

THE RELATIONSHIP OF BHAKTI AND PRAPATTI
IN RĀMĀNUJA'S MOKSOPĀYA

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this enquiry is to examine the relation between two well known concepts: bhakti (devout meditation) and prapatti (taking refuge in the Lord) in Rāmānuja's moksopāya (means of release) as found in his major and undisputedly genuine works.¹ This issue is of importance because the later Śrī Vaiṣṇavas as well as a number of other devotional sects placed great emphasis upon the latter and supposedly easier of these two means of approach to Viṣṇu. A split also developed among the Śrī Vaiṣṇavas as to the exact nature of prapatti and as to its relation to bhakti.²

¹Srī Bhāṣya, Gītābhāṣya, Vedārthasaṃgraha

²For these points see pp. xxxi-xxxiv, M.R. Rajagopala Ayyangar, introduction to Vedānta Desika's Srīmad Rahasyatrayasāra (Kumbakonam:)(Agnihotram Rāmānuja Thāhachariar), 1956. It is well known that in the rahasyatraya sāra several chapters deal with controversial matter. For a clear understanding of the discussion contained in those chapters, it is necessary to have knowledge of what the āchāryas of the southern school, especially Sri Lokacharya, have said in such treatises as Srī Vachnabhoosanam"

"If this is so, to adopt bhakti as an upāya would mean that the jeeva trusts to his own endeavours and efforts for his salvation. How can creature who has no will of his own think of depending on himself when every thought and every movement of his are directed and controlled by Īśvara? Therefore prapatti alone is the means of salvation for one whose svarūpa is being śeṣa to Īśvara. To this Vedānta Desika replies:

"It is true that the jeeva is dependent on Īśvara for all that he is. But Īśvara has endowed him with intelligence and reason, so that as a rational being, he may use the powers granted to him by Īśvara for rejecting evil and for choosing what is good. If the jeeva is absolutely without any free will of his own, the śāstras which enjoin certain things to be done by him on pains of God's displeasure would be meaningless."

Both the later schools of thought - the Vadagalai and Tengalai elevate prapatti to an independent means of attaining the Lord. However, for the former of the schools it is an alternative means meant for those not qualified for bhakti, while for the latter prapatti is seen as the only means leading to the highest goal. With regard to the nature of prapatti the Vadagalais are characterized as the 'monkey-hold' school, the substance of which is that the devotee must actively cling to God as does a baby monkey to its mother, while the Tengalais, as the 'cat-hold' school*, the meaning of which likewise is that the Lord alone accomplishes everything for the passive devotee as illustrated by the phenomenon of the mother cat carrying her young. We will attempt to see to what extent these latter emphases on prapatti vis-a-vis bhakti have a basis within Rāmānuja's own teaching.

Rāmānuja is generally far from precise in either his use or definition of terms. Such is indeed the case with bhakti and even more so with prapatti. While he spends a great deal of time defining bhakti the net effect is to so broaden the meaning of the word as to allow for many nuances and several functions.

* markata kiśora nyāya, maintains that some effort is necessary on the part of the individual soul to evoke divine grace.

mārjāra kiśora nyāya, holds that the entire initiative lies with God and the individual counts very little.

Rāmānuja takes pains to maintain that all scriptural references denoting "knowledge" or "knowing", "meditation" or "meditating" are synonymous with bhakti,¹ which term itself carries with it the connotations of "loving and reverent devotion". Considered in this sense, bhakti functions as a means of release (mokṣopāya). Later Śrī Vaiṣṇava theologians clearly distinguished bhakti as the means to mokṣa by the term "sādhana bhakti". However, as Lacombe indicates, bhakti is also synonymous with the culmination and the goal of the means, with sakṣātkāra (immediate perception) of the essence of Brahman which means not only an intellectual but an effective participation in Brahman.² Again later theologians term bhakti in the sense of phala bhakti (bhakti which is the fruit). While we can perhaps utilize these later terms to describe the two functions of bhakti in Rāmānuja's thought, we must not allow a static distinction between the two, since as Lacombe notes, Rāmānuja always sees sādhana bhakti as its own phala bhakti in so far as it always produces some degree

¹Rāmānuja, Śrī Bhāṣya, transl. George Thibaut, Sacred Books of the East, vol. XLVIII, F. Max Muller (Oxford: Clarendon Press), 1904, p. 11-15.

Vedārthasaṁgraha (transl. J.A.B. Van Buitenen) (Poona: Deccan College Monograph Series 16, 1958) para. 144, 298, 299.

²Lacombe, Oliver, L'Absolu selon le Vedānta, les notions de Brahman et d'Ātman dans les systèmes de Sankara et Rāmanuja. (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1937), p. 363.

of intuition or remembrance of Brahman. Bhakti is sometimes considered by Rāmānuja as the goal of the religious life, as well as the means to that goal, and he moves easily back and forth from one usage to the other.

With regard to the concept of prapatti, Rāmānuja has no fixed terminology but rather employs a variety of verbal forms and derivatives from several different roots to describe the activity of 'taking refuge in' or 'resorting to'.¹ This lack of definitiveness does not by any means indicate a lower place assigned to this concept by Rāmānuja. Rather contrary is the truth. We will try to show that the concept lacks definitiveness in Rāmānuja because it is a derivative from another well-defined and central doctrine concerning the basic nature of the soul's relationship to the Lord.

The exact function which prapatti performs in Rāmānuja's mokṣopāya (means of release) is not altogether clear. A few matters are clear. It is certain that Rāmānuja did not see prapatti as an alternative mokṣopāya independent of bhakti. It is equally definite that the action of 'taking refuge in' or 'resorting to' the Lord is essential to the mokṣopāya. Twice in the Vedārthasaṁgraha, it is explicitly

¹J.A.B. Van Buitenen, Ramanuja on the Bhagavadgītā, ('S-Gravenhage: H.L. Smits'), 1953, p.25.

stated.

That release of the above soul from the saṁsāra in the form of its natural conjunction with prakṛti which is due to karman and consists in various guṇas is impossible without resorting to the Lord (bhagavat-prapatti).¹

The above statement is based primarily upon Bhagavadgītā, 7.14. At this place and at several other places (e.g. Gītābhāṣya. 14.26-27, 15.4-5; 18.66), Rāmānuja establishes the necessary nature of prapatti. J.A.B. Van Buitenen sees prapatti as simply preliminary and preparatory to bhakti - a necessity in the negative sense of clearing away the obstacles to bhakti arising from karman and attachment to prakṛti, while he thinks bhakti alone performs the positive function of attracting the grace of the Lord and securing attainment of Him.² Yet Van Buitenen himself admits that at least at one point (Gītābhāṣya 14.26-27), "Rāmānuja considered prapatti equivalent with bhakti."³ On the basis of his observations, Van Buitenen allows himself to summarise prapatti in Rāmānuja's mokṣopāya as "a propaedeusis to bhakti or even identical with it",⁴ without being bothered enough by the ambiguity to attempt to account for it. We feel

¹Rāmānuja, Vedārthasaṁgraha, para. 81, p.239, cf para 78, p.237-238.

daivi hyeṣa guṇamayi mama māyā dūratyaya
mam eva ye prapadyante māyām etām taranti te'

iti tasyātmāna karma kritavicitra guṇa māyā prakṛti
samsarga rūpāt samsāranmokṣo bhagavat prapatti
manterenanopapadyata ityuktam bhavati.

²J.A.B. Van Buitenen, Ramanuja on Bhagavadgītā, pp.25-28.

³Ibid., p.25.

⁴Rāmānuja, Vedārthasaṁgraha, p.237 (Fn. 348).

that this ambiguity is quite stimulating and that the resolution of it will force us to assign much greater importance to the concept of prapatti in Rāmānuja's mokṣa scheme.

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CHAPTER I

THE ETYMOLOGY OF BHAKTI AND PRAPATTI

The terms bhakti and prapatti occur many times in different Hindu scriptures, conveying different meanings. The bhakti cult is as ancient as the Rig Veda. The word bhakti is derived from the root 'bhaj' which means to serve. Etymologically the word 'bhakti' means service, which is expressed in Rig Veda thus:

Him have ye satisfied, singers, as well as ye know,
Primeval germ of order even from his birth,
Ye knowing e'en his name, have told it forth;
May we, Visnu, serve the grace of thee the mighty one.¹
(mahas te visno sumatim bhajāmahe)

When a man performs all physical activities to please God, and when God alone is the focus of all his mental activities there arises in him the state of bhakti.

The following meanings are relevant according to Monier Williams and V.S. Apte;

1.a, To share, distribute, divide;

Children should share the property of their father.²

b, To assign, allot, apportion;

He recited Gayatri for Agni as an assignment (bhajata)³

¹Rig Veda, 1.156.3.

²Manusmṛti, 9.104: भजरेन पैतृकं रिक्यं ।

³Aitaraya Brāhmaṇa " गायत्रीमग्नेयड भजत ।

2. To obtain for oneself, share in partake of;

The son shares the good conduct of the father.¹

3.a, To resort to, be take oneself to, have recourse to;

He reached (bhaje) the mountain.²

Resort (bhajatsva) to mother Laksmi.³

A man of high caste who has many other virtues will not fall in improper path, even if he is forced to follow.⁴

b, To practice, follow, observe;

We should not follow (bhaje) other religions.⁵

4. To enjoy, possess, have, suffer, experience, entertain;

Even moon possesses (bhajate) a dark dot.⁶

Bheema never possessed of fear.⁷

What soma, we enjoy from thee the milky food or barley-brew, Vatapi, grow thou fat thereby!⁸

¹Manusmṛti, 10.59 " पितॄं वा भजते शीलं ।

²Kādambarī, 179 " शिलातलं भजे ।

³Bhrtrihari's three śātakas, 3.64.

⁴Śakuntala, 5.10." न कश्चिद्दुर्णनामपथमपकृष्टोपि भजते ।
मार्तलक्ष्मिभजस्व कंचिदपरे ।

⁵Raghuvamśa, 1.21." भजे धर्ममनातूर ।

⁶Bhāminivilāsa, 1.74. विधुरपि भजते तसं कलकं ।

⁷Bhrtrihari's three śātakas, 2.80. न भोजिरे भीमविषण भोजि ।

⁸RigVeda, 1.187.9.

All men are joyful in thy power, O God, that living
from the dry wood thou art born.¹

Our wealthy patrons who bestow rich gifts on us of steeds
and kine, high born! delightful with thy steeds.²

They who enjoy pressed juices with oblation, seated
on sacred grass, come oftenest hither.³

The very trees were joyful at my coming! kine they
obtained in plenty, steeds in plenty.⁴

5. To adore, honour, worship, serve;

Srdaprina the holy, Tarya, Srutavit and Bahuvrkta,
joined with you have slain the foes.
He gains his wish in both the worlds and brightly shines,
When he adores the host with well advancing steeds.⁵

The man to whom thou givest as provider enjoys
domestic plenty undivided,
Blest, Indra; is thy favour dropping fatness:
They worship much invoked! 'brings gifts in thousands.⁶

For now have I sent forth to you; that I may win a fair
reward, Lords of all wealth, with homage, this my song
of praise like milch cow that faileth not."

These subjects which have been declared shine forth to the
high-souled one who has the highest devotion for God
and for his spiritual teacher, as for God. Ye, they shine
forth to the high-souled one.⁸

¹ RigVeda, 1.68.2.

² Ibid., 5.79.7.

³ Ibid., 10.15.3.

⁴ Ibid., 8.4.21.

⁵ Ibid., 5.44.12.

⁶ Ibid., 3.30.7.

⁷ Ibid., 8.27.11.

⁸ Svetāśvatara Upanishad, 6.23.

At the time of death with unswerving thought,
 Disciplined with devotion and the power of discipline,
 Making the breath to enter altogether between the eyebrows,
 He goes to that Supreme divine Spirit.¹

This is the Supreme Spirit, son of Br̥tha
 To be won, however, by unswerving devotion;
 Within which (all) beings are fixed.²
 By which this universe is pervaded.²

Ever glorifying me,
 And striving with firm resolve,
 And paying homage to Me with devotion
 Constantly disciplined, they wait upon Me.³

A leaf, a flower, a fruit, or water,
 Who presents to Me, with devotion,
 That offering of devotion I
 Accept from the devout-souled (giver).⁴

I am the same to all beings,
 No one is hateful or dear to Me;
 But those who revere Me with devotion⁵
 They are in Me and I too am in them.

Even if a very evil doer,
 Revers Me with single devotion
 He must be regarded as righteous in spite of all
 For he has the right resolution.

¹ Bhaṣavad Gītā, 8.10.

² Ibid., 8.22.

³ Ibid., 9.14.

⁴ Ibid., 9.26.

⁵ Ibid., 9.29.

⁶ Ibid., 9.30.

But by unswerving devotion can
I in such a guise, Arjuna,
Be known and seen in every truth,
And entered into, Scorcher of the foe.¹

With single-minded discipline, towards Me
Devotion unswerving,
Cultivation of solitary places,²
Dislike for a crowd of people.

Through devotion he comes to know me,
What my measure is, and who I am, in very truth,
Then knowing Me in very truth,
He enters into (Me) straight way.³

Whoso this supreme secret
Shall make known to My devotees,
Showing utmost devotion to Me,
Shall go just to Me, without doubt.⁴

Without śradha or the culture of the faith and
devotion, the realization of reality cannot take place.

The karma mārga of the Veda fulfils its real purpose
when it is followed by men with feelings of love and service
and reverence to the divine reality behind all manifestations.
The Upanisadic stress on intuitive realisation means the
onepointedness of the mind and the sweetness and the tender-
ness of heart full of spirit of love and devotion to the
One Being in many becomings. Bhagavad Gītā furnishes the

¹ Bhagavad Gītā, 11.54.

² Ibid., 13.10.

³ Ibid., 18.55.

⁴ Ibid., 18.68 .

doctrine of devotion in simple form. It offers moksa to all sinners.

The Gita mother, the divine womb that gave birth to universal religion of the Gita, is the one to whom the children of any age can always confidently turn expecting nothing but total forgiveness and complete love, even after a million outrageous acts which the individual might have committed. Similarly, here Gita, the text book of life, is approached as our mother, because the Gita never gives up anybody as completely lost, and any one who lovingly approaches her courtyard calling out 'Ma... Ma... Ma' can be sure that she will accept them all in spite of all their past crimes and mischievousness.¹

Bhakti is loving attachment to the Lord, Bhardwaj remarks:

In fact, Bhakti, which is paramanurakti or the intensest and the sublimest attachment of the devotee to God, as according to sandilya sūtras parama prema ie, an all embracing love for the divine personality, as according to Nārada sūtras "manogati ravicchinna param prema paripluta abhisandhi vinirmukta" ie, the trend of one's mind and heart towards selfless love for God, as according to panca rātra (Nārada) samhitā, is essentially a constant life-long contemplation on God, the Supreme Reality which has been analysed as Vedana, dhyāna, upāsana and so on. It is this loving vision of God to which all our karma and all our jñāna lead.²

According to the Bhagavata, bhakti consists in the uninterrupted presence of the individual mind in God.³

¹Swami Chinamayananda, The Bhagavad Gītā, vol. I, (2nd ed., Madras: Chinmaya Publication Trust, 1961), p.4.

²Krishna Datta Bharadwaj, The Philosophy of Ramanuja, (New Delhi: Sir Shankar Lall Charitable Trust Society, 1958), p. 168-169.

³Bhāgavatam, 3.26.

मयि सर्वज्ञायाय मनोऽगति रविच्छन्ना ।

Patanjali has mentioned pranidhāna in his Yoga Sūtra.

According to him, it is one of the five practices necessary at the second stage of spiritual discipline. It can be defined as 'putting one's own mind into body which should however, mean the dedication of the feelings of the individual rather than the individual himself to God'. His interpretation of Yoga Sūtra 2.45 is very clear and appropriate, where he says that pranidhāna consists in man's offering of all his feelings to God.¹

The author of Brahma Sūtra uses the term saṁrādhana for the devotion to God.² Śaṅkara endorses Bādarīyana's view that those who practice yoga discover the true nature of the ātman at the time of saṁrādhana consisting in love and contemplation.³

Van Buitenen defines the term bhakti used in Ramanuja's writings:

It is man's participating of God, at once intellectual and devotional. It is the constant memorization of the ātman's total subservience to God, inspired and animated by a perfect love of worship in which the knowledge of God as the possessor of all perfections,

¹Yoga Sūtra.2.45.

इश्वरापित सर्वभावस्य समाधिसिद्धिः ।

²Brahma Sūtra. 3.2 24.

³Śaṅkara, Śrī Bhāṣya (Calcutta: Samskrit series) 3.2.24, p.280.

अपि जैनमात्मानं निरस्तमस्त - प्रपञ्चमवक्तुं
संराधनकाले पश्यन्ति यागिन संराधनं भक्ति ध्यान-
प्रणिधानाद्यनुष्ठानम् ।

as the merciful saviour and as the sole cause of the universe completely terminates. It culminates in a mystic ecstasy of love so ardent that the aspirant cannot live for a moment separated from God: all his happiness depends on his contact with God; his most humble act is an expression of his all-pervading love for God.¹

Madhava maintains that bhakti is an intense devotion proceeding from knowledge of the greatness of God. It is a tie between the devotee and his deity. Vallabha believed in two fold bhakti; the maryāda bhakti which means the devotee loves the Lord, secondly, pushti bhakti, which in conformity with the scriptural injunctions.

The Etymology of prapatti

The term prapatti is derived from the root pad used with the prefix pra. Etymologically it means, to throw oneself down (at a person's feet) or to fall down. The Dictionary meanings are:-

1. To enter upon, set forward, set foot in,
- 2a. To go to or towards, approach, resort, or attain to

My very being afflicted with the taint of weak compassion,
I ask thee, my mind bewildered as to the right,
Which were better, that tell me definitely;

¹J.A.B. Van Buitenen, Ramanuja on Bhagavad Gītā,
p.22.

I am thy pupil, teach me that have come to thee.
(prapannam)¹

For this is my divine strand composed
Trick-of-illusion, hard to get past;
Those who resort (prapadyante) to me alone
Penetrate beyond this trick of illusion.²

Not to Me do deluded evil-doers
Resort(prapadyante) base men,
Whom this illusion robs of knowledge,
Who cleave to demoniac estate.³

At the end of many births,
The man of knowledge resorts (prapadyante) to Me,
Who thinks Vasudeva is all,
That noble soul is hard to find.⁴

Deprived of knowledge by this or that desire,
Men resort (prapadyante) to other deities,
Taking to this or that religious rule,
Constrained by their own nature.⁵

'You are unborn' with this thought some one in fear
approaches (prapadyate) you O Rudra, may your face
which is gracious protect me for ever.⁶

2b. To take shelter or refuge with, flee for safety, submit;

To Him who of old creates Brahma
And who, verily delivers to him the vedas
To that God, who is lighted by his own intellect.

¹Bhaṣavad Gītā.2.7.

²Ibid., 7.14

³Ibid., 7.15.

⁴Ibid., 7.19.

⁵Ibid., 7.20.

⁶Svetāśvatara Upaniṣad, 4.21.

"ajāta ity evam kascit bhuruḥ prapadyate rudra
yat te dakṣiṇam mukham tena mām pāhi nityam.

Do I, being¹ desirous of Liberation, resort (prapadye) as shelter.

I take refuge (prapadye) in the imperishable chest with this one,

I take refuge (prapadye) in the breathe,

I take refuge (prapadye) in bhur with this one.

I take refuge (prapadye) in bhuvaḥ

I take refuge (prapadye) in svar.²

Thou art a refuge! Shine upon me come unto (padyasva) me.³

Such are some of the most note worthy meanings of the two terms as they occur in the literature. This list, however, by no means exhausts the variety of their usage but these instances given here will help to illuminate the problem.

¹Svetāśvatara Upaniṣad, 6.18.

Yo brahmaṇam vidadhati pūrvam yo vaivedāṁśa
ca prhinoti tasmai
tam ha devam ātma-buddhi-prakāśam mumukṣur
vai śaraṇam aham prapadye.

²Chāndogya Upaniṣad, 3.15.3.

ariṣṭam kośam prapadye 'munā 'munā 'munā,
prāṇam prapadye, 'munā 'munā 'munā;
bhūḥ prapadye 'munā 'munā 'munā
bhuvaḥ prapadye 'munā 'munā 'munā
svaḥ prapadye 'munā 'munā 'munā.

³Taittirīya Upaniṣad, 1.4.3.

prativedo 'si pra mā bhāhi pra mā padyasva

CHAPTER II

RAMANUJA'S MOKSOPAYA

Let us now attempt to get as clear a picture of Rāmānuja's mokṣa scheme as we can and of how Rāmānuja integrates both bhakti and prapatti within it. Accordingly, attention is first called to two passages of Vedārthasaṃgraha, the first of which is a brief summation of the path to the attainment of the Lord and the second a more detailed account of the same.

The only meaning which is to be found in the most important part of the whole body of śrutis (upanishads), which set forth what is blissful for the entire universe, is as follows: True knowledge of the individual soul (jivātman) and of the supreme spirit (paramātman), applied to the obligations imposed by the various dharmas pertaining to each stage and station of life, are to proceed pious and humble acts of meditation on the supreme spirit-acts held extremely dear by the devotee - that ultimately result in the attainment of the supreme spirit.¹

When a person has caused the mass of evil karman, amassed during all his previous existence, to melt away by amassing unequalled good karman; when he has become wholly dedicated to God as a result of his taking refuge (śaraṇagati) at His lotus like feet when he has acquired the moral qualities 'sama dama etc.', and nourishes them by exercising them daily and applying to them his preceeding knowledge of the true nature of the ontological orders gathered from the sāstras and corroborated by the teachings of the two āchāryas which he devotes himself to the accomplishment of periodical and occasional

¹Rāmānuja, Vedārthasaṃgraha, (transl. J.A.B. Van Buitenen), p.184.

acts corresponding to his station and stage of life, as the forms in which he is to worship the Supreme Person and avoids what is forbidden: - when he throws himself together (ātmātmiya) at the lotus like feet of the Supreme Person: - when the darkness concealing his innermost self is dispelled by the grace of the Supreme Person, who supremely compassionate as he is, is pleased with the uninterrupted acts of worship that are dictated by the devotee's bhakti in glorification, remembrance (smṛiti), salutation, mortification, exaltation, the listening to the descriptions of His perfections and narrating them himself, meditation (dhyāna), adoration, and prostration (praṇāma), etc.; - then will be able to attain the Supreme Person by virtue of his bhakti, which takes on the form of contemplation (anudhyāna) in the highest degree of lucid perception, directed to none but Him, uninterrupted, pre-eminent and held precious dear....

What this meditation (dhyāna) is specified by another śruti: "This soul cannot be grasped by explanation, nor by mere knowledge, nor by great erudition; he alone whom God himself elects can attain him: He singles his soul out to serve as His body" (Mund.3.2.3) That implies that he can only be grasped by meditation that takes the form of bhakti, not merely by knowing..

Bhakti is a kind of knowledge that is so excellent, precious and exclusive that it robs everything else of its interest. Now he that has acquired this knowledge is elected by the Supreme Person, and so he can grasp him. This is the full meaning of śruti cited above. It is through bhaktiyoga, furthered at first by karma yoga that is daily intensified in the above way and subsequently by jñāna yoga, that such knowledge in the form of supreme bhakti (parabhakti) arises.... He is attainable only by bhakti that has matured in the described manner.

The over-all emphasis of the foregoing passages is clearly on the necessity of taking refuge with the Supreme Person. Rāmānuja again and again and in various ways would state that release is possible only by gaining the assistance

¹Rāmānuja, Vedāarthasaṁgraha, (trans: J.A. B. Van Buitenen) paras 91-92, p.248-50.

of Brahman, the inner Ruler.

On the basis of the above citations and the discussion we conclude that Rāmānuja's mokṣa scheme follows a sequence of first karmayoga and the bhakti yoga based on knowledge gained from scripture and assisted by the development of certain spiritual qualities and the practice of certain non-meditative expressions of devotion. Thus for one who is desirous of release, the steps to be taken toward the attainment of release may be presented in the following order:-

Step i. The acquisition of right knowledge from scripture;

Step ii. The development of spiritual qualities such as sāma (tranquility) and dama (self restraint); this leads support to the proper performance of karma and to meditation.

Step iii. The performance of karma as worship of the supreme Person: this destroys sin and promotes calmness of the manas (mind) and is thereby 'propaedeutic to meditation'

Step iv. Meditation, the purpose of which is to generate devotion; this results first in a vision of the individual ātman, and second, due to the devotion which arises from this vision, in meditation on the Supreme Person, which has the form of reflection on his attributes. Such meditation, engaged in daily until death, promotes ever greater devotion to the Supreme Person.

Step v. The practice of various non-meditative expressions of devotion as support for meditation on the Supreme Person.

Rāmānuja himself omits any mention of prapatti in the summary which he gives in the first of the two quotations from the Vedārthasaṃgraha given above. This fact is very significant, for, as we have mentioned before, prapatti as an aspect of Rāmānuja's mokṣopāya is not at all an independent or primary category of thought as it becomes for the later theologians. Rather it is derived from a primary and central category that has a pervasive influence in Rāmānuja's thought, of which the act of prapatti within the mokṣopāya is only one expression. That category concerns the true and the desired relationship between the soul and the Lord. Seen in the light of this it will become clear that the concept of prapatti is not absent in Rāmānuja's mokṣopāya but rather that it is present within the very first step - "the acquisition of right knowledge (true knowledge of the individual soul (jīvātman) and of the Supreme Spirit (paramātman)) from the scripture." It will also become clear that prapatti is present not only in the first step but throughout. Indeed its presence is essential within each and every aspect of the mokṣopāya if there is to be any hope of attaining the Lord.

Śarīra-Śarīri bhāva as the source of prapatti

This concerns the relation between the body (śarīra) and soul (śarīri) and while it does entail knowledge of both the individual soul and the Supreme Spirit,¹ we must limit

¹cf. Vedārthasaṃgraha, (transl: J.A.B. Van Buitenen), para 78, pp.237-38.

our enquiry to the relation between the two. It is well known that Rāmānuja conceived of the relation between the individual and the Supreme Spirit in terms of an analogy to the relation between the soul and the body (sarīra-sarīri bhāva). In the Sri Bhāṣya Rāmānuja defines this relationship in the following manner:

Any substance which a sentient soul is capable of completely controlling and supporting for its own purpose, and which stands to the soul in an entirely subordinate relation, is the body of that soul.¹

In this definition, we see the three aspects of the relationship which Rāmānuja invariably cites and which are made more explicit in the following passage from the Vedārthasaṃgraha:

The relationship between the self and the body (ātma sarīra bhāva) is: (i) that between the support and the thing supported (ādhāra-ādheya bhāva) which is incapable of separate existence (prthaksiddhi-anarha); (ii) that between the controller and what is controlled (niyantr-niyamya bhāva); and (iii) that between the master or owner and what is subservient to him (śeṣa-śeṣi bhāva)²

The first of these three relationships, namely ādhāra ādheya bhāva, while indicating the complete dependence of the soul upon the Lord which is integral to the concept of prapatti, is not of primary importance for us here, since it represents a metaphysical fact which persists regardless of what the individual soul does about it. While it is essential for the devotee to understand this metaphysical fact, the fact itself

¹Rāmānuja, Sri Bhāṣya, II.1.9 (Thib, p.424).

²Rāmānuja, Vedārthasaṃgraha, para .76.

does not provide any imperatives or injunctions as to what the devotee should do as a means of release. The other two are of a very different nature. While in a certain, perhaps primary sense, they also represent metaphysical facts (relationships which are), with regard to the souls who are bound in samsāra (worldly existence) they also represent relationships which should be in fact must be if the Supreme Person is to be attained. Therefore they provide injunctions for the moksopāya-injunctions which form the basis for the act of prapatti.

The second of these relationships - that between the controller (niyantr) and the controlled (niyamyā) - is crucial for our concerns. One of the main reasons why some scholars have denied that prapatti holds an important place in Rāmānuja's thought is that Rāmānuja saw the individual self as a responsible agent who can and must exert his own will in order to attain release. Such an emphasis seems far removed from the emphasis upon the helplessness of the devotee in the later interpretations of prapatti. Yet it will not do to overemphasize Rāmānuja's position on the role of the individual self. Rāmānuja has a very subtle and sophisticated interpretation of the relationship between the control of the inner Ruler (antaryāmin) and the activity of the soul, an interpretation necessitated primarily by difficulties raised in fact by his own overall emphasis upon divine control. The reply to the

objection raised in the following passage from the Vedārthasaṃgraha will serve as evidence:

However, it has been declared that the Supreme Spirit is the inner ruler of all creatures and that all are subject to His ruling. If this is true, then there is strictly speaking no one who can be a qualified subject of the instructions of injunctions and prohibitions (in the scriptures)... Now this would mean that there is cruelty in God because He incites to good and evil actions arbitrarily.

The reply to this is as follows. The Supreme Spirit has bestowed equally upon all spiritual beings all that is required for activity for inactivity... So as to enable them to accomplish this, he has become their substratum (ādhāra) and has entered into them as the principal (śeṣi) to whom they are accessory (śeṣa), directing them by consenting. The spiritual being, whose capacities are so dependent upon Him, performs of his own accord certain acts or refrains of his own accord from certain acts. But while observing the soul in all its doings the Supreme Spirit Himself takes no sides. Therefore all is sound.¹

Rāmānuja's concept of the inner ruler governing the consent (anumati) is further explained in this passage from Śrī Bhāṣya:

The inwardly ruling highest self promotes action in so far as it regards in the case of any action the volitional effort made by the individual soul, and then aids that effort by granting its favour or permission (anumati); action is not possible without permission on the part of the Highest self... The case is analogous to that of property of which two men are joint owners. If one of these wishes to transfer that property to a third person he cannot do so without the permission of his partner, but that the permission is given is after all his own doing, and hence the fruit of the action (reward or anything) properly belongs to him only.²

It is not true, however, that the inner ruler always maintains such a passive and neutral position. Immediately following

¹Rāmānuja, Vedārthasaṃgraha, para 89-90.

²Rāmānuja, Śrī Bhāṣya, (trans. Thibaut)2.3.41, p.557.

the above passage from the Vedārthasaṃgraha Rāmānuja continues:

Beside it depends on every individual case whether He will cause good acts or evil acts to be performed. It is not an invariable rule that He will always cause one or the other in every case. When some one of his own accord has been active before in an extremely good action, then the Venerable Lord is pleased with him and by granting him a mental disposition for good actions helps him to be so active. When, however, someone has indulged in extremely inauspicious actions, then the Venerable Lord incites him to wicked activities by giving him a wicked disposition.

The Lord sometimes, then takes a more active role, "controlling them as animated and cheering principle" or as an animating and punishing one.

Rāmānuja's greatness as a theologian consists in his ability to hold in tension seemingly opposed elements in a manner which the succeeding Śrī Vaiṣṇava ācāryas could neither fully comprehend nor duplicate. While Rāmānuja never denies that the individual soul is a responsible agent, his primary emphasis is upon the inner ruler as the cause of all the actions of the soul. He at one point explicitly denies that the soul is free in any independent sense.² His dominant mood is expressed by his exposition of Bhagavadgītā. 18.61-62, "The Lord dwells in the heart of all creatures, whirling them around as if mounted on a machine; to Him go for refuge" (saranam gaccha)³. Perhaps we can understand

¹Rāmānuja, Vedārthasaṃgraha, Op. para:90.

²Rāmānuja, Śrī Bhāṣya, 2:3.40 (trans: Thibaut P.556-557)

³Ibid., 1.4.1. (trans: Thibaut 356-357) cf Bhagavadgītā 18.61-62.

this tension within his thought if we perceive that the soul's ability to exercise his agency in a manner contrary to the wishes of the inner ruler (therefore seeming to be free and independent) is not viewed by Rāmānuja as a positive capacity but rather is seen as a defect caused by the soul's bondage in saṁsāra. When the soul-body relationship exists as it should, the "body" of its own will should respond infallibly to the wishes of the soul. However, as Rāmānuja says immediately following his definition of a body in the Śrī Bhāṣya, "In the case of the bodies injured, paralysed, etc., control and so on are not actually perceived because the soul's power of control, although existing, is obstructed."¹ When the individual soul (the body of the inner ruler) is bound in saṁsāra, it is "injured", i.e. "enveloped by ignorance in the form of karman"². Therefore, the soul does not know that its true nature is to be a niyāmya (thing controlled) nor does it know what the niyantr wishes it to do. Consequently, the Inner Ruler's "power of control, although existing, is obstructed".

However, when a person gains "true knowledge of the individual soul and the Supreme Spirit" from scripture, he learns that his true nature is to be niyāmya and he learns

¹Rāmānuja, Śrī Bhāṣya, 2.1.9. (trans: Thibaut, p.424.)

²Rāmānuja, Vedārthasaṁgraha, para. 78.

what the niyantr requires of him. He learns that if he wants to attain release he must exert himself to re-establish the true "soul-body relationship" and the true niyantr-niyamya relationship. He must exercise his own agency in such a way that in all his actions only the will of the Inner Ruler is expressed. Finally, as is a constant theme in Rāmānuja's Gītābhāṣya and especially in the last chapter, the soul must relinquish all claim to being an agent and see all that he does as simply expressing the agency of the Lord. This bending of the soul's own will to divine will is an essential element of Rāmānuja's mokṣopāya and at one point is explicitly called an act of prapatti or "taking refuge". In Gītābhāṣya 18.62, Rāmānuja quotes Kṛṣṇa's words, "With all thy soul, Bharata! Seek Him as thy Refuge. (śaraṇam) By His grace (prasāda) shalt thou attain to supreme peace, and eternal state". And he comments as follows:

Seek Him as refuge- Follow Him or His directions in everyway; i.e. carry out all His injunctions... Obedience to Him.. shall by His grace, procure for thee supreme peace, or cessation of all karma bonds, and also Eternal State, or the immortal Empyrean (highest heaven). Srutis by the hundred declare thus:¹

It should be noted that "seeking the Lord as refuge" is here presented as instrumental not only in the negative

¹Rāmānuja, Gītābhāṣya, op.Cit., 18.62 .

and preliminary step of gaining freedom from "all karma- bonds" but also in the final step of attaining to the highest heaven in the presence of Nārāyaṇa. Prapatti in this sense is not a formal, preparatory ritual but rather a continuous activity and attitude which must inform every stage of the mokṣopāya. It should also be re-emphasized that prapatti in this sense is a derivative of the true nature of the "soul-body relationship"-- derivative partly from the niyantr-niyamya bhāva but to an even greater extent from the third aspect of the relationship to which we now turn. This is the śeṣi-śeṣa relationship.

śeṣi-śeṣa relationship

It is in this aspect of the soul-body relationship that we find the major source of prapatti both as it enters into Rāmānuja's own mokṣopāya and as it has been re-interpreted by the later schools of Śrī Vaiṣṇavas. Rāmānuja develops the śeṣi-śeṣa relationship in his dispute with the Karma Mīmāṃsa school which uses the term "śeṣa" in a completely ritualistic sense.* In Vedārthasaṃgraha Rāmānuja first gives his own definition of the relationship as it concerns the sacrifice and then, with a significant analogy, generalizes the concept.

*Mīmāṃsa school used it to describe any subordinate part of the sacrifice which was intended to serve the principal purpose called śeṣi.

The śeṣa-śeṣi relationship in any situation means just this: the śeṣa is that whose essential nature consists solely in being useful to something by virtue of its intention to contribute some excellence to this other thing, and this other (parah) is the śeṣi....

In the same way, the essential nature of born slaves (garbha dāsa) and other servants is solely that they are entities which have value for their master (puruṣa) by virtue of their intention to contribute some particular excellence to him. Likewise, the essential nature of all entities, eternal and non-eternal, intelligent and non-intelligent, is solely that they are entities which have value for the Lord by virtue of their intention to contribute some excellence to Him. Thus everything is in the state of being subservient (śeṣabhūta) to the Lord, and He is the master and owner (śeṣi) of every thing, as is declared in texts like, "He is the ruler (vāsi) of all and the Lord of all" and the master (pati) of the universe."¹

Even though it is not possible to give adequate one word equivalents in translation of śeṣi and śeṣa we can perhaps use the analogy of a slave to his master and owner, which expresses Rāmānuja's view of the relationship in question fairly adequately. But Rāmānuja means more than that, which will bear out our point. As with the Niyantr niyāmya relationship, the śeṣi-śeṣa relationship implies the complete obedience and subordination of the slave to the will of the master. Yet, "the śeṣi not only rules; He rules by right over what belongs to Him. His superiority over His creation is not only by virtue of His power, but it is what is eminently fitting or appropriate".² This right of

¹Rāmānuja, Vedārthasaṃgraha, para. 121-122.

²Robert Lester, The Nature and Function of the Patanjalian-type yoga in the means of release according to Rāmānuja (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University) 1962, p.84.

the owner implies obligation on the part of the owned, an obligation or duty which is of the nature of a categorical imperative arising from the slave's essential nature as the slave of a rightful owner. From the quotation cited above, this duty is the slave's service with the "intention to contribute some excellence" to his master. The implication of this categorical imperative for Rāmānuja's mokṣopāya is that the devotee as śeṣa must perform "service in the form of bhakti" and in the form of other acts of worship which praise and glorify the Lord as śeṣi, "For He alone should be worshipped by all always in all stages of life."¹

If we are to understand the full implication of the śeṣi-śeṣa relationship then we must purge the master-slave analogy of all the negative and oppressive connotations generally associated with a slave's dependence. These connotations were present even in Rāmānuja's day and he anticipated the objection that his position is contradicted by all experience:

for we see that literally all spiritual beings have one great wish: to be completely independent; compared with that, dependence means suffering. And there is the smṛti "All dependence means suffering" and in the same line "Service is called a dog's way, so try to avoid it"²

¹Rāmānuja, Vedārthasaṃgraha, para. 144.

²Ibid., para 143.

Rāmānuja retorts that such an objection "must be regarded as an erroneous cognition due to karman" made by one who knows nothing about the nature of the soul nor about what it means to be a śeṣa or slave to such a śeṣi or master as "the Supreme Person (who) is happiness in Himself".¹

There is nothing burdensome in this servitude: rather being a śeṣa is the soul's natural and joyous fulfillment of its own being. The essential nature of this (finite self) is itself ensouled by bhagavān (Lord) because its sole rasa -- its essence and its delight-- is to be a śeṣa of bhagavān.² Van Buitenen notes that rasa has here the double meaning of "essence" and "ecstasy" for serving God as His śeṣa by the loving representation of bhakti is as such a source of extreme joy, as Rāmānuja repeatedly declares.³ The observation brings out that the synonymous word rati is used in the introduction to the Gītābhāṣya describing the Lord's eternal attendants (sūris) as those whose sole essence and joy is to be His śeṣas. This aspect of fulfillment and joy -- finally even bliss -- in the service, taken together with the fact that the object of this service is Himself joy and bliss, is an essential element in Rāmānuja's moksopāya. This aspect alone accounts

¹Rāmānuja, Vedārthasaṃgraha,

²Ibid., para.78.

³J.A. Van Buitenen, Rāmānuja's Vedārthasaṃgraha (Poona: Deccan College monograph series 16)1958, p.238, tn. 349.

for the facts that the performance of bhakti is "immeasurably and overwhelmingly dear to the devotee" and that bhakti gains "the sense of a kind of love (prīti)" which is essential to the highest bhakti (parabhakti)¹. This aspect makes the soul's complete subordination to and reliance upon the Lord (prapatti) not only a metaphysical fact to be understood, not only an imperative to be obeyed, but also a joy to be realized.

We must consider one other aspect of the śeṣi-śeṣa relationship which, while not considered at length by Rāmānuja, assumed great importance in the later development of prapatti. The idea that the slave has obligations to the master can be taken to imply that the master has responsibility for the slave. This implication is quite explicitly drawn by Vedānta Deśika, the principal theologian of Vadagalai school.

Īśvara is responsible for the protection of His servants and has also the power to do so, where as the jeeva or chetana is not responsible for his own protection nor has he the ability to protect himself. This is due to Īśvara being the unconditional (nirupādhika) śeṣi and their being the unconditional śeṣas and their being indeed the responsibility of the owner to protect what belongs to Him and of the strong to protect the weak.²

From some statements in Rāmānuja's writings, we can come to the conclusion that the Lord as śeṣi does not have any binding responsibility. The basis for this conclusion is, however, present in a much more basic manner than simply as

¹Rāmānuja, Vedāntasāṃgraha, para.141.

²M.R. Rajagopala Ayyangar, Śrīmad Rahasyatrayasāra of Vedānta Deśika (Kumbakonam: Agnihothram Ramanuja Thathachariar, no date,) p.30.

an implication of the obligation of the śeṣa. The basis exists in the fact that ultimately it is the slave and not the master who benefits from the relationship, the 'service' which the slave performs pales into insignificance in comparison with the 'service' which the master does for the slave, even though the master is not obligated to do so. To one who, in love and devotion, has humbled himself as His śeṣa, to one who has taken refuge and thrown "himself together (ātma-ātmīya) at the lotus like feet of the Supreme Person, the Lord as śeṣi naturally responds in love and compassion and performs for His śeṣa the highest possible service in granting to him His eternal presence.¹

In this connection we may refer to the similarities between our point of view and that of a recent author, Robert Lester. In his study on the place of Patanjalian-type of yoga in Rāmānuja's means to release, Lester has developed the thesis that "the nature of the means to release is determined primarily on the basis of the doctrine that the individual soul and the Supreme Person are related as śeṣa and śeṣi."² While Lester does not explicitly draw out the connection between the śeṣi and śeṣa relationship and the concept of prapatti, his discussion indicates the manner

¹Rāmānuja, Śrī Bhāṣya.1.3.39 (trans. Thibaut, 1.347); 1.4.22 (Trans: Thibaut p.396.)

²Robert Lester, op.cit., pp.165-166.

in which the soul's nature as śeṣa leads to the act of prapatti within the moksopāya. As he says "the mentality of yoga-practice is reliance on the Supreme Person... not one of the self mastery." With regard to the vision of the self (ātmadarsana)

the important point to note... is that the ātman is perceived not only as distinct from prakṛti but also as śeṣa to the Supreme Person... The fact that the individual ātman is śeṣa to the Supreme ātman informs Ramanuja's entire means to release. We have seen that knowing this fact is the basis for karmayoga. Now we see that the vision of the individual ātman as śeṣa gives rise to higher devotion (parabhakti) toward the Supreme Person... and such devotion gives rise to meditation on this person.¹

In ātmadarsana the yogin realizes that he is essentially dependent upon the Supreme Person the Inner Ruler; that this person is worthy of devotion indeed that this person is the highest goal to be attained and the only means by which to attain it. Realizing all this, he can do no other than turn his manas entirely toward this Supreme Person:

"Having become a man of knowledge thinking, 'I am of the one essence of being a śeṣa to Vāsudeva (Supreme Person), and my actions, maintenance and essential nature depend on him. He is the most Supreme by His countless auspicious attributes; then, he resorts to me (mām prapadyate), i.e. he meditates on Me (mām upāste), thinking, Vāsudeva alone is my highest goal and means; whatsoever abides in my heart, He is all that to me (Gītābhāṣya, 7.19)²

¹Robert Lester, op.cit., p.144-145.

²Ibid., p.148-149.

Here on the highest level of bhakti (parabhakti) and the highest level of meditation (paravidya), we see meditation (which is synonymous with bhakti) equated with the act of resorting to the Lord (prapatti) which arises from the realization that one is a se^psa of the Supreme Person.

CHAPTER.III

BHAKTI, PRAPATTI AND THEIR RANGE

Rāmānuja sometimes used the word 'bhakti' in the sense of the goal of the religious life and sometimes with the sense of the means to that goal, and he moved easily back and forth from one usage to the other. It is just such fluidity in terminology that we find in the gadyas¹. At those points where devoted service to the Lord is emphasized as the goal, the means to that goal is the Lord himself, and the only human requirement is surrender of one's self and recognition of one's essential subservience (śeṣatva) to the Lord.² This is not considered by the author of gadyas as an alternative to bhaktiyoga; it is bhaktiyoga considered from the standpoint of man's essential nature of subservience to, and helplessness before, God, and it is, therefore, not surprising that it is particularly emphasized in a stotra,³

¹M. Yamunacharya, Rāmānuja's Teachings in his own words (Bombay: Bhavan's Book University, 1963) p.156-160, Bhagavad Rāmānuja viracitam śaranagati gadyam 1-23 is given in Appendix, ii.

"gadyas (prose-poem) is dialogue of communion with God in which the soul of the author voices forth its innermost aspirations calling forth the depths of his consciousness a response from his Lord who assures his devotee of his living presence with him in the consciousness of which and in the perennial joy of whose service he may live content and happy!" p.128.

²Properly speaking, this is not a means, but the acknowledgement that there is no human means to salvation without divine grace.

³M. Yamunacharya, op.cit., p.157, śaranagati gadyam.5.

which is praise of God's glory, and confession of one's own unworthiness. There is this same difference of emphasis but not of fundamental conception, between Yamuna's stotraratna¹ and his doctrinal works. The gadyas are considered by Sri Vaisnavas to be a part of their stotra literature and there is little doubt that their author intended them as stotras, whether that author was Rāmānuja or one of his early followers.

Rāmānuja's two alternative interpretations of the chief prapatti text in the Bhagavadgītā, 18:66, called carama śloka (the last word), are not used by Vedānta Deśika² to support the doctrine of prapatti as he understood it, because

¹Swamy Ramakrishnanda, Life of Sri Rāmānuja (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Matt, 1965), p.107. (Stotra ratna is given) "Fie upon me, the impure, immodest, cruel, shameless creature, for lustful though I am, I am praying, O Supreme Lord, for the position of your servant which is far from being object of comprehension of even Brahma Śiva and Śanaka who are worthy of being counted as the greatest of yogis".

²Vedānta Deśika gives a summary of the meaning of the carama śloka: "Your knowledge is limited: your ability is insignificant; your life is short and you are also impatient of delay. Therefore do not go about seeking other upāyas which you cannot fully understand, which you cannot easily adopt and which can bear fruit only after much delay. Realize that I who am easy of access to all, who am the saviour of all the worlds, and who am endowed with all the attributes essential for a saviour, am the only upāya and perform the surrender of the responsibility of protecting yourself to me with its five angas. When you have adopted this upāya you will have done what you ought to do, you will become my ward.....I will find delight in making you render all forms of service in all places." Srimad Rahasya traya sāra, p.563-64.

they do not clearly state that "surrender" is an alternative path to salvation from that of devotion (bhakti) Rāmānuja's two¹ interpretations of the carama śloka, however reveal an understanding of "surrender" that is not so different from the position of gadyas.

Here we will quote the carama śloka and then focus attention on Rāmānuja's interpretations of it:-

Abandoning all duties
Adopt me as they sole refuge;
From all sins I thee
Shall rescue: be not grieved!

In his first interpretation² Rāmānuja takes "all dharmas" to mean all the paths to mokṣa previously taught, karmayoga, jñānayoga and bhaktiyoga, but he does not take parityājya (abandoning) literally. These yogas or disciplines are not

¹Kumarappa, Bharatan, The Hindu conception of deity as culminating in Ramanuja. (London, Luzac & Co, 1934)p.309., gives only one interpretation. Van Buitenen's comment on this is interesting, see Ramanuja on Bhagavadgītā, p.27.

²karmayogajñānayogabhaktiyogarūpān sarvān dharmān paramanissreyasasāadhanabhūtān madārāadhanatvena atimātraprītya yathādhikāraṁ kurvāṇa evoktarītyā phalakakarmakartṛtvādiparityāgena parityājya mām ekameva kartāramāradhyaṁ prāpyamupāyam cānusaṁdhatsva

Performing, according to ability, with intense love, and as worship of me, all dharmas, which have the form of karma yoga, jñāna yoga and bhakti yoga and which are the means to supreme felicity, renouncing by giving up the fruit, the action, the doership, etc., in the manner heretofore stated, reflect on me alone as the doer, the object of worship, the goal and the means.

Quoted in Robert Lester, op.cit., p.27.

to be abandoned, but to be performed as worship pleasing to God, and entirely in the spirit of love, in a manner accordant with the devotee's own position in society and spiritual qualifications.¹ Those things which should be abandoned are: the karmic fruit of such actions, the idea that the actions are one's own, and the idea that one is their real author. Correspondingly, adopting the Lord as one's sole refuge means that one recognizes that he is both the actor and the one worshipped through the action, and he is both the goal (upeya) and the means (upāya). If the Lord is thus worshipped, he will deliver the devotee from the accumulated sins which prevent him from reaching Him.

In his second and alternative interpretation,² Rāmānuja interprets, "dharmas" to mean expiatory ceremonies to remove sins. Since there is an infinite weight of such

¹This is what Śankara has designated by the term 'adhikāri-bheda'.

²"bhaktiyogārambhavirodhyanādikālasamcitanānāvidhā nantapāpānugunān....prāyaścittarūpān..sarvān dharmān parityājya bhaktiyogārambhasiddhaye māmekam śaraṇam prapadyasva aham tvā sarvapapebhyo yathoditasva rūpabhaktyārambhavirodhi bhyassarvebhyah pāpebhyo mokṣayiṣyāmi....."

Renouncing all dharmas which have the form of expiations with regard to the infinite and various kinds of sins accumulated during beginningless time which are obstacles to the commencement of bhaktiyoga resort to me alone as refuge in order to affect the bhaktiyoga: I will release you from all sins, sins which are obstacles to the commencement of bhakti which has the essential nature described. Quoted in Robert Lester, op.cit., p.28.

sins, since the ceremonies designed to remove them are also countless and difficult to perform, and since life is short, the Lord counsels Arjuna not to practice such expiatory rites, but instead to take refuge in HIM, and assures him that He will remove the sins which prevent Arjuna from undertaking bhaktiyoga.

Vedānta Deśika comments that only a hint of the deeper meaning of this verse, which according to him is the doctrine of prapatti, is given by Rāmānuja here. Rāmānuja himself is not so clear about it as he is in his later work, the saranagatiqadya. The hint that Vedānta Deśika speaks about is contained in the second interpretation presented above, for it shows that just as a man may give up expiatory ceremonies and surrender to the Lord in order to be able to begin bhaktiyoga, so one who considers that he cannot perform bhaktiyoga at all may give up bhakti, jñāna and karma yoga and may surrender to the Lord in order to attain him directly i.e. to secure mokṣa.

Now, to revert to the first interpretation, Rāmānuja is following the summary of the meaning of the eighteenth chapter of the Gita given in śloka 22 of Yamuna's Gītārthasaṃgraha.¹ All through the Gitabhāṣya, Rāmānuja has

¹Yamuna's Gītārthasaṃgraha, 22.

"The last lecture deals with the knowledge in virtue of which all agency is attributed to God, and of the necessity of cultivating sattva, sets forth how personal acts develop (into the attainment of God) and concludes by stating the fundamental doctrine of the Śhagavadgītā.

(svakarmaparipāmas ca sāstrasārārtha ucya
karma yogas tapastīrtha dāna yajñādisevanam.)

been emphasizing this point, but here he extends it from its initial application to ritual action (karma) to include all human efforts to attain salvation. All of these forms of worship should continue, he insists, but it is only in a secondary sense that they are means to salvation, for God himself is the true means (upāya) as well as the goal (upeya), the one who enables the worship to be done (the doer) as well as the one who is worshipped. Saranagati or prapatti is, here, not an alternative to bhakti, but its true meaning, though in devotional expressions where the emphasis is on the all-sufficiency of the Lord's action and the unworthiness of the devotee, bhakti, jñāna and karma seem to fall into insignificance. This is certainly a long way from the later understanding of prapatti as a particular cultic act by means of which one's salvation is assured. It is even further a way from the later practice of having prapatti done on one's own behalf by the guru,¹ or the later doctrine that it had already been performed on one's behalf by Rāmānuja.²

¹Vedānta Deśika, Srīmad Rahasyatrayasāra, op.cit., p.96. "In the case of those who depend solely on the āchārya there is no doubt at all concerning the fruition of prapatti, by the principle of "How much more, then? (kaimutika nyāya)"

²Ibid.,
 "When the author of the Srībhāṣya performed prapatti (the surrender of his responsibility or bhāra) we too have been saved (by that act) owing our intimate connexion with him." This is interpreted in two different ways by the southern school of the Viśiṣṭadvaita and the northern school. The former holds that since Sri Ramanuja has already performed prapatti, even his followers of a later day who acknowledge him as their āchārya will benefit by it and they need not perform prapatti; the latter hold, on the other hand, that only those who were his śiṣyas then would benefit by it.

Nevertheless, it undoubtedly provides a basis for these later developments, for Rāmānuja has followed Yamuna in radically extending and deepening the teaching of the Bhagavadgītā in such a way as to relativize (though not to make any less necessary) all human religious effort as a means of gaining salvation. Once it is recognized that it is fundamentally God who accomplishes men's salvation, the joys of the mystical communion and humble service, which might previously have been considered part of the human path to reach God, are understood to be part of the divine estate into which the devotee enters by the grace of God.

"Supreme devotion" and "service"¹ are all dependent on the metaphysical subservience of the soul to the Lord, its śesatva. This same connection is made in Rāmānuja's comment on the verse just before the carama śloka. Having that the Lord is now going to speak his final word to Arjuna concerning the bhaktiyoga, Rāmānuja interprets the verse previous to it to mean that Arjuna is instructed to practice that continuous representation or calling to mind which is synonymous with knowledge, worship and meditation,

¹These are called 'para bhakti' and 'seva' in Vedārtha samgraha: see in Van Buitenen, op.cit., para.141, p.170; para. 92, p.250; para. 144, p.299; 'parama bhakti' and 'kainkarya' in the gadyas.16

which is a contemplation most dear to the worshipper, God should be worshipped with excessive love (not simply by rituals without accompanying emotion). The worship which is pleasing to God is the performance of the entire round of services which are incumbent on a śēṣa; i.e., which a liege or serf should perform for his master or owner. Here the entire life of devotion is interpreted, not, as sometimes in Rāmānuja's writings, as particular actions which please the Lord and elicit an appropriate reward, but as that which is in accordance with one's essential nature, which is both one's duty and one's joy.

In the thought of Rāmānuja, God seems to have two somewhat different relationships to man's religious activities. In the first relationship, He presides over the working of the law of karma. Here He does not interfere with the moral decisions and the religious activities (or absence of such activities) on the part of the finite self. Only in certain exceptional cases does He cause individuals to perform good or bad actions, and this is only when the individuals already have strong disposition in one direction or the other, so that the Lord's encouraging them to go further in the direction they have already chosen is only a special means of rewarding unusual goodness, or punishing incorrigible evil-mindedness and evil-doing. Apart from this special case,

the Lord simply gives permission or approval (anumati) for souls, which He has endowed with the power to act and the capacity to discriminate between good and evil, to perform whichever course they themselves desire. God's second relationship to man's moral and religious action is quite different from the first. Here, He actively intervenes both in the life of individuals and in the affairs of the world as a whole. He manifests himself in the empirical universe, or, in other terms, descends periodically from his perfect and eternal realm of bliss to the constantly changing world filled with misery or at best only limited happiness.

There is not, in Rāmānuja's mind, any contradiction between the first relationship of law and the second relationship of grace, but there is, however, a clear distinction. Indeed Rāmānuja's followers found it difficult completely to reconcile the two, precisely because of the prominence which Rāmānuja gave to the second relationship, in which God intervenes in the affairs of the world. Before turning to this second mode of divine activity, we should note some aspects of Rāmānuja's conception of God's presiding over the working of the law of karma, since this is for Him the indispensable presupposition of everything he says about God's protective and redemptive action towards those who worship Him.

First of all Rāmānuja makes it clear that the power for future effects present in good and bad action is not a mysterious power immanent in the cosmos, which the followers of the karma mīmāṃsa called apūrva or niyoga. It is on the contrary, nothing other than the Lord's pleasure and displeasure, which then brings either happiness or suffering, as the case may be, to the individual who has done this action. The work which pleases God and thus caused him to grant appropriate rewards are primarily acts of worship, i.e. sacrifices and other religious duties which are prescribed in the Vedas or in other sacred scriptures. Though the vedic sacrifices are directed to the deities to whom the Vedic hymns are addressed, they are all actually enjoyed by God himself, since He is the Inner Self of all these deities. In this respect there is no essential difference between ordinary religious works and the higher forms of meditation and devotion. Both works and meditation achieve their results by pleasing the Supreme Person, who alone is the one who bestows all the goals of human desire: pleasure in this life, attainment of the lower and transitory heaven after death, and the attainment of permanent bliss by being liberated from the bond of karma which keeps one in an endless cycle of rebirths. The difference lies in the end a man wishes to reach by his religious act. Meditation

or devotion to the Supreme Person is usually undertaken in order to secure man's supreme goal or release from this transient and painful world. However, rites enjoined by the scriptures, or even forms of worship which are ordinarily performed to gain some worldly benefit, may help in winning the favour of God, which will bring permanent salvation, provided that they have been done without any desire to earn merit to be used for worldly results.¹

Meditation, like action, achieves its effect only by winning the divine favour or grace, but it is distinguished in this respect, that it can so please the Lord that it nullifies His displeasure at the mass of sins accumulated by the soul in an endless series of lives. The effect of the Lord's displeasure is His condemning the soul to ignorance of its true nature and destiny and His causing it to identify itself with its material body and worldly pleasures experienced through that body. When the Lord's displeasure

¹Rāmānuja, Sribhāṣya, 3.2.37 (Trans. Thibaut. p.625), "For it is He only - the all-knowing, all powerful, Supremely generous one who being pleased by sacrifices, gifts, offerings, and the like, as well as by pious meditation is in a position to bestow the different forms of enjoyment in this and the heavenly world, and release which consists in attaining to a nature like his own. For action (karma) which is non-intelligent and transitory is incapable of bringing about a result connected with a future time." see Gītābhāṣya 16.19; 18.46.

at accumulated sin is nullified by his delight in the meditation and devotion of the worshipper, He destroys the ignorance He has caused and grants the soul knowledge of its own nature and of Himself. Such knowledge leads to the attainment of God and, at the cessation of this life or some future life, to the attainment of communion with the Supreme Person and release from the bondage of samsāra.

Rāmānuja gives the following analogy to show how the Supreme Person rewards:

It is also observed in the human society (lōke) that man earns wealth of various kinds by such occupations as farming, and by means of wealth, they pay homage (arcayanti) to the king, either directly or through his ministers. When the king has thus been honored, he bestows rewards (phala) appropriate for each gift or act of homage (arcane).

Rāmānuja goes on to say that sacrifices, gifts, and obligations are indirect aids towards propitiating the Supreme Person, while praise, worship and meditation propitiate Him directly. When propitiated (offered pleasing worship, āradhita) God like a king, bestows appropriate rewards, viz. temporal happiness and final release.¹ This is a very significant analogy, for it makes it appear that God's relation to men is comparable to that of a king who bestows his favour on his subjects in proportion to the value of their gifts and services to Him. This suggest something very important

¹Rāmānuja, Sribhāṣya.3.2.40. (Trans: Thibaut, p.627-628)

about nature of God and also about man's motivation in serving God: he serves God in order to win God's favour and receive His blessing in return.

This theme of pleasing God in order to win his favour certainly runs throughout Rāmānuja's theology, and it is sometimes taken as so characteristic of his thought as to set him apart from his followers who more and more stressed and unconditional or uncaused character of divine grace (nirhetuka kṛpa). However, we have already seen that there is another line of thought which runs through all of Rāmānuja's writings, though it is less prominent in his commentary on the Vedānta Sūtras than in his other works. This other thought also has its human analogy in the relation between a king and his subject, or perhaps more accurately, between the head of a household and his servant or slave. This is the 'śeṣi-śeṣa' relationship which we have already discussed in the second chapter. In this relationship the service of the subordinate to his superior is not done in order to win some favour' it is done simply as his duty.' As this relationship applies to God and the soul, this is a joyful duty, so that subservience and service to God is man's real happiness.

Rāmānuja's followers have stressed that God's relation to the soul is also quite different from that of

the ruler who bestows his favour according to the merit of his followers. It is the proper function of the master or owner to take care of his servants, and this is all the more true when the servant has acknowledged his inability to care for himself and his utter dependence upon his master. Rāmānuja himself never suggests that God "must" save man or even that He certainly will, by virtue of His nature, for to say this would be to limit God's complete lordship and supremacy. Since God is the master and owner (śeṣi) of all His creatures, it is quite fitting that He should protect and save them, but there is no question of any responsibility or necessity forcing Him to do so. He is compelled to save men only by His own supreme compassion (parama kārūṇya). Such Divine mercy or compassion does not imply for Rāmānuja that God must abandon His strict justice and His treatment of men according to their moral deserts. He deals with this point specifically in the Śribhāṣya in refuting the charge of 'mercilessness' in God's creating the world in which there is suffering. He defines "mercy" (dayā) as "a disinterested concern in the welfare of others, which is incapable of enduring their suffering." Mercy which causes one to transgress the law in order to help someone else is not a virtue but weakness. The Lord's mercy or compassion is certainly not such weakness. The Lord is

always endeavouring to increase superlative (niratisaya) happiness, and in order to do this He must subdue the accumulated mass of sins and check the tendency of creatures to disobey His laws.¹

In all God's descents or manifestations in the finite realm, in all His efforts to make Himself available to men so that they may worship Him and attain their goals, he remains the Supreme Person, the Lord of all. His compassionate concern for men is not a weak pity; it does not contradict, but rather requires, His strict justice. In his compassionate dealings with men, God is accessible and Supreme. There is one situation, however, in which God not only makes Himself accessible to the experience of His creatures, but also seems to forget His Supremacy. This is in the special relationship He has with his most excellent devotees.

In the Gītābhāṣya Rāmānuja describes a relationship between God and those who are exclusively devoted to Him, the highest class among all His devotees. They are called the wise (jñānis) or the great-souled ones (mahātmās). These yogis are as superior to other yogis as mount Meru is to a handful of mustard seeds.² Where as the devotion of others

¹Rāmānuja, Sribhāṣya. 2.2.3 (trans: Thibaut p.488-89).

²Rāmānuja, Gītābhāṣya, 6.47.

to God is only in order to please Him and thus gain their own ends, the exclusive object of the jñānis devotion is God Himself. "The jñāni's love for me is so great that I cannot express it. Even such love have I, too for him."¹ These jñānis are also described as those who have no other object or desire, for their sole object, necessary to sustain their souls, is meditation on God Himself.² These supreme devotees worship God from the sheer joy of experiencing Him in devotion and also with the consciousness that they are His śeṣas and they are therefore obligated to render Him all that a servant should do for his master.

From the side of the devotee, this relationship with God is one of utter dependence and reliance on God for support. There is, in the first place, the intellectual realization that all intelligent and material entities, in all conditions whatsoever, are dependent on the supreme person with respect to their essential nature, existence and activity (svarūpa-sthiti-pravṛtti). The highest kind of devotee applies this knowledge also to himself:

one will rarely meet a person in this world who after many virtuous lives has come to know that it is his sole essence to be śeṣa of God and that his own proper

¹Rāmānuja, Ītābhāṣya, 7.17.

²Ibid., 9.22.

form, existence and activity depend on God who is the supreme one on account of his innumerable auspicious qualities.¹

The devotee's sense of dependence, however, goes far beyond the recognition of God as the universal ground and Lord, or the support of which he feels in need, is the experience of the presence of God. The jñāni is the one of the very few whose nature is such that "his happiness is only when in union with Me and his grief only when separated from Me"² The superior yogi has an intense desire to find God and to remain in communion with Him. This yearning love is so intense that this yogi is unable to tolerate a moment's separation from God.

Now the paravidya or the knowledge of the most high is praised. It is said that superior to the yogins of all kinds is that yogin of whom God will now proceed to speak. Compared to this yogin all yogins who resort to austerities etc., are as inferior as mustardseed compared to the Meru. God considers that this superior yogin is he who has fixed his manas on God because his excessive love of God adding something to his nature that others lack, he cannot find any support but God, who strives diligently to attain God because his love is too

¹ Van Buitenen, The Condensed rendering of Ramanuja's Bhagavadgītābhāṣya, 7.19., p.104.
 Harikrishna Das Goyandaka, Ramanuja bhāṣya Hindi anuvāda Saṁhita, Gita Press Gorakhpur, p.246.
avasāne vāsudevasaṣataikarasaḥ aham tadayatta svarūpa
 sthitipravṛtti ca sa ca asaṁkhyevai kalyaṇagunai
 "I am the śeṣa of Vasudeva. My essential nature, existence and activity are all dependent on Him, and He is far superior to all else by virtue of His countless auspicious attributes"

² Van Buitenen, op.cit., 7.27., p.106.

ardent to allow him to be, if not for a single moment separated from God and who whorships God through bhakti.

"He is so attached to me and he loves me so dearly that it would imperil his existence to be separated from Me, even for a moment, or to stop thinking from My essential nature, qualities, actions or glorious realms."² It is said of the mahātmas that "because of their intense love, without Me their souls cannot be supported."³ The same idea is brought out in the definition of exclusive devotion in Gītā, 9.13.

But 'tis Me, son of Prtha, that great souled men,
Abiding in god-like nature,
Revere with unswerving thoughts,
Knowing (Me as) the beginning of beings, the imperishable.⁴

and in the comment on the following verse, this communion is interpreted as continual worship: "Because of their

¹ Van Buitenen, op.cit., 6.47, p.98.

Harikrishna Das Goyandaka, op.cit., p.225.

"Without Me, he is unable to sustain his very existence (ātma) Thus he merges his mind in Me."

² Ibid., p.230.

मयि अभिमुख्येन आसक्तमान मत्प्रियत्वातिरेकेण गुणैः - ज चेद्विज्ञेन
मद्विभूज्या विश्लेषे सति तत्क्षणद एव विशीर्यमाण स्वभावतय मयि सुगादं (7:1)

³ Ibid., p.270.

महामनसो यथावस्थितमत्स्वरूपज्ञानाः अत्यार्थमत्प्रियत्वेन मया केन
आत्मधारणम् आलुभमाना मयि आसक्त मनसो मदप्रियाः (8:15)

⁴ Ibid., p.294.

intense love for me, they discover that it is impossible to support their souls (ātma-dhāraṇamdothamāna) for even an infinitesimal part of a moment without being engaged in singing My names, or in holy exercises, or in obeisance of Me."¹

It is the second side of the relationship between God and the devotee which is somewhat surprising. Rāmānuja understands Lord Krishna to be teaching in the Gītā that He is similarly dependent upon His exclusive devotee. There is no question in Rāmānuja's mind of denying the onesided ontological dependence of the universe on God. Indeed it is precisely in the Gītābhāṣya that Rāmānuja makes a distinction between the finite self's relation to its body and God's relation to His cosmic body. In the former case, although the soul is superior to the body, there is some mutual dependence, for the soul also depends on the body to accomplish its purpose. In the case of God, however, there is no such dependence on the cosmos.

I do not depend on them. They do not benefit me. I support all existence by my will. I am the supporter of all beings (bhūta bhūt) and I derive no benefit from them.²

¹Ibid., p.294.

²Rāmānuja, Gītābhāṣya. 9.5.

Novertheless, God's love for the devotee is so great and His longing for the devotee is so intense that He declares that He also needs the devotee to support His own self (ātma)

The jñāni.....focusses His mind on Me alone, because of intense love for Me and because he cannot sustain his soul (ātma) without keeping Me before his mind. Then I myself am the One who is to be attained, not merely some aspect of My being such as my sovereignty. Being unable to endure separation from this worshipper, I choose him. I alone bestow on him the fruition of the meditation suitable for attaining Me, and this meditation has the form of intense love for Me.¹

Rāmānuja puts this mutual dependence between God and His favoured devotee very emphatically in His commentary on the Gītā.

I consider the jñāni as My own self, i.e. I consider that the maintenance of My ātma depends upon his ātma. How so? I am his highest end because without me he cannot maintain His ātma. Like wise I cannot maintain My ātma without him and therefore he is My ātma.²

In two passages in the ninth chapter, Rāmānuja goes even further in describing God's reversal of the ordinary metaphysical relationship between himself and His creatures:-

But whoever worship me with intense love; worshipping me in such a way that without that worship, they could not support their souls, worshipping Me as though that worship were their sole aim; whether they are high cast³ or low, they will dwell blissfully in Me possessing attributes like My own. I also dwell in them means that I dwell in them as though they were more exalted than I.³

¹Rāmānuja, Gītābhāṣya.8.14.

²Ibid., 7.18.

³Ibid., 9.29.

This is somewhat explained in a comment in the earlier chapter.

I reckon that when a loving devotee of this kind I deliver my own self entirely, even that is no sufficient compensation for the love he has borne (for Me). I reckon, too, that even when I have given My own self to him, I have done little or nothing for him. That is how I think My beloved lovers.¹

This paradoxical reversal of values can only be understood on the basis of God's generosity (audārya). Rāmānuja paraphrases Lord Krishna's words in 7.18 to mean that all the classes of devotees are generous (udāra) in that they favour God by accepting any gift from Him. God considers that by accepting His gift they have given Him their all. The devotee can only be called "generous" here in the light of God's own generosity, which is so great that He considers their accepting His gifts more important than His having given to them. This same idea of the divine generosity underlies Rāmānuja's paraphrase of 9.26:

Whoever presents to Me with devotion a leaf, a flower, a fruit, or water, that offering of devotion I accept from the devout-souled, giver.

If a devotee who loves Me and is unable to support his ātma without worshipping Me make Me even a very simple offering such as a leaf, but offers it as His sole aim, then I shall accept that leaf and enjoy it, for although I am the universal cause.... and experience My own superlative bliss and the leaf is far removed from my desire, I shall consider it a precious gift.²

¹Rāmānuja, Gītābhāṣya.9.2.

²Ibid., 9.26.

His generosity and favour towards His devotees is unfathomable. It is immeasurably great, and it is incomprehensible how God could give as though He were ignorant of the unworthiness and insignificance of the recipients. Along the same lines is one of their definitions of the term kṛtajnata as Rāmānuja applies it to God. This is usually translated as 'gratitude', its literal meaning being "the recognition of something done."

In the case of gāmbhīrya, we may detect in the definitions something of the tendency of the later Sri Vaisnavas to interpret all Divine qualities originally indicative of God's supremacy so that they also will point to His accessibility. Rāmānuja himself does not define gāmbhīrya, so we do not know for sure whether it was its original meaning of 'depth' or "profoundity" which caused him to use it so frequently as a divine attribute, or whether it was some derived meaning which was most important for him, such as "inscrutability" or "majesty". For many of the divine attributes the commentators give various alternative meanings, and it is quite understandable that Rāmānuja also has given somewhat different meanings to the same term in different contexts. What is more important for us to note, however, is that the concept of generosity

itself contains a combination of supremacy and accessibility. This quality is one which finds its clearest expression in someone with the resources to bestow gifts: the king or the great land owner, who for Rāmānuja frequently furnishes the human analogy for the position of the Supreme Person. It is especially lavish generosity which Rāmānuja seems to have in mind: that is royal prerogative. Although the presupposition of this generosity is wealth or greatness, the most prominent feature of the definition is the self-forgetfulness of the giver motivated by his desire to give.

This notion of self forgetfulness is even more prominent in the commentators definition of sausīlya, another important divine attribute which Rāmānuja frequently mentions but never defines. This term has the common meaning of 'good conduct', as does the simpler form śīla, but at some point it acquired a much more specific meaning in the Sri Vaisnava tradition.

Like audārya, sausīlya can only be exercised by one who is essentially superior. That is why we may properly translate this concept by the English word "condescension" but we must qualify this as "gracious condescension", not only because of the unfavourable associations of the noun by itself, but because unfavourable connotations of "condescension" is inherent in the situation of a superior

dealing with an inferior, unless the conduct of the superior is so gracious that his inferiors are not frightened or embarrassed, indeed, are so charmed by his gracious presence that they temporarily forget his superiority. This quality is not real but only "as it were" (expressed by 'iva' in Sanskrit), yet it is essential to the situation of intimate communion between the Lord and His servants. It is the attitude and the behavior of God as avatāra that furnishes the background for the understanding of all these qualities indicating the divine saulabhya, and it is from the lives of the avatāras that illustrations of a particular quality are often drawn by the commentators. It is the present situation of the serious worshipper, however, that furnishes the most important context for Rāmānuja's thought about these qualities, as well as for that of his followers. Rāmānuja was concerned about the present communion of the devotee with the Supreme Lord, and it is about that communion that he is thinking when he says that the Lord treats His chosen devotees as His equals, or even as though they were superior to Him. The possibility of such an ontologically impossible situation is the 'gracious condescension' of the Lord.

The other important divine attribute which underlies this paradoxical relation is vātsalya, which may

perhaps best be translated in the Sri Vaisnava usage as "protecting and forgiving love". The earlier meaning of the word was the relation between the mother cow and its calf, and the common meaning was "tender affection" or love.

As in the case of the other two attributes just discussed, a kind of divine self-forgetfulness is implied in this conception of vātsalya, a fact obscured by the later controversy, for there is something even more important here than the ignoring of the sin of the creature; there is the forgetting of the sinless perfection of the creator and judge, the doctrine dearest to Rāmānuja's heart. It might be argued on the basis of Rāmānuja's definition of "mercy" (dayā) that he would not have accepted either of the later definitions of the schools. In that case, Rāmānuja would have understood vātsalya along the lines of the later definition of mārdava "inner softness"; "inability to bear separation from his devotees." Once we recognize the longing for communion with His devotees as an attribute of the Divine nature, however, the essential problem returns. Why should God desire, let alone intensely yearn for, fellowship with sinful creatures? It can only be because of a fundamental impulsion in the divine nature, a quality which at times takes precedence over everything else in God's Being. This is not a general setting aside of Divine justice. Because

of His supreme compassion God has established Himself (through His incarnations and other manifestations) as a refuge for all, but His vātsalya is expressed only towards those have taken refuge (āśrita) in Him. For those, however, and more especially for the few who have shown their worthiness for his special favour, God is an "ocean of vātsalya", and Rāmānuja almost certainly understood this protecting love to include "forgiveness to the maximum extent." The result of that contact in intimate communion is the destruction or the burning away of sin, so that the devotee can look forward to liberation from this sinful world and eternal communion with His Lord, but that cleansing action is only possible because the Lord, free from the slightest trace of anything defiling, so yearns for communion with his creatures that He disregards their sinful state. This is what Rāmānuja expresses with the last of the four phrases at the end of the introduction to the Gītābhāṣya, āśrita-vātsalya-vivaśah, "overwhelmed by His love for His sinful creatures who have come to Him for refuge".

The quality of compassion seems to have less relevance to this intimate sphere of God's communion with His devotee, yet that general concern for the happiness of creatures and distress at their misery is the basis for these more specific and dramatic Divine qualities. In the

definition of "mercy" or "compassion", too, there is a Divine self-forgetfulness: the forgetting of His own interest or gain (svārth-nirapekṣa), the forgetting of His eternal delights and His cosmic sports, in His compassionate concern for His finite creatures.

CONCLUSION

What remains is for us to see how bhakti and prapatti are integrated within Rāmānuja's mokṣopāya. We have sought to establish that prapatti is not simply a preparatory and continuous helpful auxiliary to bhakti as are the acquisition of knowledge from scriptures and the performance of karma-yoga but rather that it is the heart of successful bhakti. We can see this if we view the act of bhakti as a sacrificial propitiation of the Supreme Person as Rāmānuja so often does. To understand this concept, we must add a new dimension to our introductory description of bhakti. There we said that acts of loving and reverent devotion in the form of meditation are bhakti in the sense of means (sādhana bhakti). Sādhana bhakti then gives rise to an "immediate perception" of the Supreme Person which is bhakti as the goal or fruit (phala bhakti). This description, however, deals with bhakti from the perspective of man's actions and experiences.

The primary concern with bhakti, however, is how it affects God and what He does in response to it. Seen from this perspective both sādhana bhakti and phala-bhakti are means. While Rāmānuja often seems to speak of bhakti as a means of release, he never means to say that bhakti

itself effects release. Rather, bhakti is a means whereby the Supreme Person is propitiated and pleased so that He Himself effects release and attainment of Himself.¹ Rāmānuja explains this in the Vedārtha Saṁgraha by a comparison with sacrificial ritual acts.

Those who do know their Veda hold that the sovereign Lord, the Venerable Nārāyaṇa, grants any desired result when he is propitiated with any ritual act.²

Moreover, the very texts that enjoin the various acts first enjoin that a definite act be performed by an agent who is desirous of its effect, and then they say that, that act has the form of propitiation of a deity and that through the intermediary of that deity the effect of that act will be realized: e.g., a text like "One desirous of prosperity must sacrifice a white he-goat that is destined for Vayu..." As declared in the Drāmidabhāṣya:... "When the venerable Lord knows that someone follows His commandments, then He makes him prosper in His mercy, for He knows and is capable of acting." When a person performs the enjoined acts such as the worshipping of the Supreme Person which presupposes true knowledge of Him then by His favour, he finds happiness culminating in the attainment of Him, and security, according to his qualification... As the Venerable Lord has said: "Perform acts constantly: for acts are better than knowledge: "herewith He enjoins that acts must be performed after knowledge has been acquired. Then in having dedicated all acts to Me "He sets forth that the acts are propitiations of Himself and that souls are under His control.

p.277. ¹Rāmānuja, Vedārthasaṁgraha. (Trans: Van Buitenen,)

²Ibid., p.279-282.

Then He continues: "The men who always follow what I have taught here, faithfully and without muttering, will find release through acts!"

.....While He describes the eternal place that the followers of His command will reach in: "He that always performs acts while resorting to Me will attain by my favour forever the eternal place."

So we see that bhakti is an act of propitiation which will be successful only if it is performed in accord with the injunction that act must be performed after knowledge has been acquired. This knowledge starts one on the path toward discovering his true nature as śeṣa of the Lord. The second injunction is that which we saw arising out of the niyantra-niyamya relationship according to which oneself one must see as controlled by the Lord, and do all his acts in accord with His will (thereby making them service and worship the Lord.) The third enjoins the faithful obedience of the loyal and contented slave (śeṣa) to his rightful master (śeṣi). The last injunction that which is to be obeyed in conjunction with those acts of bhakti in response to which the highest goal is granted by the Lord's

grace* is that of resorting to Me (madvyapasraya-prapatti)
 an act which we have shown to arise from the soul's
 essential nature as the Lord's śeṣa. Dr. Satyavrata

*When we speak of grace and the doctrine of grace we are using western terms with the associations of Christian Theology. We use them to try to understand the central conception of one tradition in Hinduism. The similarities in doctrinal developments and controversies surrounding the doctrine of grace between this Hindu tradition and Christian thought are so striking that it would be misleading not to use the word grace. Nevertheless, we are involved in a process of "translation" with all its usual perils. If we are to avoid the pitfalls of translation, we must note carefully the precise meaning of these words which correspond most closely to our English word 'grace'. More than that, however, we must pay careful attention to the entire religious context in which these terms occur. Rudolf Otto characterized the bhakti tradition in general and this sect of Vaiṣṇavas in particular as "India's religion of grace". This may well be a useful description, but we need to recognize at the outset that this is not a phrase which occurs in the Sri Vaiṣṇava tradition itself. Even the phrase "doctrine of grace" does not occur. There is a doctrine of God and doctrine of the means to salvation, but there is no separate chapter entitled "the doctrine of grace". What is even now surprising, however, is that the two sanskrit terms which are most easily translated "grace", that is anugraha and prasāda, play only a minor role in the theology of Rāmaṇuja and his followers and are not included in the long list of divine attributes. This does not mean at all that there is no conception of Divine grace; but this conception is expressed in a number of terms which indicate quite specific aspects of the Divine love and compassion for creatures.

Singh remarks:

Prapatti is the natural and the spontaneous culmination of bhakti. The path of action i.e. karma yoga, merges to reach its goal, in the path of knowledge i.e., jñāna yoga. The path of knowledge serves its purpose when it loses itself in the path of devotion i.e. bhakti yoga. The path of devotion in its turn culminates in the path of self-surrender, i.e., prapatti. Being the culmination of bhakti and jñāna and karma, prapatti is their culmination also. The spirit of prapatti or self surrender which results in the resignation of the ownership and the authorship of karma transforms karma and the law¹ of karma in Akincanya and the law of Īśvarānugraha.

Does Rāmānuja's own conception of Divine grace agree with the 'cat-hold' or the 'monkey-hold' view of divine action, or with neither? How does he reconcile the apparent opposition of Divine justice and mercy? How does he combine the different Vaiṣṇava traditions whose differing emphases have sharpened this problem?

There are at least five possible interpretations of Rāmānuja's teaching of the upāya: the 'means' to be used by the devotee to attain salvation.

1. The Tengalai (southern) view is that Ramanuja taught only the way of prapatti and that is clear in all his writings.
2. The Vadagalai (northern) view is that Rāmānuja taught both ways: in his major philosophical works he taught the way of bhakti interpreted as a difficult path of

¹Satyavṛta Singh, Vedānta Deśika. (Varanasi: the Chowkhamba Sanskrit series office), 1958, p.375.

disciplined meditation on various aspects of the nature of God; in the more devotional gadyas, however, Rāmānuja is considered to have taught the way of prapatti, a simple surrender to the Lord, trusting in His mercy to assure one's salvation.

3. Some modern scholars regard the gadyas as later works ascribed to Rāmānuja in order to secure the authority of his name for this novel and unorthodox teaching. Rāmānuja, himself, in this view taught only the difficult path of devotion through disciplined meditation, a meditation restricted to those of the higher castes who were allowed to study the Upanisads. This does not mean that they argue that Rāmānuja was unfamiliar with the conception of prapatti but that he regarded this "surrender" to God as a preliminary to the disciplined practice of devotion, not as a separate and much easier path to salvation open to the multitude. This is the conclusion reached by Robert Lester and J.A.B. Van Buitenen.

4. The Śrī Vaiṣṇava scholar, M. Rajagopala Ayyangar and the French Catholic Prof. O. Lacombe agree on an alternative: Ramanuja considered prapatti as one particular form of bhakti; he did teach it, therefore as a distinct way to salvation, but within the one broader context of bhakti.

5. My own interpretation is fairly close to the above. In brief, my view is that Rāmānuja taught one way to salvation, the way of bhakti but this is a devotion filled with the spirit of surrender and grounded in the doctrine of the human self as a property or slave (śeṣa) of the Lord. Human action in pursuit of salvation is assumed, but this is always in response to and even animated by Divine action.

Bhakti, then is a human act meant to please the Lord. It is an outpouring of love and devotion to Him through meditation upon His many auspicious qualities - an outpouring with which the devotee hopes to elicit a response of love and grace from the Lord. Whether or not bhakti is successful depends upon how it is performed. It must be performed in accord with the true nature of the soul's relationship to God.

In his acts of bhakti, the soul -- the body of the Lord -- must come as one whose very existence depends upon Him (ādheya), as one whose every act is or should be controlled by Him (niyāmya) and as the joyous slave whose sole essence and delight is to serve and worship Him (śeṣa). He must come as one who, with all that is his

is taking refuge at the lotus-like feet of the Lord. When he so comes, his bhakti will naturally elicit an overwhelming response of love and grace from the Supremely compassionate One; and he will learn that the Lord is faithful to His words that "He that always performs acts while resorting to Me will attain by My favour for ever the eternal place" (Bhagavad Gītā. 18.56.)

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