by Sarasvatī, but they all agree on one point: true śaraṇāgati is an absolute necessity for every form of sādhanam.]