by Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswami

VOLUME 4

A POOR MAN READS THE भगवद्गीता

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A POOR MAN READS THE Bhāgavatam

VOLUME 4

CANTO 1, CHAPTERS 7–8

SATSVARŪPA DĀSA GOSWAMI

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A POOR MAN READS THE BHĀGAVATAM
VOLUME 4

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To His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, who dedicated his best hours to presenting translations and purports to the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, an invaluable gift to humankind. This book is a humble attempt to praise his work and follow in his footsteps. My answers to questions on the *Bhāgavatam* are taken entirely from what I have heard from him.

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PREFACE

I have not written a volume of *A Poor Man Reads the Bhāgavatam* in eight years, and I have not written at all, not even a diary, in over a year. What is bringing me back to pumping the well again? A casual browsing in my library at the volumes of *A Poor Man Reads the Bhāgavatam*. They have an appeal because, I think if I write at all, it should be "straight" and śāstric. And as Professor Klaus Klostermaier wrote in his Foreword to Volume One of *Poor Man Reads the Bhāgavatam*, "Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswami writes beautifully, poetically, spiritually." When I first saw that, I thought the professor was praising something more than "straight" scholarly Vaiṣṇavism. He was speaking of my personal writing, the personal mix which *A Poor Man Reads the Bhāgavatam* contains.

Remember how I describe the process in the Preface to Volume Three? "I present the translation of a *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* verse, then make a brief overview of the contents of Prabhupāda's purport. Then I field questions devotees have submitted. When all that is done, I take off in a freer form of writing."

Here goes.

First Canto

Chapter Seven

VERSE 1

śaunaka uvāca
nirgate nārade sūta bhagavān bādarāyaṇaḥ
śrutavāṁs tad-abhipretaṁ tataḥ kim akarod vibhuḥ

"Ṛṣi Śaunaka asked: O Sūta, the great and transcendentally powerful Vyāsadeva heard everything from Śrī Nārada Muni. So after Nārada's departure, what did Vyāsadeva do?

VERSE 2

sūta uvāca
brahma-nadyāṁ sarasvatyām āśrama ḥ paścime taṭe
śamyāprāsa iti prokta ṛṣīṇāṁ satra-vardhanaḥ

"Śrī Sūta said: On the western bank of the River Sarasvatī, which is intimately related with the Vedas, there is a

cottage for meditation at Śamyāprāsa which enlivens the transcendental activities of the sages."

VERSE 3

tasmin sva āśrame vyāso badarī-ṣaṇḍa-maṇḍite
āsīno 'pa upaspṛśya praṇidadhyau manaḥ svayam

"In that place, Śrīla Vyāsadeva, in his own āśrama, which was surrounded by berry trees, sat down to meditate after touching water for purification."

COMMENT

It is important to meditate on the Lord before beginning our spiritual duties. Placing the consciousness on Kṛṣṇa makes our activities or service actually Kṛṣṇa conscious. Ideally, a *kīrtana* service is held before reciting or speaking on *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. When the mind is absorbed in Kṛṣṇa, then we can act in ways to please Him.

After Nārada fully instructed Vyāsadeva and left him to wander and preach, playing the *vīṇā*, Vyāsa sat down in his own *āśrama* and touched water for purification. In his purport to this verse, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "Before commencing the great epic *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, Śrī Vyāsadeva realized the whole truth by trance in devotion." It may be asked, How can those of us who have not realized the whole truth by devotion be effective as preachers of Kṛṣṇa consciousenss? But we don't have to realize the whole truth first. We require only to be staunch representatives of the spiritual master, with faith in his teachings. With such conviction, a devotee goes out, meets nondevotees, and tells them about Kṛṣṇa.

Vyāsadeva is a householder, yet his residential place is called an *āśrama*. In the *varṇāśrama* system, each and every status of life is called an *āśrama* because they all have the same goal of life:

realization of the Supreme. None of them are less important as far as spiritual culture is concerned. The only difference is that the householders are given permission to raise children in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, and the *sannyāsīs* are held in high esteem because of their practical renunciation. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes that "it does not matter whether the *āśrama* belongs to a householder or a mendicant." But in the history of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (which professes a spiritual vision and goal), *sannyāsa* has been emphasized and *gṛhastha* has been seen/treated as a lesser "class." What's the matter? Often the *gṛhastha* is an indulgent sense gratifier who has taken the *gṛhastha āśrama* as a license for sense gratification. But that is not supposed to be the case. He's supposed to be just as good as his *sannyāsī* Godbrother. He does not indulge in sex life with his wife, and therefore he should not be treated as a lesser spiritual person. There is something wrong if he is treated as a lesser preacher or as a less spiritually advanced person. And this should be corrected.

One might also ask, What are the elements of the *āśramas*, what distinguishes them? The main necessity for *gṛhastha* life is the presence of husband and wife. Lord Śiva has no house and lives under a tree. But he lives there with Pārvatī, his wife, and so his *āśrama* life is considered complete.

An *āśrama* is a place where spiritual culture is always foremost. One doesn't have to live in a temple or live among devotees to make spiritual culture foremost in one's life. Some people find living among devotees difficult for one reason or another. Perhaps many of the devotees in one's local community are immature in self-realization and can only relate to others on a dogmatic basis, and so one finds it difficult to live among them all the time. How can one keep spiritual culture in the forefront of one's life, if he or she has trouble relating to the devotees in his local community? Or perhaps a person has intellectual or cultural interests that are not strictly religious in nature but that in some sense seem to be spiritual. Is it possible to pursue such intellectual and cultural interests while still keeping spiritual culture in the forefront of

one's life? Or must one reject intellectual or cultural interests that are not directly related to Kṛṣṇa?

I think the answer to that last question is that one needn't reject cultural interests that are not directly related to Kṛṣṇa. If these interests seem to be spiritual, and they keep one enthusiastic in one's personal spiritual life, they can be maintained. Similarly, if one finds it difficult to live in a temple setting, that can be given up. Somehow or other, one must associate with devotees, but it should be done in a practical way, keeping in touch with one's psychophysical nature. My answers to these challenges may sound "not *parampara*," but I think they are realistic. When dealing with individual people, we cannot make one mold fit everyone. A person may be definitely a Kṛṣṇa conscious soul but have an attachment to visiting museums. (I don't say an attachment to visiting nightclubs.) A person may love to attend the devotee festivals but not live day in and day out in the temple regimen. And certainly that is hard to do if one has a family. The *gṛhastha āśrama* thrives in an independent setting.

Vyāsadeva followed the instructions of his spiritual master for meditating on the Supreme Lord. This included selecting a suitable place and atmosphere. Vyāsa's place was on the western bank of the Sarasvatī at Śamyāprāsa.

There's a minimum standard for a suitable place in order to advance spiritually, and if my domicile does not meet the minimum requirements, then I'm really working against myself, being dragged down by distractive elements. But practitioners of other yogas might protest: "Why aren't our places good enough to acquire spiritual understanding?" Or, "What makes the place in your tradition the best place and not someone else's?" "What if I am more suited to being in a place of activity, like a city, rather than a peaceful *āśrama*?" Ancient forms of yoga and meditation required great peace and concentration, and the residential places are no longer possible. Therefore, the scriptures and *śāstras* have stated that in this age, all that is really possible is the chanting of Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare, Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare. One can stay at a home

with one's family and chant the mantra morning and night, even if one lives in a busy city.

In his purport to this verse, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "Under instructions of his spiritual master, Śrīla Nārada Muni, Vyāsadeva concentrated his mind in that transcendental place of meditation." We hear so much about the importance of the instructions of the spiritual master, yet sometimes one's relationship with the guru seems very distant, almost like a formality. What does it mean to approach the guru by following his instructions? How can a person approach the guru by following the guru's instructions if that person's relationship with the guru seems to be a formality? How does one go beyond formalities in one's service relationship to guru and Kṛṣṇa?

One has to become a menial servant. Then one becomes intimate. The surrendered disciple is accepted by the spiritual master in a relationship that goes beyond formalities. He is given assignments that are confidential and more difficult to perform, and he performs them enthusiastically, without hesitation. The spiritual master is open to an intimate relationship with all his disciples, but those who hold back remain formal, and those who step over the formal barrier and take up humble services and who serve with long hours when called for begin to distinguish themselves by sincerity and pass beyond the border of mere formality. The guru begins to remember their names and quality of service more often, and calls upon them for service. And without even being called upon, they come forward, and they are accepted.

This chapter is called "The Son of Droṇa Punished." He will be brought to trial for killing the five Pāṇḍu children. Aśvatthāmā is his name. Arjuna ropes him and brings him before Draupadī. He wants to kill him. Draupadī wants to spare him. Kṛṣṇa wants him killed. What to do? Arjuna shaves the son of Droṇa by cutting off patches of his hair and driving him out of the camp. But Aśvatthāmā retaliates. He and Arjuna duel with *brahmāstras*. We will describe the verses one by one, but this is a quick overview

of what's to come.

He is one of the greatest scoundrels, a so-called *brāhmaṇa* in the *Mahābhārata*. The son of Droṇa punished. I stand by to watch. And watch TV. "How am I doing? What's my rating in the polls?" I should care. I'm actually not a bad guy. I'm no Aśvatthāmā. But I'm not a spotless shirt, a stainless saint.

VERSE 4

bhakti-yogena manasi samyak praṇihite 'male
apaśyat puruṣaṁ pūrṇaṁ māyāṁ ca tad-apāśrayam

"Thus he fixed his mind, perfectly engaging it by linking it in devotional service [bhakti-yoga] without any tinge of materialism, and thus he saw the Absolute Personality of Godhead along with His external energy, which was under full control."

COMMENT

Śrī Nārada advised Śrīla Vyāsadeva to meditate on the Personality of Godhead. Śrīla Vyāsadeva did not take notice of the effulgence of Brahman, because that is not absolute vision; it is the glowing covering of impersonal Brahman, and only when that curtain's removed by the mercy of the Lord is the real face of the Absolute seen. In this verse, the word for Absolute is *puruṣa*, or person. The Absolute Personality of Godhead is mentioned throughout the Vedic literatures and the *Bhagavad-gītā* as the eternal and original Person. This Supreme Person has many energies, and the energy mentioned in this verse is the external energy, "which was under full control." Vyāsadeva saw all this in meditation by the grace of the Lord.

Again we ask whether it's possible to link up the mind in devotional service "without any tinge of materialism" while

living in big, materialistic cities. It doesn't seem possible, since the cities are jammed with materialism. But there is a linking method ideally suited for this age of corruption, the *saṅkīrtana* method of chanting the holy names. This was given to us specifically by Lord Caitanya, since nothing else was possible. "There is no other way, there is no other way, there is no other way in the age of Kali except chanting the holy names, chanting the holy names, chanting the holy names." In this age of vice, there is one great benefit, and that is the chanting of the holy names, which purifies the environment and counteracts the predominant evil.

How important is it for a devotee to see the Lord? It's a valid question to ask, "Should a devotee of the Lord care about this information beyond the fact that 'I am interested because it is about my beloved Lord,' since a devotee's goal is not to achieve the Lord by meditation or austerities but to please the Lord he already knows exists?" It is a kind of insult to ask the Lord to appear before oneself or to demand proofs of the Lord's existence. By faith, the devotee already knows of the Lord's existence. He believes in guru, *śāstra* and *sādhu*, and he has fixed his goal of life in pleasing these authorities as a method of pleasing the Supreme Lord. Seeking an audience of the Lord in a lonely place is not his goal of life, nor is he seeking to see the energy of the Lord under full control.

I remember this one from the old days. Vyāsa saw a lot in his vision. The Lord and His energy. He was a great devotee and compiled *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. They say he was outwardly unhandsome. What is that? None of the wives wanted to have union with him. One covered her eyes and had a blind son. The one who was willing had a good boy, but of a lower caste, *śūdra*.

We will hear in later verses how Vyāsa taught after this vision. He knew how to mitigate the miseries of the masses.

In his purport to this verse, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "Perfect vision of the Absolute Truth is possible only by the linking process of devotional service." We have seen how, over the decades, the term "devotional service" has been applied to all kinds of different activities by ISKCON devotees (even, in some cases, criminal

activities). The phrase has been applied to so many different kinds of behaviors by people in so many states of consciousness that one might wonder whether the phrase has any practical meaning any more. How can one be sure that one is actually engaging in genuine devotional service and not something else? If my spiritual master or a temple authority engages me in some service or other, then is that activity to be considered devotional service, irrespective of the state of consciousness I might be in as I perform those activities? Let us say a young *brahmacārī* living in the temple would really rather be working at some job and living in his own apartment, where he could stay up late watching some show on television and then sleep in late on Saturdays and Sundays instead of having to get up early and go to *maṅgala-ārati*. He didn't always feel this way, but that's the way he feels now. Currently, he has no money and no place to live other than the temple, and so he remains in the temple, where he does what he's asked by the temple authorities (because if he did not, he would be asked to leave the temple), but in his own mind, he's just going through the motions. Is one engaged in devotional service even if in one's mind one is only "going through the motions"? On the other hand, let's say a college student who has never heard of Kṛṣṇa and who has never given much thought to God or religion happens to hear a musical composition by Bach, during which he has a deep aesthetic experience, which he later describes to a friend as an experience of the Divine. Where should one draw the line between devotional service and material life?

One definitely can't count "going through the motions" as the linking process of devotional service. One has to actually be serving Kṛṣṇa and guru with body, mind and words. It has to be an authorized service, as given in the scriptures, beginning with the processes of chanting, hearing and glorifying the Lord. Certainly concocted forms of activities outside the *sampradāya* don't count as *bhakti*.

But what about the boy who hears Bach as a divine aesthetic experience? It is what it is. Bach and other western religious composers created sublime God conscious music from the

Christian perspective, and those who hear can be uplifted to states of higher consciousness. We can even say they are being linked with God by hearing a great work by Bach. That is because consciousness is the important element in performing devotional service, not merely "going through the motions."

The effulgent curtain of Brahman has been removed for the *sādhaka*, or practicing devotee. In humility, he does not think that he knows Kṛṣṇa, but he actually sees beyond his blinding effulgence by the grace of the spiritual master and Kṛṣṇa Himself.

Śrīla Prabhupāda said in a lecture in Durban, South Africa (October 1975), which he addressed to a predominantly Indian diaspora audience, "there is a place above Hardwar where Vyāsadeva's *āśrama* was situated on the Sarasvatī on the western side. There, all the great sages and saintly persons used to perform sacrifice. Formally, big saintly persons used to live in forest *āśramas*. Now they have come far away from *āśrama* to South Africa because people have forgotten. At the present moment, the number of interested people is very small." He said that no one wants to come to the *āśrama* to visit saintly persons. It seems that these days, in many places in ISKCON and other spiritual groups, the amounts of visitors drop, and the amounts of new recruits drop. Is this the influence of Kali, the expected postmodern reality? And does it really matter if only a few attend?

Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī said that even if no one attended the temple lecture, the preacher could lecture to the four walls. And our Prabhupāda said that if no one attended the temple *kīrtana*, the devotees could chant to the roaches in the wall. In Prabhupāda's 1965–1966 diary, he was talking about his early Bowery days. One day he commented: "Only three persons attended, therefore I did not do the recording." So do numbers matter? Would it have been better if he recorded the talk he gave to only three persons?

The diminishing of interest in spiritual topics and of spiritual audiences should not influence the enthusiasm of preachers

to present the message of the *Bhāgavatam*. They should go on by all means giving classes and *kīrtana* with all enthusiasm, whether there are three people attending or three hundred. If Śrīla Prabhupāda decided not to record his talking to the three people who showed up, it means he probably spoke to the little audience spontaneously, and there is nothing wrong with that. The preacher does whatever is best according to time and place.

For the Sunday Feast, there are always plenty. But for nightly classes, maybe not so many. What can you expect? Saintly persons are like cows with full milk bags. They are not sour about poor attendance but give generously to the guests who come inquiring, be they one or a hundred.

Today in Mexico, we are living without electrical power, just as they often do in Vṛndāvana. They say if it keeps up for two days, we will have to move out of the hacienda and go to a hotel, or I may share Nārāyaṇa's apartment. We can't go without bathing water and refrigerated food. If I sit close to a window, I have enough light to read and write. But I can't watch a video, which I have gotten into the habit of doing.

I'm supposed to leave Mexico in five months to go and live in Delaware. But I feel restless and wish to leave earlier. Yet it seems I can't. The house isn't ready, although I could move into another house. But it would seem abrupt to leave here. And my caretakers are not ready there. Yet still, this restlessness to move. . .

VERSE 5

yayā sammohito jīva ātmānaṁ tri-guṇātmakam
paro 'pi manute 'narthaṁ tat-kṛtaṁ cābhipadyate

"Due to this external energy, the living entity, although transcendental to the three modes of material nature,

thinks of himself as a material product and thus undergoes the reactions of material miseries."

COMMENT

This verse tells how the conditioned soul comes under the control of the material energy and has to suffer. But it also tells the way out, which is surrendering to the Supreme as the remedial measure for getting relief from the bewildering waves of the illusory energy. Externally, he's punished by the material nature (*māyā*), and internally, he's visited by the Supersoul and the spiritual master in the shape of the scriptures.

It seems that Vyāsadeva, as a disciple of Nārada Muni, was able to accept the absolute truth by the mercy of Nārada through straightforward, stern instructions. This shows us the importance of having a humble attitude—being able to accept reprimands from higher authorities, despite being a highly qualified spiritual master for the whole universe. Being humble may create inconveniences in our spiritual life when we actually apply it, but it is essential. We have to be corrected in order to be shown the whole truth. We have to admit we do not know everything and bow down before our guru, who can instruct us.

In his purport, Prabhupāda writes that the Supreme Lord does not interfere with the task of the illusory energy because such performances of the illusory energy are also necessary for the reformation of the conditioned soul. So this appears to be a sign that the Lord loves us first. He is *satya-saṅkalpa*, whatever He wants is real—or one can say that reality is what He wants. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes that He, like an affectionate father, does not want the action of material nature, and He does not like it. He accepts the presence of something He doesn't like (this material prison) instead of simply annihilating the disobedient souls. This can be only because He loves us, even if we do not love Him. This brings to mind the early days, when Prabhupāda said to me, "If you love me, then I will love you." I believe that Swamiji saw I was hesitating to love him, for various reasons, and this was

delaying my progress in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. And so he said those words, which unlocked my heart and let my love pour out to him. I realized there was no reason not to love him, and all reasons to love him. From that point on, my Kṛṣṇa consciousness flowed. Swamiji was loving me all the time, and he just said in effect, "You foolish boy, why don't you love me? That's what you want."

When Prabhupāda writes in his purport, "The Supreme Lord does not interfere with the task of the illusory energy because such performances of the illusory energy are also necessary for the reformation of the conditioned soul," this very closely follows the logic of Jīva Gosvāmī's *ṭīkā* (from *Tattva Sandarbha*): "Here we can infer from the phrase 'being ashamed' (*vilajjamānayā*), that although *māyā* knows her work of bewildering the living beings does not please the Supreme Lord, still she cannot tolerate that they have turned their backs on Him because of their ignorance of Him, which is beginningless. *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (11.2.37) describes the result of turning away from the Lord: "When the living beings are attracted to something other than the Lord, they become fearful. Therefore, *māyā* covers their real nature and entices them to identify with matter."

For his part, the Supreme Lord cannot withdraw His favor from *māyā*, whom He has delegated as the controller of the material creation and who has always been His devotee. Still, He wants the conditioned souls to turn favorably towards Him, even if they must do so out of fear of *māyā*, and therefore He instructs them in *Bhagavad-gītā* 7.14 (*Tattva Sandarbha* 32-33). And so the question is, "In relation to worshiping God out of fear of Him and His punishment, it appears from the above that fear or punishment is not the factor or the way that Kṛṣṇa would prefer to attract conditioned souls back to Him. When religionists propagate faith in God that is based on the fear of the Lord's punishment—such as *māyā* or material suffering, hell, reactions, etc. alone—do they propagate *māyā*'s perspective and not Kṛṣṇa's preferred way?

Yes, worshiping or turning to God out of fear is not Kṛṣṇa's preferred way, it is *māyā*'s way. But there is also a kind of spiritual

fear or fearfulness, not only a fear coming from *māyā*. Thus there is a variety of sources acting on us when we turn to God in fear. Spiritual fear is a form of love of God—fearing the loss of our relationship with the Beloved—just as one fears losing his loving relationship with a parent if he misbehaves. In such a case, the fear is not one of punishment but out of loss of the loving relationship.

Prabhupāda writes, ". . .And due to this unholy contact, the pure spiritual entity suffers material miseries under the modes of material nature." As a way of excusing their material behavior, people claim, "You say Lord Kṛṣṇa made everything, so how could anything be unholy? All I have to do is realize that everything is connected to Kṛṣṇa. Okay, I realize it. I don't have to become a devotee or chant or read *Bhāgavatam*. It's all Lord Kṛṣṇa's energy, no longer unholy." Are there warnings devotees should heed so as not to fall into the same trap?

Devotees have been known to say, "I'm in *māyā* today," or "I'm still covered" as a way of acknowledging their imperfections, doubts and flaws. Can this be done without blaming the Kṛṣṇa-created material energy for doing her job, indirectly saying, "Kṛṣṇa, it's Your fault, Your energy made me do this. I'm Your devotee—why am I still suffering, still so imperfect?" In answer to all these questions, we should certainly not fall into the traps of cheaply excusing our material behavior or blaming Kṛṣṇa's *māyā* for doing her work.

In the end, it looks like your Lord Kṛṣṇa, by creating the material energy, intended the living being to suffer, yet your Prabhupāda is claiming that the Lord's real desire is to free His living beings through giving of the *śāstras*, sending His devotees, and other methods. But why does the all-compassionate Lord make us suffer only to free us? And why do we become so covered that our hearts forget our true path?

Again, these are more questions put up by the insincere souls who are trying to pin the blame on Kṛṣṇa for putting His own living entities in *māyā*.

Scene: Mother and son flying on a 737 evening flight arriving

into Philadelphia.

Mother: "Doubting Thomas. Prabhupāda says many things about the qualifications of Śukadeva Gosvāmī, but how can I know he is as qualified as all that? How can I believe the *Bhāgavatam* has truth and thereby accept its authorities, as in, 'it must be true because Śukadeva says it is true'—isn't that a tautology?"

Son: "Mom! Śukadeva Gosvāmī is a *mahājana*. He's the son of Vyāsadeva, who compiled all the Vedic literatures, and he heard the *Bhāgavatam* from his dad. His version must be true, and that's exactly what you are, a Doubting Thomas for not believing the words of Śukadeva Gosvāmī. You are safe in the arms of Śukadeva. Just believe him, and you'll be relieved from imperfections and know the truth."

Mother: "It seems to be so easy for you. I suppose it's because you heard it from Prabhupāda in the beginning."

Son: "It can be easy for you, too. Prabhupāda didn't tell us about Śukadeva, we just absorbed it all as one, along with the *chapattis* and *dahl*. Kṛṣṇa consciousness is truth—in the storefront in '66, and now, riding in a precarious airplane. Please believe, Mom. Śukadeva doesn't lie."

Mother: "All right, all right."

Mom waited until the plane had landed safely (by God's grace), and when she and her son were waiting for luggage, she threw out another salvo: "You devotees say there must be a God and you naturally give an idealized picture of what He must be like, but you can offer no proof He is as perfect as you say, that He does not fall into illusion, and then, like the living being, conquer illusion. Therefore, we are all alike, we become God when we conquer illusion."

Son: "Is this what they teach you at the yoga center? As Prabhupāda says, 'There are so many unscrupulous imaginations on the part of the monists to endeavor to put both the Lord and the living being in the same category.' But you can never put God and the *jīva* soul together as one. They are the same in quality, but not in quantity. God is great, and the soul is tiny. We don't

make up God's greatness. It's described in the scriptures, and it's known in the hearts of realized saints and sages. They never exaggerate the greatness of God but appreciate that they have even a tiny glimpse of an understanding of the Almighty. The attempt to drag Him down as one with the living being is the most ludicrous act of a so-called philosopher or yogi. You simply reveal yourself as a number-one fool when you say that you are one with God. Can you make the great creations of God, such as the mountains and storms and the wind and the sea? Can you claim that you are never in illusion? Better you simply admit you are an atheist with no knowledge of God than to speculate and imagine a oneness of God and all souls."

Mother: "Don't get so worked up. Here comes our luggage."



In his purport to this verse, Prabhupāda writes, "The living entity misunderstands himself to be a material product. This means that the present perverted way of thinking, feeling and willing, under material conditions, is not natural for him. But he has his normal way of thinking, feeling and willing. The living being in his original state is not without thinking, willing and feeling power." Everyone in the material world has his or her own particular tastes and propensities. When a devotee first comes to Kṛṣṇa consciousness and starts associating with the devotees, almost invariably, he or she is encouraged to regard those tastes and propensities as the products of *māyā*, and the devotee soon learns that the only tastes he or she should embrace are values that are directly related to Kṛṣṇa—reading and hearing about Kṛṣṇa and embracing the various aspects of Kṛṣṇa conscious life and culture. Yet, each eternal spirit soul is a unique individual with unique tastes and service propensities. Kṛṣṇa derives a unique pleasure from each of His individual *jīva-atmas*, and the pleasures He derives from one spirit soul are not identical with

the pleasure He derives from any other spirit soul. The process of devotional service involves uncovering those unique qualities and characteristics of personality—including those unique tastes and service propensities that are natural to the eternal, individual spirit soul in his own primordial nature. So on the one hand, a devotee may feel his individual tastes are to be rejected and that he or she should surrender to what the senior devotees say he should be thinking and feeling and valuing. On the other hand, the ultimate goal is to uncover and manifest those unique personal characteristics and tastes and service propensities that are innate to the individual spirit soul and that cannot be dictated or legislated from without. So how is the devotee to steer his way through all the various socializing forces that he faces while living in the International Society for Krishna Consciousness so as to become that unique, eternal person that he is in truth? If a devotee has been practicing Kṛṣṇa consciousness for ten or fifteen years and if, after that time, he awakens to a taste for, say, Beethoven's string quartets—is that simply *māyā*? Some aesthetic experiences seem to resonate within the deepest strata of one's heart. Do such tastes or aesthetic experiences bear no relation whatsoever to the original tastes of the spirit soul? How can a devotee see those tastes in relation to Kṛṣṇa? How is a devotee to distinguish the emergence of his unique tastes and values—those tastes and values that are rooted in his own eternal nature—from simply being in *māyā*?

I don't think awakening to a taste for Beethoven's string quartets can come under the category of the emergence of one's eternal nature. The "aesthetic experiences" which "seem to resonate within the deepest strata of one's heart" are, nonetheless, experiences of beauty with or without relationship to Kṛṣṇa. If they can be seen in relationship to Kṛṣṇa, then they may be accepted as feelings of the soul, but otherwise not. There are *vibhūtis*, or wonderful things mentioned in *Bhagavad-gītā*, and Kṛṣṇa says He is the root of those things. For example, He is the light in the sun, of hymns He is the *gāyatrī* mantra, of prayers He is *japa*. So if one truly begins to hear Kṛṣṇa in Beethoven's string

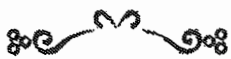
quartets—and who can deny that this is possible?—then this may be a *vibhūti*, or a perception of Kṛṣṇa in the material nature, in the beautiful sounds of the music. And thus the devotee can find his tastes and values in his own eternal nature apart from "simply being in *māyā*."

But don't drag us down to Elvis and the Beatles and say, "This is Kṛṣṇa, this is my soul, awake at last to its primordial nature." Try not to stretch the thing, but stay in line with Rūpa and Sanātana. Are those "socializing forces" really laying it on you? Surely you know by now that Kṛṣṇa consciousness is a matter of the free spirit turning to God. It cannot be dictated by an outer force, but it depends on your own will. So don't worry, that can never be taken away. And you may see Kṛṣṇa in a grain of sand and eternity in an hour. You have His permission.

It appears that different Śrīla Śukadeva Gosvāmīs appear in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and in other scriptures. In Prabhupāda's commentary on the *Bhāgavatam* verse 9.21.25, a different Śrīla Śukadeva Gosvāmī in another *kalpa* is described. Vyāsadeva wanted a son, and on Nārada's advice, performed penance to please Lord Śiva, who blessed him to have a son equal in potency to all five elements. At that time, Vyāsa's effulgence was so great that Indra became concerned and sent the Apsarā Ghātaci to seduce him. Later, when Vyāsa was attempting to light a sacrificial fire, Ghātaci appeared at his side. Vyāsa did not welcome her, although his mind was attracted to her beauty. Fearing his curse, Ghātaci transformed into a parrot and flew away. Her beauty, even as a parrot, continued to attract Vyāsadeva, and his semen fell on the sticks used to produce fire. Without noticing, he continued to rub the sticks together. A lustrous child appeared and was named Śukadeva. There are also details of a different Śukadeva appearance in the *Mahābhārata*, Śānti-parva, Chapters 323–333, so both stories are true, what to speak of the story of *Garga-saṁhitā*, when Śukadeva was a parrot of Rādhā in Goloka. So the question is: How do we get rid of the Western theological idea, which is based on cultural upbringing in the way Western scriptures are interpreted: the idea that there is only one way things can be

described that is right, and that contradictory statements cannot both be right? It seems that in many cases, scripture suggests, *This* is right, and *that* is also right, and even if the two contradict, the essence is that contradiction is not the actual substance, and that it does not stop one's faith or acceptance of the scripture as the absolute reality.

Why do we hear so much of the sages challenged by demigods and beautiful celestial creatures? Does it mean that just to get rid of that power that is given to a sage by austerity, he is challenged? The answer seems to me that it is natural for anyone with powers, such as the demigods, to put down others who may challenge that power.



VERSE 6

anarthopaśamaṁ sākṣād bhakti-yogam adhokṣaje
lokasyājānato vidvāṁś cakre sātvata-saṁhitām

"The material miseries of the living entity, which are superfluous to him, can be directly mitigated by the linking process of devotional service. But the mass of people do not know this, and therefore the learned Vyāsadeva compiled this Vedic literature, which is in relation to the Supreme Truth."

COMMENT

We may ask in what ways are the material miseries superfluous? They seem quite real and often difficult to overcome. The material miseries are ultimately unnecessary for the living being. He's

entangled in suffering due to his misuse of free will, but he can become free again if he surrenders to Kṛṣṇa. So ultimately, the miseries are not necessary. He's going through a bad dream, like a man who sees a tiger when there's actually no tiger. People take on so much trouble in the name of sense gratification and economic development, which is unnecessary to them. They can live a simple life serving Kṛṣṇa and avoid the hassles of *karmic* reaction. But no, they prefer to involve themselves in tar pits or quicksands of actions and reactions which leave them wailing and seeking relief where they cannot find it.

Three times in his purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda says Śrīla Vyāsadeva *saw* the Personality of Godhead, along with His energies, His different incarnations, etc. Did he actually see Kṛṣṇa, or did he only understand Him? He actually saw Him with his transcendental eyes. In the case of Vyāsa seeing the remedy to the miseries in the form of transcendental loving service, he saw the *process* of devotional service, which begins with hearing and chanting the names and glories of the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "Revival of the dormant affection of love of Godhead does not depend on the mechanical system of hearing and chanting, but it solely and wholly depends on the causeless mercy of the Lord. When the Lord is fully satisfied with the sincere efforts of the devotee, He may endow him with His loving transcendental service. But even with the prescribed forms of hearing and chanting, there is at once mitigation of the superfluous and unwanted miseries of material existence."

So on the one hand, you can't expect that just by chanting on your beads, you get relief from miseries. It depends on the Lord's mercy, whether He sees you as sincere. And even if you chant mechanically, some relief comes. Even in the stage of offensive chanting, a devotee reaches liberation—the process is so powerful.

Since release from miseries comes not simply by chanting but by the mercy of the Lord, we have to be patient. But sometimes we're impatient. At times when we have to wait, how can we be

calm and collected? There is a line by John Milton, "They also serve who only stand and wait." Of course, another answer to this question is to say, Don't just be calm and collected but always serve fervently, and don't simply wait by sitting around. Impel the Lord to your favor by acts of service that will attract Him. Yes, ultimately we have to wait on the Almighty, and that is the proper place for the tiny servant. Rest assured, God knows we are waiting in line, He has our number, and He has not forgotten us. Sooner than we think, sooner than we deserve, His merciful glance will fall upon us.

Optimism and faith. Boost the morale of the troops. There is no reason not to do it. Just like a military commander, even in a dire situation.

There is an apparent tension between the "causeless mercy of the Lord" and the "sincere effort of the devotee" in relation to attaining devotional service and love of God. What would be a balanced attitude in this regard? The sincere efforts of the devotees cannot be a cause of the causeless mercy of the Lord. Still, the Lord can be satisfied by them and endow the devotee with His transcendental loving service. Everything always operates under the pleasure of the Lord. When He is pleased, then He acts and showers His mercy.

Prabhupāda speaks about the importance of executing devotional service sincerely. It would seem that a person's sincerity is a measure of his or her self-understanding. For example, a young boy may want nothing more in the entire world than to see a certain baseball team win the World Series—his desire may be such that, should that baseball team lose, the boy's heart would break. Those feelings that arise in the boy's heart are unquestionably genuine, and they are deeply felt. Yet, when the boy is just a little older, he may no longer care so much about that baseball team (to quote a popular children's song, "Painted wings and giant springs make way for other toys"). Given the fact that, over the course of one's life, one's self-understanding evolves and develops—and with it, the things one values most in one's heart of hearts—what might a devotee do to properly

fix on the true object of his desire? How might one approach the Lord in a manner that is genuine, given the limitations of his current self-understanding? What does sincerity mean, given the fact that the things I cherish with all my heart today may not seem so important to me down the road?

One should fix his heart, make his obeisances, offer all that he does to the Supreme Lord. The object of his sacrifices is not a whimsical or irrelevant one. He is not offering to a baseball team. He is fixing on the supreme object, and so his sincerity is not whimsical. Why should we say that it will not be cherished or seem so important later in our lives? With the Lord's help and our own devotion, our sincerity will only grow stronger as we grow and develop. If there are limits in our current self-understanding, we must still offer our full-hearted abilities to Kṛṣṇa, as far as we are able, and depend on Him to see that our sincerity increases in reciprocation. "To those who are constantly devoted to serving Me with love, I give the understanding by which they can come to me." (*Bg.* 10.10)

The purport to this verse ends with Prabhupāda's writing, "Rather, knowledge is dependent on devotional service for the ultimate realization of the Supreme Truth." But we see that the more we read about Kṛṣṇa and His associates, His abode, His loving pastimes, His holy names, etc., the more we desire to engage in His loving service. In fact, the process of hearing Kṛṣṇa conscious literature is stressed so much by us. It seems that devotional service (at least in the conditioned state) is dependent on knowledge that we have about Kṛṣṇa and those related to Him. In light of these facts, how do we understand the above statement of Śrīla Prabhupāda's?

Knowledge about Kṛṣṇa is not *jñāna* but is essential *bhakti* in itself. Therefore, it is part of the ultimate realization of the Supreme Truth. When we hear about Kṛṣṇa and His associates, we are not gathering knowledge as a *jñānī* does, but we are engaging in pure devotional service. These activities are nondifferent from chanting Kṛṣṇa's name, which is nondifferent from associating directly with Kṛṣṇa. The literature about Kṛṣṇa produced by

Vyāsadeva and pure devotees is not the same thing as dry scholarship or impersonal knowledge. A pure devotee remains blissful reading about Kṛṣṇa as part of his active devotional service, and thus knowledge and service are one and the same for him.



VERSE 7

yasyāṁ vai śrūyamāṇāyāṁ kṛṣṇe parama-pūruṣe
bhaktir utpadyate puṁsaḥ śoka-moha-bhayāpahā

"Simply by giving aural reception to this Vedic literature, the feeling for loving devotional service to Lord Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, sprouts up at once to extinguish the fire of lamentation, illusion and fearfulness."

COMMENT

Prabhupāda concludes his purport to this verse by saying, "One can attain the highest perfection of life by transcending worldly miseries, illusion and fearfulness. These are practical tests for one who has actually given a submissive hearing to the readings of the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*." What a test! Can you please define and explain what "submissive" hearing means? Any practical steps or suggestions, especially for those who, due to unfortunate circumstances, have to hear the *Bhāgavatam* on the run (with low-quality attention)?

What's the problem? Your reading isn't bringing you the highest perfection, transcendence of all worldly misery?

Submissive hearing means bow down your head at the feet of the Cantos of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. Never doubt the sages who speak it, such as Śukadeva, Sūta, Maitreya, Nārada and Vyāsa. Why low-quality attention? You know you need to tune your ear so sharp because your life depends on it. It's not a time for fooling around and hearing "on the run." You'll get out of it whatever you put into it.

In his purport, Prabhupāda writes, "Love is the only word that can be properly used to indicate the relation between Lord Kṛṣṇa and the living entities." What about the interrelation between devotees? What should be the right word?

The right word is love, just as between Kṛṣṇa and His devotees. The devotees are nonenvious servants of Kṛṣṇa, and they live together in peace and harmony. Immature, novice devotees may fight, but pure devotees are as good as Kṛṣṇa, and they know that if they fight, they will displease the Lord. All of their actions are for pleasing the Lord, and therefore, the only word that can be used to describe their interrelationships is love. As they link up with the Supreme in *bhakti*, so they exchange with one another in *bhakti*. This love also continues in the spiritual world eternally. The servants of the Lord serve side by side in eternal pastimes for the Lord's pleasure.

How is it that despite hearing *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* regularly, which Śrīla Prabhupāda describes as the solution for finding peace in the world, we find that in ISKCON, there are sometimes serious conflicts among its members?

Apparently the members of the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement have not passed the practical tests for giving submissive hearings to the readings in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. As long as they still maintain the spirit of domination, there is illusion and fearfulness. Their meetings will be like the politicians' peace conferences, which cannot bring about peace in society. It seems the devotees have not realized the validity of Śrī Kṛṣṇa as the Personality of Godhead. They have not actually taken shelter of Him. Until we do so, we will fight over different viewpoints, territories, and false claims. We need to become softhearted and desire above all

not to hurt Śrīla Prabhupāda but to please him by stopping our fighting. Until we work together, we are like the sons who, in the name of massaging the father, began hitting different parts of his body, causing him great grief.

It is not easy to convince the nondevotees—especially the politicians—of the good effects of hearing and discussing the glories of the Supreme Lord, which is the only way to eliminate lamentation, illusion, and fearfulness. But why do devotees tend to neglect this most important task? A great American politician said that it was political suicide for him to be sympathetic to the Vaiṣṇavas. Even when devotees try to enter the offices of the politicians, they get no entrance and no hearing. And viewed the other way, devotees contaminate themselves if they mix with the politicians. Nonetheless, devotees approach the nondevotees and try to speak about Kṛṣṇa in novel ways to attract them to the various ways in which Kṛṣṇa consciousness is helpful to the human society. Tell them its good for their morals. The obesity rate will go down. The mobster gangs will shrink, and drug rings will be cut in half.

This verse talks about the importance of hearing the Vedic literature. Many devotees are interested in hearing about the confidential pastimes of Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs*. Does there come a time in a devotee's life when he would be benefited from reading Gaudīya Vaiṣṇava literature recounting Kṛṣṇa's more confidential pastimes in Vṛndāvana? How will a devotee know when he or she would benefit from reading such literatures?

He will know when he's able to hear the literatures without any material reaction. He or she won't think of the *gopīs* as ordinary lovers or Kṛṣṇa as a mundane boy entangled in a romance. One will hear it all as divine play, and one will hear it with full faith that it's the highest religious literature. Then you'll know that you're really hankering to hear the *rasa* dance—when you feel it burning your disease of lust from the heart and when you feel your love of God increasing.

Aside from the song of Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs* in the *rasa* dance, within various genres of popular music, there are many songs

about love. Some of these songs are capable of touching one's heart in special ways. Such songs seem to open one's heart to the possibility of loving feelings that otherwise lie dormant. They sometimes seem to break through the crust of one's usual frame of mind. In such moments, such songs seem to open one's heart to a softer way of seeing and relating to others. They seem to make one more open to the possibility of feelings of caring, of sympathy, and of appreciation of others, through the persona of the beloved. Is there room somewhere in a devotee's life to listen to such songs? Or should they all be regarded as mundane songs that are ultimately about sex and should be shunned by devotees practicing Kṛṣṇa consciousness?

This question is too easy to answer. It's too easy to say that all popular songs should be shunned by practicing devotees. Certainly it's hard for a person with the refined sensitivity of a *bhakta* accustomed to hearing *bhajanas* to hear what passes for popular music today—electric guitar and bass and drums, with shouting lyrics. The devotee finds it obnoxious aesthetically, and even if he does concede that loving feelings beyond sex are being expressed, it's hard to hear "feelings of caring, of sympathy and of appreciation of others, through the persona of the beloved" through all the noise. That being said, there are examples of fine jazz vocalists, sensitive popular ballads and folk songs which could qualify for opening one's heart "to a softer way of seeing and relating to others."

VERSE 8

sa saṁhitāṁ bhāgavatīṁ kṛtvānukramya cātma-jam
śukam adhyāpayām āsa nivṛtti-nirataṁ muniḥ

"The great sage Vyāsadeva, after compiling the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam and revising it, taught it to his own son, Śrī Śukadeva Gosvāmī, who was already engaged in self-realization."

COMMENT

In the purport to verse 8, Śrīla Prabhupāda says, "Although it is especially meant for the *paramahaṁsas*, or those who are totally engaged in self-realization, it works into the depths of the hearts of those who may be worldly men." The *paramahaṁsas* relish the *Bhāgavatam* like nectar, while it acts like some sort of medicine for the worldly men. It is certainly amazing to hear about such wonderful medicine. What kind of transcendental potion is *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* that it works in two different capacities, for people who are situated at two opposite ends of the spectrum?

For paramahaṁsas, it is not exactly a medicine. They are already cleared of material disease, and so they relish Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam like nectar. The Bhāgavatam is especially meant for them. But the Bhāgavatam is not exclusive. It first addresses persons already engaged in self-realization, but also tends to the needs of worldly persons.

Since the path of *pravṛtti-mārga* has been condemned by Nārada Muni in his instructions to Vyāsadeva, some ISKCON devotees have the tendency to show and take an extreme position and demonize *pravṛtti-mārga/varṇāśrama*, sometimes not even caring for time, place and person. Is there any hope we can hear some mature, balanced presentation of pure Kṛṣṇa consciousness that (with a vision for the wider picture) cares for those who need a more lenient process? Are other authentic religions to be demonized just because they seem to be professing and practicing something less than "pure devotional service"?

We must keep in mind that the theme of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* is the cure of the materialistic disease of the human being, or stopping completely the "pangs of material existence." But that doesn't mean it can't be done gradually. The *Bhāgavatam* and its teachers take this into account. We should not demonize the attempt to give a balanced presentation of Kṛṣṇa consciousness for those who need a lenient process. In their own way, these people may be making as much sincere progress as a person who proclaims that he's on the *nivṛtti-mārga*. It is up to Kṛṣṇa to judge

who is actually pleasing Him the most by their sacrifice and sincere effort to give up material attachment. In the race between the tortoise and the hare, the tortoise seemed to be the favorite with his streaking, but he turned out to be a lightweight, and the slow but steady tortoise came in first.



VERSE 9

śaunaka uvāca
sa vai nivṛtti-nirataḥ sarvatropekṣako muniḥ
kasya vā bṛhatīm etām ātmārāmaḥ samabhyasat

"Śrī Śaunaka asked Sūta Gosvāmī: 'Śrī Śukadeva Gosvāmī was already on the path of self-realization, and thus he was pleased with his own self. So why did he take the trouble to undergo the study of such a vast literature?'"

COMMENT

Even the *ātmārāmas* go through the trouble of studying the *Bhāgavatam*—the topics being so nectarean! Why then can't we taste it? And sometimes we pose as devotees, even more than *ātmārāmas*. . . Our inability to taste reveals our poverty of spirit. This should be honestly confessed, as do some great Vaiṣṇavas in their songs: "I have no taste for the *kīrtana* of Lord Caitanya, I never read the verses of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*."

In this purport, Prabhupāda writes, "Everyone is searching after the highest pleasure, but the standard of pleasure of one may be different from the standard of another. Therefore, the standard of pleasure enjoyed by the *karmīs* is different from that of the *ātmārāmas*." Actually, no one is truly satisfied by the pleasures

derived from sense gratification, the enjoyment of the *karmīs*. The true enjoyment of the self is spiritual, in relation to pleasing the senses of Kṛṣṇa. Śrīla Śukadeva Gosvāmī had already attained self-realization and detachment from material happiness. But he was still attracted to undergo the trouble of studying the great *Bhāgavatam* literature. "This means that *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* is a postgraduate study even for the *ātmārāmas*, who have surpassed all the studies of Vedic literature."

While we are still attached to the inferior pleasure of the senses, what is the fastest way of developing a higher taste for spiritual subject matters and an indifference to material enjoyment?

The fastest way is to chant Hare Kṛṣṇa and dive into the subjects of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. It does not matter if at first these practices seem dry. The fact that they are substantially sweet and nourishing will bring about a change in the senses and mentality of the practitioner, and he will soon find himself in the realm of the higher taste. This has been proved by many, many neophytes attempting the chanting and finding themselves able to become free of material bondage, such as attachments to intoxication, meat eating, gambling, and illicit sex.

Why take the trouble to undergo the study of such a vast literature when you're already perfect in self-realization, when you're already self-satisfied and pleased in your own self? Haven't you done enough studying in God consciousness, in theological science, certainly enough for one lifetime? Oh, you want to get another Ph.D., you say, even for the *ātmārāmas*, who have surpassed all the studies of Vedic knowledge. You are so attracted to the *Bhāgavatam* you can't get enough. You actually love it. It's not a chore, it's not a research grind. You love the work.



VERSE 10

sūta uvāca
ātmārāmāś ca munayo nirgranthā apy urukrame
kurvanty ahaitukīṁ bhaktim ittham-bhūta-guṇo hariḥ

"All different varieties of ātmārāmas [those who take pleasure in ātmā, or spirit self], especially those established on the path of self-realization, though freed from all kinds of material bondage, desire to render unalloyed devotional service unto the Personality of Godhead. This means that the Lord possesses transcendental qualities and therefore can attract everyone, including liberated souls."

COMMENT

Lord Caitanya described this *ātmārāma śloka* to Sārvabhauma Bhattācārya in many different ways, presenting eighteen meanings and convincing Sārvabhauma that He was the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Later, Caitanya Mahāprabhu described even more meanings of the *ātmārāma śloka* to Sanātana Gosvāmī. Aside from the tour de force of different ways in which the Sanskrit words were described, there was a basic principle of the verse's meaning. That is described in the last line of the translation, "The Lord possesses transcendental qualities and therefore can attract everyone, including liberated souls." He can attract all different kinds of persons, and those persons are described in different categories with different names in the *ātmārāma* verse. There are *munis, nirgranthās, urukramas* (those whose activities are glorious), ascetics, mendicants, sages, saints, etc.

In discussing spiritual *rasa*, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "These attractions are so strong that no one wants to exchange them for material enjoyment, mystic powers and liberation." How is

it, then, that sometimes we see that even devotees go back to material enjoyment or to an impersonal path? Does it mean that such a devotee never tastes spiritual *rasa*, or is it due to another cause?

It certainly means that such a devotee never tasted spiritual *rasa*, or else, as Śrīla Prabhupāda says, he would never have exchanged it. It means he just had a shadow attachment for Kṛṣṇa consciousness and not the real thing. Had he actually been attached to Kṛṣṇa the way the Kumāra brothers were attracted to the fragrance of flowers and tulasi leaves offered at the lotus feet of the Lord, and the way Śukadeva Gosvāmī was attracted by the transcendental pastimes of the Lord, and the way the young cowherd damsels were attracted by the bodily features of the Lord, and the way Rukmiṇī was attracted by hearing about the glories of the Lord, then they never would have left their devotional service.

Śrīla Prabhupāda concludes his purport, "So by interpreting each and every word of this *śloka*, one can see unlimited numbers of transcendental qualities of Lord Kṛṣṇa that attract the mind of a pure devotee." So much condensed in just one verse. How can we dive into the ocean of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*?

You simply have to trust in the depth of the ocean and dive, without fear or hesitation. *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* is buoyant and will keep us afloat with its knowledge and Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Each and every verse is as filled with meaning as the *ātmārāma* verse. It can be uncovered by study and devotion.



VERSE 11

harer guṇākṣipta-matir bhagavān bādarāyaṇiḥ
adhyagān mahad ākhyānaṁ nityaṁ viṣṇu-jana-priyaḥ

"Śrīla Śukadeva Gosvāmī, son of Śrīla Vyāsadeva, was not only transcendentally powerful. He was also very dear to the devotees of the Lord. Thus he underwent the study of this great narration [Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam]."

COMMENT

Śrīla Śukadeva Gosvāmī was a liberated soul even within the womb of his mother. Śrīla Vyāsadeva impressed upon him the synopsis of the *Bhāgavatam* so that the child could be made attached to the transcendental activities of the Lord. After his birth, the child was still more educated in the subject of the *Bhāgavatam* by recitation of the actual poems. Prabhupāda writes, "The transcendental qualities of the Lord are so attractive that Śrīla Śukadeva Gosvāmī became detached from being completely absorbed in impersonal Brahman and positively took up the personal activity of the Lord." In this way, Śrīla Śukadeva Gosvāmī turned away from the association of impersonalists and the goal of ultimate impersonal realization. Both he and his father Vyāsadeva became absorbed in the personal features of the Supreme Lord.

It's strange to think that Śrīla Śukadeva Gosvāmī was ever an impersonalist. He was never a sense gratifier. He was always a liberated soul. But his vision was that of the impersonal Brahman until he heard the qualities of Lord Kṛṣṇa, and then his mind became turned. We should not look down upon Śukadeva Gosvāmī but just look upon it as a stage in his evolution. And once he glimpsed the superior thing, the transcendental activity of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, he immediately dropped the inferior thing, meditation

upon impersonal Brahman.

The relationship between the devotees of Lord Viṣṇu (*viṣṇu-janas*) and the Brahman-realized people is discussed by Śrīla Prabhupāda with a respectful tone toward the impersonalist "pilgrims." Yet we know how adamant Prabhupāda was against the Māyāvādīs. Thus it seems we have to discriminate between different kinds of impersonalists before passing heavy judgments or assuming an antagonistic attitude. How can we discriminate in this regard?

Prabhupāda clearly says that the personalists and the impersonalists do not like to associate with each other, and yet he says, "From time immemorial, these two transcendental pilgrims have sometimes been competitors." They are both regarded as transcendental, genuine Brahman-realized sages. The Four Kumāras or Śukadeva Gosvāmī before he heard the pastimes of the Lord from Vyāsadeva may be regarded with respect. In these cases, it is a matter of their not having yet heard about the glories of the Lord. If they hear and continue to not wake up to Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa, then they are regarded as less intelligent. In all cases, a devotee should maintain his humble demeanor. When Lord Caitanya came into the company of Prakāśānanda Sarasvatī and the impersonalists, He sat in a distant place and did not speak arrogantly but only spoke when there was an opportunity.

"I do not like them because *they* do not like me!" What should we do if this is our mentality toward devotees? This is not the topic being discussed. The topic is the dislike between the devotees and the impersonalists. They maintain an enmity because one group does not recognize the supremacy of the Supreme Lord and devotional service as the goal, whereas the other group, the *viṣṇu-janas*, is completely saturated in devotional service to Kṛṣṇa. That mentality is natural and not cripple-minded. You cannot expect them to understand each other or appreciate each other because of their different realizations.

It is very clear from this purport that Śrīla Śukadeva Gosvāmī did something unusual, he crossed over from the impersonal path to the personal path, and he started to actually like devotees,

which is also unusual for an impersonalist. Prabhupāda writes in the purport about the two people on the paths and how they like to keep separate from one another. "Therefore, it appears that Śrīla Śukadeva Gosvāmī also had no liking for the devotees. But since he himself became a saturated devotee, he desired always the transcendental association of the *viṣṇu-janas*, and the *viṣṇu-janas* also liked his association, since he became a personal *Bhāgavata*." Often there are misunderstandings on this subject: Should one associate with the impersonalists? The answer is no. But here, Śukadeva, an ex-impersonalist, is accepted as an *ātmārāma*, or self-realized sage, and the guru of the Vaiṣṇava personalists. A most unusual case.

One may similarly have doubts about who can be a guru, because souls like Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī, Śrīla Prabhupāda, or Śrīla Śukadeva do set extremely high standards. Should we demand that anyone who comments on *Bhāgavatam* be of the same caliber? Is it at all possible? Śrīla Gopala Bhatta Gosvāmī wrote, quoting from *Āditya Purāṇa*: *avidyo vā sa-vidyo vā gurur eva janārdanaḥ mārgastho vāpy amārga-stho gurur eva sadā gatiḥ*. "Whether learned or not, the guru is *janārdana*. Whether situated on the path or not, he is ever the goal." (*Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* 4.359) So he was a guru, he should know. The Six Gosvāmīs selected him, out of all of them, to be the inititiating guru, and he put such a quote in his book that he gave to Sanātana to complete and later published himself. Also, Lord Caitanya Himself said to the Kurma *brāhmaṇa, kibā vipra, kibā nyāsī, śūdra kene naya yei kṛṣṇa-tattva-vettā, sei 'guru' haya* (*Cc. Madhya* 9.128). "You can be with or without qualifications, a *brāhmaṇa, śūdra*, or a *sannyāsī*, but if you teach about Kṛṣṇa, you are the guru." Why then is there so much restriction on who can elaborate or teach the *Bhāgavatam*? Why should we be so concerned as to who is measuring up, as if he has to be up to the exceptional case of Śrīla Śukadeva Gosvāmī? He doesn't have to be another Śrīla Śukadeva Gosvāmī, but a faithful follower who doesn't change the sound vibration as he hears it from his spiritual master, who comes in disciplic succession from Śukadeva Gosvāmī.

In the purport to this verse, Prabhupāda describes various relationships between transcendentalists. We have seen how disagreements can arise between various parties within Lord Caitanya's movement. When disputes do arise, in most cases, each of the parties to the dispute feels that his position is justified on the basis of the teachings of *guru*, *sādhu*, and *śāstra*. Yet we see from this verse that persons who are in transcendental consciousness like each other and value each others' association. Are all disagreements between devotees evidence of a lack of transcendental consciousness? Is there ever a legitimate ground for dispute among devotees? Sometimes the pure devotees disagree with each other in their commentaries on *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. That is not a very serious thing and can hardly be called a "dispute." There are different angles of vision, all within Kṛṣṇa consciousness. When the Yadu dynasty fought among themselves using iron sticks, that was an extraordinary arrangement by the Supreme Lord's *yogamāyā* just to rid the world of the burden of the Yadus. One of the twenty-six qualities of a devotee is "friendly," and they are certainly friendly among themselves. Vaiṣṇavas are unfriendly toward the evil-minded. Lord Rāma was inimical to Rāvaṇa, and Lord Kṛṣṇa convinced Arjuna to be unfriendly toward Duryodhana and his evil-minded relatives.

In the purport to this verse, Prabhupāda explains how the impersonalists and the personalists do not like to associate with one another because of their different ultimate realizations. But even in modern-day ISKCON, among practicing Vaiṣṇavas it is sometimes difficult to evaluate and appreciate devotees. Sometimes there is longstanding tension, breakdown in relations, lack of observant fundamental etiquette, dissension, faction, splintering, etc. Is the cause of this that we are too much institutionalized or too much *kaniṣṭha-adhikārī* mentality? How should we lead our lives to avoid conflicts that sometimes consume so much valuable time that could otherwise be used in positive Kṛṣṇa conscious pursuits?

If within the family of devotees there is strife, it may be better to avoid close association. Respect each other from afar.

Cooperate in joint efforts as far as possible for the higher good, putting aside petty feelings of envy and enmity.

VERSE 12

parīkṣito 'tha rājarṣer janma-karma-vilāpanam
saṁsthāṁ ca pāṇḍu-putrāṇāṁ vakṣye kṛṣṇa-kathodayam

"Sūta Gosvāmī thus addressed the ṛṣis headed by Śaunaka: Now I shall begin the transcendental narration of the Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa and topics of the birth, activities and deliverance of King Parīkṣit, the sage amongst kings, as well as topics of the renunciation of the worldly order by the sons of Pāṇḍu."

COMMENT

Without Kṛṣṇa, all the supplementary literatures like the *Purāṇas* and the *Mahābhārata* are simply stories or historical facts. But with Kṛṣṇa they become transcendental, and when we hear of them, we at once become transcendentally related with the Lord. *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* is a special *Purāṇa* because the activities of the Lord are central and not just supplementary.

But a less intelligent class of devotees desire to go at once to the Tenth Canto of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and skip over the preliminary nine cantos, thinking that they're not as important. No one should try to go into the matters of the Tenth Canto, however, without having thoroughly understood the meaning of the other nine cantos. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "Kṛṣṇa is not without His devotees of all the *rasas*... The devotees and the Lord are interlinked, and they cannot be separated. Therefore, talks about them are all *kṛṣṇa-kathā*, or topics of the Lord."

So the narration within the narration begins. Sūta Gosvāmī addresses the *ṛṣis*, headed by Śaunaka. He's speaking what he has heard from Śukadeva Gosvāmī. Sūta Gosvāmī was present

when Śukadeva Gosvāmī spoke the *Bhāgavatam* previously to Mahārāja Parīkṣit and a host of kings and sages gathered at the Ganges on the occasion of the last days before the passing away of Mahārāja Parīkṣit. Now, at a later date, Sūta Gosvāmī is retelling the narration to another gathering of sages at Naimiṣāraṇya. This group is headed up by the ṛṣi named Śaunaka, who shall ask some key questions along the way.

Lord, please let me speak in disciplic succession. Where is the extra taste given by the bite of the parrot's beak? Where is the exact repeating by the faithful parrot? Take the fruit handed down. Situate yourself in a tree and take the fruit handed down. But if you cannot, then find some unbruised fruit lying on the ground. Don't take it bruised, and don't take it unripe. Don't talk too much, and don't talk too little.

In the purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "The devotees and the Lord are interlinked, and they cannot be separated. Therefore, talks about them are all *kṛṣṇa-kathā*, or topics of the Lord." Descriptions of the glories of the devotees of the Lord are herein described as being on the same level as *kṛṣṇa-kathā*. This peculiarity of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava movement, and maybe other Vaiṣṇava schools, is sometimes considered "too much" by other schools or laymen. How do we understand the importance of glorifying and serving/worshiping the devotees? When does such worship became a "personality cult"?

The Lord is pleased when His devotee is glorified. Kṛṣṇa is known as *bhakta-vatsalaḥ*. He is especially inclined to the devotees. When does such worship became a personality cult instead of true worship? If a devotee performs his worship with false ego and not in humility, or when he wants to get attention for himself as a great *bhakta*, the Lord will not be pleased with such a show or worship and will not shower His favor upon such a pseudo-devotee. In various ways He shows that He is not pleased. A personality-cult devotee may get something material in return for his service, such as fame, but he will never get the blessings of the Lord, such as empowerment to preach.

Prabhupāda talks about how devotees and the Lord are all

interlinked as *kṛṣṇa-kathā*. One time, around 1968, Prabhupāda was visiting Boston in the first storefront temple. He asked me to give a lecture on Kṛṣṇa Book. I was typing the tapes that he was making and so had access to the stories of *kṛṣṇa-līlā*. I stood speaking while he sat on the *vyāsāsana*. I told the story of Mother Yaśodā accusing Kṛṣṇa of stealing butter. Kṛṣṇa answered back that the accusation was false. He said the monkeys didn't even eat the butter, and He couldn't even give it away. As I spoke, I saw the audience was transforming into wonderful smiles. I didn't think my words could make them do that, so I turned gradually to look at Śrīla Prabhupāda. There he was with a bright and flooding smile, a smile of the Kṛṣṇa Book. It was a great feeling to make him smile. Is this story about Śrīla Prabhupāda's smile also *kṛṣṇa-kathā*? Isn't it all interlinked, as Prabhupāda has said? I think so.

Sūta Gosvāmī says he will now talk about the transcendental narration of Lord Kṛṣṇa and topics of the birth, activities, and deliverance of King Parīkṣit, as well as topics of the renunciation of the worldly order by the sons of Pāṇḍu. In his book named *Bhaktya-loka*, Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura explains that speaking about a third person is to be avoided as a form of *prajalpa*. Under certain circumstances, it is considered favorable, but "those who talk about others while influenced by devotional impediments like envy, hatred, pride, or distinction are offenders at the feet of Bhaktidevī." As devotees, we often speak and ask about devotees. Should we avoid it? If not, how do we do that in the right way? Sometimes our words are polite, but our hearts are somewhere else. Certainly in the case of Sūta Gosvāmī, it was good for him to be speaking about "a third person"—Śrī Kṛṣṇa, King Parīkṣit, and topics about the renunciation of the worldly order by the sons of Pāṇḍu. These are holy topics, and he was speaking in the right attitude, nonenviously, glorifying the Lord and the Lord's devotees. That is the method of doing it in the right way. If you can't speak in that way, then don't speak at all. Keep silent if your tongue is like a poisonous snake's—or if your tongue may not be poisonous but your heart is. Thus, we can follow the advice of

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura and avoid the *prajalpa* of speaking about others while under the influence of devotional impediments.

Śrīla Prabhupāda states over and over that devotees should not "desire to relish at once the activities of the Lord narrated in the Tenth Canto without first understanding (the purport of) the primary cantos." Yet he magnanimously made sure to translate the Tenth Canto (in the Kṛṣṇa Book) to give us the *parampara* version. In different places, he stresses that devotees need to know *both*. So it does no good for a person to "hide" out of "humility" in the first nine cantos and not approach the Tenth Canto under the plea of being "unqualified" or "not advanced enough." How can persons realize within themselves the *ācāryas'* wish that they become "whole persons" in devotional service?

We can happily take the ripe mango of the Kṛṣṇa Book without grabbing for more sensual *rasika* literature that's not translated by our spiritual master or given with purports by him. Let us play with Kṛṣṇa and the cowherd boys and the *gopīs*, but guided by our spiritual master. After all, Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote the Kṛṣṇa Book as one of his earliest books, and we should take it as an open invitation—a duty—to realize Lord Kṛṣṇa, the Absolute Truth, and Śrīmatī Rādhārani, His eternal consort, within its pages, complete with colorful illustrations.

In his purport to this verse, Prabhupāda writes, "No one should try to go into the matters of the Tenth Canto without having thoroughly understood the purport of the other nine cantos." What does it mean to thoroughly understand the purport of the other nine cantos? A devotee might read or hear the first nine cantos many times and still feel he has little realization of the purport of those cantos. Other devotees find they have heard the various points that Prabhupāda makes in his purports so many times that they have little interest in hearing them again—the verses and purports no longer hold much interest for him. Is there some secret to hearing the verses and purports of the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* in a way that allows one's understanding to deepen? For one who has heard or read the various verses and purports many times, how can one break through one's habitual ways of

experiencing the verses and purports of the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* to reach deeper realizations?

You can break through habitual ways of hearing by taking the subject matter very personally and seriously, the way Mahārāja Parīkṣit did. He had only seven days to live, and he asked the question for all persons who have a short duration of life, "How can we best spend our remaining days?" We are all in that situation, and if we wake up to it, *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* will be real and reveal our predicament, and the remedy.

In the purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "Kṛṣṇa and His pure devotees like the Pāṇḍavas are on the same plane. Kṛṣṇa is not without His devotees of all the *rasas*, and the pure devotees like the Pāṇḍavas are not without Kṛṣṇa. The devotees and the Lord are interlinked, and they cannot be separated. Therefore, talks about them are all *kṛṣṇa-kathā*, or topics of the Lord." This description explains how the Lord's devotees are dear to Him. Because the devotees are so humble, they usually do not "pose" or reveal their inner spiritual qualities. Hence, there is often a lack of proper reciprocation, and sometimes gross or subtle offenses are committed at the feet of such great souls. We say that great devotees are seen but not heard. But what is a safe position in terms of being able to recognize and properly serve such exalted souls for our own Kṛṣṇa conscious development?

A devotee can be recognized by his humility and by his God-centered behavior. He speaks about Kṛṣṇa, offers everything to Kṛṣṇa, and does not act out of false ego. He is not self-centered but God-centered. Since pure devotees are sometimes hard to recognize because of their being covered out of humility, one should be very careful in dealing with all devotees and all souls. One should not commit any offenses with God's creatures, especially those following the spiritual path. One should offer obeisances and honor to all holy men and holy women as they present themselves. One who does not present himself according to guru, *śāstra* and *sādhu* does not have to be honored as a high devotee but can be given minimum respect out of etiquette.

VERSES 13–14

yadā mṛdhe kaurava-sṛñjayānāṁ vīreṣv atho vīra-gatiṁ gateṣu
vṛkodarāviddha-gadābhīmarśa bhagnoru-daṇḍe dhṛtarāṣṭra-putre

bhartuḥ priyaṁ drauṇir iti sma paśyan kṛṣṇā-sutānāṁ svapatāṁ śirāṁsi
upāharad vipriyam eva tasya jugupsitaṁ karma vigarhayanti

"When the respective warriors of both camps, namely the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas, were killed on the Battlefield of Kurukṣetra and the dead warriors obtained their deserved destinations, and when the son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra fell down lamenting, his spine broken, being beaten by the club of Bhīmasena, the son of Droṇācārya [Aśvatthāmā] beheaded the five sleeping sons of Draupadī and delivered them as a prize to his master, foolishly thinking that he would be pleased. Duryodhana, however, disapproved of the heinous act, and he was not pleased in the least."

This volume has had very little free writing. There's hardly a poem in it, or any "ItM." "ItM" is an abbreviation for "in the mix," a kind of free-writing technique which mixes "a collection of truthful moments. . . I speak of the mix in my writing, but Jaḍa Bharata asserts that matter and spirit don't mix. All his life he stayed apart from temporary affairs. How do I presume to "mix" with him? I am obviously a mix myself—a combination of spirit and matter. I am also mixed in affection; I feel some affection for Kṛṣṇa's eternal activities and pastimes, and I appear to have affection for certain material affairs. Śrīla Prabhupāda speaks of unalloyed devotion. By that he means unmixed—no *karma*, no *jñāna*. Pure devotional service. Oil and water don't mix; matter and spirit don't mix. Yet what does it mean to mix? Everything comes from Kṛṣṇa, including everything we now define as matter (*sarvaṁ khalv idaṁ brahma*). We can use so-called matter in Kṛṣṇa's service (*yuktaṁ vairāgyam ucyate*). The mix comes in through Kṛṣṇa consciousness itself.

So why aren't I writing in the mix? One of my friends says its because one of my recent books has been criticized by authorities in our movement. That's probably right. I'm afraid to let go. They suggest I could write but not publish. But that's no fun. You must write in the mix, *yukta-vairāgya.* Churn the ocean, demigods and demons producing milk and some poison, the poison to be caught up by Lord Śiva. I won't get "busted."

COMMENT

In the purport to this verse, Prabhupāda writes, "Lord Caitanya desired that all who are born in India seriously understand such *kṛṣṇa-kathās* and then after full realization, preach the transcendental message to everyone in all parts of the world." Why did Lord Caitanya make such a distinction based on birth? What is so special about being born in India? Is it still valid today, when the entire world is following one materialistic culture?

Perhaps it is not so valid. India is following America economically and culturally, and it doesn't seem likely that the materialistic countries of the world will follow India's original glorious culture, since India herself is not following it. Nevertheless, Lord Caitanya desired it, and if people would seriously take up the original culture of India, it would have a tremendous affect on people around the world. Lord Caitanya's statement may be taken as sectarian, since other denominations in other parts of the world have similar statements and claims. But Lord Caitanya's cult is to be understood as one of many, and yet unique among many. Outwardly, it appears to be just another sect, but the transforming potency of its main processes—(1) hearing of the *Bhāgavatam,* (2) chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, (3) honoring *bhāgavata prasādam* (spiritual food), (4) associating with pure devotees, (5) worshiping the form of the Deity in the temple—are unexcelled and beyond sectarian practice. It is a spiritual science which delivers successful results under any material conditions.

Śrīla Prabhupāda has magnanimously extended the principle

of *kṛṣṇa-kathā* to include topics related to devotional activities within the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. How can devotees who have more or less surrendered to the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement know definitely where to draw the line between *kathā* and *prajalpa*?

It is *kathā* as long as it is some useful discussion for pushing on the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. It can be about purchasing cars or trucks, keeping accounts, management, purchasing fabric for the Deities, purchasing *bhoga* for the Deities and the devotees. It can be about settling disputes among devotees—anything yoked to actual Kṛṣṇa conscious life. When it has no yoke, it is *prajalpa*, no matter how flowery it may be or how academically recognized it may be, or how much money may be spent on it. The crucial principle is utility in the service of Kṛṣṇa.

Śrīla Prabhupāda uses the words, "after full realization," and says then we can go out and preach. On the practical level, we don't seem to follow that. With very basic realization, devotees are encouraged to preach. I recently heard an ISKCON devotee say, "Realization or no realization, our first business is to preach." It was an inspiring comment—to stop stewing over our state of qualification and fulfill Śrīla Prabhupāda's order to engage in helping others, regardless of our own level.

What is a "fully realized" state? It means self-realized, knowing the spirit soul in relationship with Kṛṣṇa. Actually knowing that you are the eternal servant of God, with no self-centered impediments. When you can realize that and act in that way, you have full realization. But even short of that, under the orders of the spiritual master, you can act. Even a dog can act under the orders of its master—without the highest intellectual realization—and do loyal work. But the more one has full realization, he can be empowered with full intelligence to meet all challenges in the difficult work of preaching in the atheistic world.

The statement, ". . .seriously understand such *kṛṣṇa-kathās* and then after full realization, preach the transcendental message to everyone" points to the fact that we should be thoroughly cognizant of the process, both in terms of *jñāna* and *vijñāna*. What

is expected of us to become successful preachers? What are the minimum qualifications? What is the balance between precept and exemplary life to ensure successful preaching?

As for the academic side in ISKCON, there is the process of attaining the "bhakti-śāstri" degree. This is done by studying under a facilitator in the institution's recognized colleges or seminars. One is awarded a *bhakti-śāstri* when he has a basic hold of the *Bhagavad-gītā's* chapters and verses. Higher degrees are called Bhakti-vaibhava and Bhakti-vedānta, which call for mastery of other books of Śrīla Prabhupāda's, such as *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* chapters and *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*. This is *jñāna*, or knowledge, which is necessary in order to be an expert preacher. As for exemplary life, that is the life which is actually described in the books—the humble devotee who is not proud of his scholarship but who simply serves Kṛṣṇa and his spiritual master as best he can, preaching vigorously what he knows.

Verse 14 is an interesting verse from the point of view of interaction of *Bhāgavatam* with the *Mahābhārata*. In fact, the subject is again touched very soon in the Third Canto in the purport, where Śrīla Prabhupāda writes (*Bhāg.* 3.3.13), "The fall of Duryodhana, the leading son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, was not pleasing to the Lord, although He was on the side of Arjuna and it was He who advised Bhīma how to break the thighs of Duryodhana while the fight was going on. The Lord punishes the wrongdoer, but He is not happy to award such punishments because the living entities are originally His parts and parcels." It is this act of breaking the hips or thighs that incidentally caused the rage of the son of Droṇa (Aśvatthāmā). However, we can also ask a question on the subject of the position and devotion of Duryodhana himself. It is described that during the fight between Bhīma and Duryodhana, and against the explicit rules of the battle, under Kṛṣṇa's advice Bhīma fulfilled his own promise/curse and broke the hips that Duryodana used to place Draupadī on during the ill-famed gambling match, and also Bhīma broke the spinal cord of Duryodhana. It was at this moment that Balarāma, who was the well-wisher of Duryodhana, was ready to punish Bhīmasena.

But Bhīma was Kṛṣṇa's devotee, and a beautiful fight between Balarāma and Kṛṣṇa could have taken place, just like two clouds, white and blue, with the blue one embracing the white one and keeping him from attacking Bhīma. So Kṛṣṇa was protecting His own devotee, as He promises in the *Bhagavad-gītā*, *na me bhaktaḥ praṇaśyati*, even if a devotee, as in the case of Bhīma, breaks the rules of the battle. Will Kṛṣṇa protect us, even if we break a rule or two? Or will we be more in the Duryodhana category, and even if we follow all the rules but offend Kṛṣṇa's devotee, then will even Balarāma not be able to save us?

Yes, that seems to be the conclusion. We had better be on Kṛṣṇa's side and the side of Kṛṣṇa's devotee under all circumstances, even if we err in some technicalities of battle etiquette or some other etiquette, such as honoring great persons, in addition to honoring Kṛṣṇa's devotees and Kṛṣṇa Himself.



VERSES 15–16

mātā śiśūnāṁ nidhanaṁ sutānāṁ niśamya ghoraṁ paritapyamānā
tadārudad vāṣpa-kalākulākṣī tāṁ sāntvayann āha kirīṭamālī

tadā śucas te pramṛjāmi bhadre yad brahma-bandhoḥ śira ātatāyinaḥ
gāṇḍīva-muktair viśikhair upāhare tvākramya yat snāsyasi dagdha-putrā

"Draupadī, the mother of the five children of the Pāṇḍavas, after hearing of the massacre of her sons, began to cry in distress with eyes full of tears. Trying to pacify her in her great loss, Arjuna spoke to her thus: 'O gentle lady, when I present you with the head of that brāhmaṇa, after beheading him with arrows from my Gāṇḍīva bow, I shall then wipe the tears from your eyes and pacify you. Then, after burning your sons' bodies, you can take your bath standing on his head.'"

COMMENT

Śrī Madhva, in his commentary to this nightmare, refers to *Skanda Purāṇa*: *pārthānuyātam ātmānaṁ drauṇiḥ svapne dadarśa ha, bandhanaṁ cātmanas tatra draupadyā caiva mokṣaṇam*, "Arjuna could see this horrible nightmare caused by son of Droṇa, and as a result, the attachment and bondage in the mind was gone, her sons and Draupadī were certainly liberated." Madhvācārya comments with just a few words: *tasmān naiṣīkāvarodhaḥ*, "It is concluded, therefore, that this lamentation and grief will completely nullify the bondage." This is the end of the long story of revenge, and as usual, the innocent mother of the soldiers—or, even worse, the children—are suffering the most. But the lamentation of this suffering is liberating for us to hear. There are so many monuments to warriors who have laid down their lives in wars, but there really should be more monuments to mothers who suffer because of their selfless love for their beloved sons (which is, of course, a form of attachment). But even though this emotion of Mother Draupadī will be labeled as material by some, it is clearly inspiring spiritual and liberating emotions within us—as in the words *mātā* or *śiśūnāṁ*, the maternal love for children, which come first in the verse. Hard-heartedness comes when I shut myself from this common and beautiful human emotion and label it—according to the pigeon-hole system—into the "material section" of life and therefore not deserving the attention of a devotee. Yet here at this critical point is the first appearance of Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhāgavatam*, framed with such intense dilemmas and human emotions that it leaves very little room for impersonalism with informal (or, as the case may be, institutional) personalism. How do I keep in my daily life this deep emotional and personal understanding of the Supreme Personality, Kṛṣṇa, and how do we never shut ourselves off from this understanding?

We can see that Kṛṣṇa was acting in Draupadī's life too as the supreme will to sever her bondage to her children so that "exactly this lamentation and grief. . . will completely nullify the

bondage."

Incidents such as Arjuna's promise to kill Aśvatthāmā seem to be very revengeful, even in the name of *kṣatriya-dharma*. How do revenge and punishment differ?

Arjuna was following the Vedic code for punishing aggressors. Aśvatthāmā had killed the five sleeping sons of Draupadī and was therefore an aggressor. So "because the so-called *brāhmaṇa* acted like a butcher, he was taken as such, and there was no question of killing such a *brāhmaṇa's* son who proved to be a villain."

We know that scriptures are the word of God and are absolute. One meaning of the word "absolute" is that which is applicable in all circumstances (especially if taken from the "spotless" scripture). However, if someone thinks of following these statements in today's context, it would be considered criminal. For example, if person A sets fire to person B's home, and if person B in turn kills person A, considering him to be an aggressor, person B would be considered a criminal under modern law. He may have a hard time convincing the authorities that he is right as per the Vedic system. How do we read similar statements and injunctions and restrictions mentioned in the scriptures, since if these were applied in today's world, devotees might be considered outlaws?

It's a fact that Vedic justice cannot be dispensed in modern society. Cows cannot be protected. Liquor cannot be prohibited. As long as law enforcers are morally lax and as long as people in general crave to break moral codes, the two will form a pact of corruption in which Vedic codes can never be applied.

A theological application of verse 1.7.16: The teaching of the *Bhāgavatam* in Arjuna's stated intention to behead Aśvatthāmā can be very easily be argued as being criminal today. How do we read these parts of our holy scripture, which supposedly deal with pure devotional service only? "One who is equal to friends and enemies, who is equipoised in honor and dishonor, heat and cold, happiness and distress, fame and infamy, who is always free from contaminating association, always silent and satisfied with anything, who doesn't care for any residence, who is fixed

in knowledge and who is engaged in devotional service—such a person is very dear to Me" (*Bg.* 12.18-19).

This *Bhagavad-gītā* verse about the devotee who is very dear to Kṛṣṇa does not rule out Arjuna's mood of determination to hunt down Aśvatthāmā and murder him for the right cause. He is doing it to avenge Kṛṣṇa's pure devotee Draupadī, who has just lost her five sons at the hand of Aśvatthāmā. Arjuna is a *kṣatriya*, a martial caste, of whom such honorable fighting reaction is expected. He should not be a coward in the name of being a "peaceful" *sādhu*. He will be dear to Kṛṣṇa by fighting. Kṛṣṇa taught the whole *Bhagavad-gītā* just to arouse Arjuna's fighting spirit. In this instance, Arjuna finds a unique solution of cutting Aśvatthāmā's topknot instead of ending his life, but had he not found this solution and instead ended Aśvatthāmā's life, that would also have been acceptable. It is also fair to remember that Arjuna, as the reigning prince governing the kingdom, was not acting as an individual but as the representative of a proper government. Sometimes one hears people talking as if anyone should be able to administer such punishment just on the basis of the nature of the aggressor. But it is also important to remember the nature and position of the would-be punisher.

VERSE 17

iti priyāṁ valgu-vicitra-jalpaiḥ sa sāntvayitvācyuta-mitra-sūtaḥ
anvādravad daṁśita ugra-dhanvā kapi-dhvajo guru-putraṁ rathena

"Arjuna, who is guided by the infallible Lord as friend and driver, thus satisfied the dear lady by such statements. Then he dressed in armor and armed himself with furious weapons, and getting into his chariot, he set out to follow Aśvatthāmā, the son of his martial teacher."

COMMENT

This verse, as part of the story that is going on, calls into question the tension between what appears to be principles of Vedic culture versus principles of Vaiṣṇava culture, or at least brahminical culture. One can evade this tension by rationalizing in various ways: (1) this was happening to the Pāṇḍavas, and they are pure devotees, or (2) that was then, and this is now. It would be artificial to impose Vedic principles in modern society.

But for some, this evades important questions. If an enemy is a Vaiṣṇava (as many of the Kauravas were), then principles apply, regardless of status, fame, or even purity. Droṇācārya or Bhīṣmadeva would be killed, as they were on the side of the enemies. Therefore, when Vaiṣṇavas fight—now, today, they disagree—even still, they may be deemed aggressors and punished or defended against. Being devotees does not buy them a free pass. So how do we apply this or reconcile this with principles of tolerance, humility, and compassion? When do you punish, and when do you tolerate? Who decides—society or the individual, or both?

A Kṛṣṇa-conscious governing authority decides in matters like this. That was Śrīla Prabhupāda's way of managing his Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. An individual devotee should not think that he's in a position to take up weapons or mete out punishment to another individual, even if he thinks he has just cause. Better that we err on the side of tolerance, humility and compassion. On an individual basis, we can do well to follow the example of Lord Jesus Christ and turn the other cheek. Let those who are ministers of justice deal with the alleged culprits in a court of law.



VERSE 18

tam āpatantaṁ sa vilakṣya dūrāt kumāra-hodvigna-manā rathena
parādravat prāṇa-parīpsur urvyāṁ yāvad-gamaṁ rudra-bhayād yathā kaḥ

"Aśvatthāmā, the murderer of the princes, seeing from a great distance Arjuna coming at him with great speed, fled in his chariot, panic stricken, just to save his life, as Brahmā fled in fear from Śiva."

COMMENT

In his purport, Prabhupāda refers to the use of two different Sanskrit words in this verse, *kaḥ* and *arkaḥ*. If the word *kaḥ* is used, it refers to Brahmā; if the word *arkah* is used, it refers to Sūrya, the demigod of the sun. One time, Brahmā became allured by his daughter and began to follow her, which enraged Śiva, who attacked Brahmā with his trident. Brahmā fled in fear of his life. If one considers the use of the word *arkaḥ*, there's a reference in the *Vāmana Purāṇa*. There was a demon by the name Vidyunmālī, who was gifted with a glowing golden airplane, which traveled to the back of the sun, and night disappeared because of the glowing effulgence of this plane. Thus, the sun god became angry, and with his rays, he melted the plane. This enraged Lord Śiva, who attacked the sun god, who fled away and at last fell down at Varanasi.

These stories can be viewed in the context of a lecture Śrīla Prabhupāda gave in Vṛndāvana on September 15, 1976:

"So here is one reference that Lord Brahmā was pursued by Lord Śiva when Brahmā was running after his beautiful daughter. So similarly, here Aśvatthāmā, he knew that Arjuna is coming to kill him, so he was running very swiftly. *Āpatantaṁ sa vilakṣya dūrāt*. From distant place, when he saw that Arjuna was coming. . . so

dehātma-buddhi. This is the distinction between person in bodily concept of life and person who is liberated from the bodily concept of life. So when Durvāsā Muni cursed or wanted to kill Ambarīṣa Mahārāja, who was a devotee. . . Unnecessarily he was harassed by Durvāsā Muni, but because Ambarīṣa Mahārāja was a pure devotee, advanced, he was not afraid of being killed. He was not afraid. There are many instances. Just like Prahlāda Mahārāja. He was attempted to be killed by his father so many times, but he was never afraid. Although he was five-years-old boy, but he was not afraid.

"So that is the distinction between an advanced devotee and an ordinary man. *Dhīras tatra na muhyati* (*Bg.* 2.13). Birth, death, old age, and. . . they are suffering condition, but if one is an advanced devotee, he's not afraid of. *Nārāyaṇa-parāḥ sarve na kutaścana bibhyati* (*Bhāg.* 6.17.28). *Nārāyaṇa-parāḥ*, he's never afraid of. Death is coming, that's all right. What is the wrong there? Provided he knows that, 'after giving up this body, I am going to Kṛṣṇa.' *Dhīras tatra na muhyati*, he's *dhīra*. One who is *dhīra*, he's not afraid of. So we have to become *dhīra*. Then we shall not be afraid of death. So this is the movement, how to make an *adhīra dhīra*. Everyone is *adhīra*. Who is not afraid of death?"

Regarding the events that took place among the demigods, modern scholars find it difficult to believe these descriptions. How can we present them in relevant ways to intelligent, modern audiences?

We can point out that in every ancient civilization, such as the Greeks, Egyptians, etc. etc., there is the equivalent of worship of *devas*. The almost ubiquitous presence of similar God-worship in every part of the world in every phase of human history should certainly indicate a kind of proof of God's actual existence.

We can also point out the plethora of beautiful objects, sculptures of gods and goddesses, paintings of paradises, gods at war, and so on. And what to speak of great sophisticated literature coming from all the world religions from thousands of years ago. There is too much there to be just pushed aside as

imagination or "unscientific mythology."

In the purport to this verse, we hear how both Lord Śiva and the sun god became angry. Great personalities of this universe are often shown in the scripture as enraged and revengeful. Surely they are to be respected, but to remember the faults and forget the good qualities, being the "natural" tendency of a conditioned soul—that could become more difficult after listening to these narrations. How can we avoid this danger?

We should use the rule that the great, powerful rulers of the universe can do no wrong. "The king can do no wrong." They are so powerful that they are above natural law. They purify themselves by their own natural activities. No one can imitate the acts of the great controllers of the universe. If one does so, he will be like someone imitating Lord Śiva's drinking of poison in the pastime of the churning of the milk ocean. We may hear of Lord Śiva smoking ganja, but if one does it oneself, he will become contaminated and poisoned. Lord Śiva is above being poisoned by any association with ghosts or with the poison of the crematorium. He does these things out of compassion for ghostly creatures, and he does not harm himself.

VERSE 19

yadāśaraṇam ātmānam aikṣata śrānta-vājinam
astraṁ brahma-śiro mene ātma-trāṇaṁ dvijātmajaḥ

"When the son of the brāhmaṇa [Aśvatthāmā] saw that his horses were tired, he considered that there was no alternative for protection outside of his using the ultimate weapon, the brahmāstra [nuclear weapon]."

COMMENT

In the purport to this verse, Prabhupāda describes Aśvatthāmā as a *brahma-bandhu*, not exactly a qualified *brāhmaṇa* but the

friend of a *brāhmaṇa*. What are the essential differences between a real *brāhmaṇa* and a *dvija-bandhu?* How are these considerations relevant to ISKCON devotees?

A real *brāhmaṇa* is the most intelligent man. *Brāhmaṇa* is not a hereditary title. He knows Brahman, the absolute truth. He knows Kṛṣṇa. He is clean and pure-hearted, he knows the scriptures, and he is fully qualified. The *dvija-bandhu* is immature and not fully qualified, so he is purposely called the son of a *brāhmaṇa*. In ISKCON, those who have been initiated with the *gāyatrī* mantra are supposed to have brahminical qualifications. They have chanted Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra and followed the orders of the spiritual master strictly for a sufficient amount of time to be awarded brahminical status. They chant *gāyatrī* mantras three times a day and are allowed to cook for the temple deities. *Brāhmaṇas* study the scriptures and know the conclusions or the *siddhānta* with all seriousness. Therefore, despite their births, which may be in lower castes, they are to be accepted as real *brāhmaṇas*.

As members of ISKCON, we can be called sons and daughters of Śrīla Prabhupāda. Yet we have to ask ourselves what it takes to be a genuine son of our Śrīla Prabhupāda and not merely apply it in a hereditary way, as any member of a group, such as an "hereditary *brāhmaṇa*."

It takes genuine sincerity and loyalty. One has to be loyal to the vows one takes before Śrīla Prabhupāda, and loyal to his teachings. This can be seen as a kind of spiritual chastity.

Is there a place for the outpouring of anger and retaliation in known wrongdoings in a Vaiṣṇava society? The jewel of a *sādhu* is to be forbearing and forgiving. When should we forgive and when should we not?

Lord Caitanya became angry when He heard that His devotee, Lord Nityānanda, had been struck by the rogues Jagāi and Mādhāi. He ran to the spot with the intention to harm the wrongdoers. This indicates that a devotee is always forgiving except when another devotee is offended. But even Lord Nityānanda was forgiving of Jagāi when He saw that he was genuinely contrite

and fell at the feet of Lord Caitanya, asking forgiveness.

It appears that Aśvatthāmā was a *dvija-ātma-jaḥ*, son of a *brāhmaṇa* not a *kṣatriya*, so how was he qualified or entrusted even to learn the secrets of the use of the *brahmāstra*? If he was not qualified to use it, why would his teacher knowingly give away a power that was used totally irresponsibly?

Droṇācārya was the military guru of Aśvatthāmā and was obliged to arm him for warfare, even at the risk of Aśvatthāmā's misusing his power. But Droṇa was not pleased when his son, Aśvatthāmā, misused his power in killing the five sleeping sons of Draupadī. Droṇācārya placed himself on the wrong side in the battle of Kurukṣetra, the side of the Kauravas, and therefore had the duty of training Aśvatthāmā. So this would be held against Droṇācārya, who nevertheless taught his student how to use the *brahmāstra*.

Aśvatthāmā fell down once by his horrible misjudgment by what would please his father (the killing of Draupadī's sons), and again when he sought to defend himself by irresponsibly choosing the most destructive weapon imaginable. Although a human being misuses his free will, because these pastimes are directly related to the presence of the Lord on earth, is it proper to see even such terrible acts as the will of providence, part of the Lord's overall plan?

Yes, this is the only answer when we are confronted with such disasters as the killing of Draupadī's sons and the massacre of almost all the soldiers on the field. In the *Bhagavad-gītā*, Kṛṣṇa says to Arjuna, "Time I am, and I have come to slay all the living beings." Specifically, Kṛṣṇa says that He has chosen to destroy the soldiers on the battlefield, and He asks Arjuna only to take credit for it. These are all pastimes of the Lord, even though they baffle our sense of morality or sense of justice. Aśvatthāmā acts as he does under the spell of *māyā*, which is Kṛṣṇa's material energy, and under the misuse of his own free will.



VERSE 20

athopaspṛśya salilaṁ sandadhe tat samāhitaḥ
ajānann api saṁhāraṁ prāṇa-kṛcchra upasthite

"Since his life was in danger, he touched water in sanctity and concentrated upon the chanting of the hymns for throwing nuclear weapons, although he did not know how to withdraw such weapons."

COMMENT

Aśvatthāmā's behavior is considered immature—that of a *brāhmaṇa* in name only—because of his misusing ultimate power for self-preservation's sake. What if the same thing happens to the leaders of established spiritual organizations? Does this happen in ISKCON? How can we protect society from that kind of abuse?

Society must not make leaders in name only. Before being installed in power, leaders should be tested to determine if they are pure and interested in the welfare of the people. They can be tested by probationary leadership. They can be put into the fire of leadership but with controls upon their powers. Only when the "panel of *brāhmaṇas*" is satisfied with the leader can he be accepted and can society have some assurance that the leader will not be another Mahārāja Vena, the cruel tyrant who the *brāhmaṇas* had to pull down with powerful mantras.

In the short purport to this verse, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "The subtle forms of material activities are finer than grosser methods of material manipulation." This is one of the most concise purports by Śrīla Prabhupāda. It's a good illustration of the expression, "Less is more." In his purport to this verse, Viśvanātha Cakravartī is even more concise and gives just a short quote from Śrīdhara Svāmī's purport. He had put it in two

words, and has covered two verses as well, 1.7.20–21: *samāhitaḥ kṛtadhyānaḥ*. That's it! *Samāhitaḥ*, "by concentration"; *kṛtadhyānaḥ*, "which causes deep meditation." That's concise. It is minimalist expression, modern in addressing the contemporary way of life (like haiku, for example). What would be an example from Śrīla Prabhupāda's life of this "less is more"?

Prabhupāda came to the United States as a mendicant, depending on Kṛṣṇa in the gigantic heart of New York City. He opened a storefront and began Hare Kṛṣṇa *kīrtanas*, gathering a small but faithful following. He called it, "the International Society for Krishna Consciousness." He translated and wrote purports to approximately sixty volumes of books. Since he was constantly traveling and lecturing and managing his society by correspondence, he had little time to devote to writing. How then was he able to write sixty books? He replied, "Little drops of water wear away the stone." Less becomes more.

PERSONAL COMMENT

I have received an email from a sixteen-year-old boy who was reading an earlier volume of *A Poor Man Reads the Bhāgavatam*. He says, "I have written this email first to tell you how useful I am finding this book in regards to advancing in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. *A Poor Man Reads the Bhāgavatam* has helped me, firstly, to understand the *Bhāgavatam* in a much better way, and secondly, to strength my faith in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. The way you have incorporated your own personal emotions/comments in the books really makes it easy to understand, and we can relate to some of the emotions you feel. I cannot express how grateful I am for such a great book being made available to someone as low as myself." I am sorry that so far this volume is not incorporating so much of my personal emotions as the earlier volumes did. That is because at this time in my life, I am feeling "shy" in my writing. Recently I received official criticism about a recent book I wrote, and it makes me unable to let loose with even basic ItM ("in the mix") expressions. And so this book has been basically all *śāstra*,

although it has been personal in the sense that it is incorporating questions that devotees have submitted to me. But I see from this young boy's letter of appreciation that personal emotions can help one to understand the *Bhāgavatam*. The interspersing of the free writing brings a kind of relief from the constant *śāstra*, just as in classical music, changes in movements bring relief from the main theme. One needs courage to write in that way, and also a kind of trust in the reader. If I make a statement that appears to be non-śāstric, I have the courage to believe that it's part of "Kṛṣṇa is everything." And I trust that the reader will come with me, swing with me, play with me and enjoy the changes. My courage in my own self-writing and my trust that the reader will cross the bridge are the essentials. Without them, I keep holding back and not daring to dive into the pool.



VERSE 21

tataḥ prāduṣkṛtaṁ tejaḥ pracaṇḍaṁ sarvato diśam
prāṇāpadam abhiprekṣya viṣṇuṁ jiṣṇur uvāca ha

"Thereupon a glaring light spread in all directions. It was so fierce that Arjuna thought his own life in danger, and so he began to address Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa."

COMMENT

What is fascinating here is that we find out in a few verses that Arjuna has the potency with his own arsenal to stop Aśvatthāmā by using his own *brahmāstra* weapon. Is Arjuna here turning to Kṛṣṇa for direction (as he did at Kurukṣetra), for protection (as the devotee Gajendra did out of bodily distress), or simply taking the opportunity to glorify the Lord?

Arjuna is definitely turning to Kṛṣṇa out of fear of the *brahmāstra*. He fears for loss of life, and he turns to his supreme Protector. But the system is that when there is something to ask of the Lord, one first glorifies Him in transcendental prayers.

Arjuna has the power to respond, yet immediately he turns to Kṛṣṇa. Can one of the lessons from this verse be about the use of power, that if the powerful person is honest, he recognizes the source of that power and doesn't feel himself the doer, or doesn't feel qualified to use his power independently of the Lord?

Even Aśvatthāmā drew his power from Kṛṣṇa, although he did not recognize this, as Arjuna did. We shall see the results of Aśvatthāmā's so-called independence. Every powerful man should use his might in the service of the Lord and feel himself a humble servant of the Almighty. The one who claims "I am the greatest" is in illusion and will soon be cut down by mighty *māyā* in the form of various enemies and competitors.

It is an amazing scene: Kṛṣṇa is appearing in action, for the first time in the *Bhāgavatam*, and Arjuna is approaching Him in obvious anxiety and fear and helplessness. Is that the mood in which we may have our first meeting with Kṛṣṇa, or did Kṛṣṇa make a special arrangement for his cousin and friend? How shall we turn to Kṛṣṇa in the midst of need and difficulty? It is natural for a person in difficulty to turn to God. Does it mean that He will put His devotees in trouble just to hear a sincere prayer? Will a devotee do it to himself (put himself in danger)?

Kṛṣṇa sometimes puts a devotee into distress just to test him, to see his sincerity. Do I actually want Kṛṣṇa more than my material comforts? Am I true to Him despite being persecuted? ("Blessed are they who suffer in My name.") There is no need to put ourselves in material difficulty; the difficulties arise by themselves, like swells in an ocean storm. Our job is to become detached from material security and to turn to Kṛṣṇa in our hearts.

Arjuna is such a wonderful devotee. He always takes shelter of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Whenever there are difficulties, he turns to the Lord for help. In our own devotional service, if we turn

to someone time and again for help, it would not be taken as a positive sign of progress. It would be taken as indicative of weakness of heart, that one is not trying to solve his problems on his own, and instead is seeking external help to solve his problems. Where and how do we draw the thin line between positive dependence on mercy and miserly overdependence on the help of seniors?

It is a thin line. We cannot expect to always have a direct connection to Kṛṣṇa in the heart. Then, it is best to be honest and approach wise Godbrothers for their understanding and advice. There's nothing shameful about that. If they are actually wise, they will not try to solve our problems for us but turn us to Kṛṣṇa in the heart and to our own experience. We should not believe that a peer has all the answers, as good as Kṛṣṇa. Turning to the spiritual master, however, is a different thing. You should be confident that he will represent Kṛṣṇa. Yet even he will ask you to do it on your own, to pray to Kṛṣṇa in the heart for a solution to your problems. It is good to know persons you can trust, but learn to find your own way to the treasury of Vedic wisdom.

A PERSONAL NOTE ON THESE COMMENTS:

My answers to the questions are not formidable purports or *ṭīkās*. They are not highly intellectual or deeply mystical. They are not poetic outbursts of joy or even piercing, pessimistic views of material life. Therefore, "a poor man. . ."

When I look at a question and cannot answer it, I brood over it as long as possible. Then it becomes too tedious; I must do something. I "lower the bar," lower the standards and plunge ahead with whatever I have in my cupboard. Sometimes my material comes out too simple, or even simplistic. But it's the best I can do, and it's *bhakti*.

A Poor Man Reads the Bhāgavatam is not intended to be an imitation of the Bhaktivedanta purports. They are the writings of a disciple of Śrīla Prabhupāda who answers questions on

the Bhāgavatam submitted to him by other devotees. He writes whatever he has recalled his spiritual master taught on each question, and then he becomes silent. He doesn't know more than what Prabhupāda has taught him. Why even write such "student notes" when we already have the complete Bhaktivedanta purports? Because Śrīla Prabhupāda encouraged me to write. He encouraged all his disciples to do so. The subject matter is not static, he said. As one speaks more and more in *paramparā*, the pastimes and teachings get churned, and even though one is speaking the same thing, Bhāgavatam is so special, so capacious, that new insights are brought out. Especially relevant here is that new, easy access to the Bhāgavatam may be brought by the student of the spiritual master. And as my sixteen-year-old correspondent said, the personal comments and reflections not only bring a reader more access into the Bhaktivedanta purports, but they prove interesting in themselves. So much for advertising myself.

VERSE 22

arjuna uvāca
kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa mahā-bāho bhaktānām abhayaṅkara
tvam eko dahyamānānām apavargo 'si saṁsṛteḥ

"Arjuna said: O my Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, You are the almighty Personality of Godhead. There is no limit to Your different energies. Therefore only You are competent to instill fearlessness in the hearts of Your devotees. Everyone in the flames of material miseries can find the path of liberation in You only."

COMMENT

Arjuna knows Kṛṣṇa's qualities, because they were together in the battlefield of Kurukṣetra. The specific qualities mentioned in this verse are that He is almighty and that He can instill fearlessness in the hearts of His devotees. In the purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda describes material existence as "something like a blazing fire in the forest," and he states that the spiritual master can put out the fire, since he is the "mercy representative" of the Lord. By his words, he can penetrate into the heart of a suffering person and give him transcendental knowledge, "which alone can extinguish the fire of material existence."

This verse is the first prayer in which Arjuna addresses Kṛṣṇa before asking Him for release from the *brahmāstra* of Aśvatthāmā. The very first words of Arjuna are filled with emotion and show us a very personal contact between the Lord and His devotees: *kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa mahā-bāho. Mahā-bāho* is the same address that Kṛṣṇa used for Arjuna ("O strong-armed one") in the *Bhagavad-gītā* when Arjuna was confused about his own strength. When Kṛṣṇa called him *mahā-bāho*, he was doing so ironically, as if to say, "Arjuna, you are mighty-armed, but why are you now so afraid to fight and considering yourself incapable?" Was Arjuna now so helpless against the *brahmāstra* that he used his own "title" to refer to Kṛṣṇa? It almost sounds like, "Kṛṣṇa! It's You, Kṛṣṇa, who is *mahā-bāho*, not me... What to do, please! Please!" But as we grow older, we may find our hearts become harder as we build up a sort of preconceived illusion of independence toward the spiritual master. Where does that feeling of need for the help of the spiritual master go? It seems to atrophy once the disciple becomes more "mature" in the sense of being beaten up by *māyā* and having committed offenses.

The feeling of need for the spiritual master's mercy comes from actual danger and poverty. It comes from trusting the guru, and love. When one is aware of his precarious condition, in his actual dependence, then he turns to the spiritual master, just as a child turns toward its parents. Prayers to the spiritual master,

as well as active service, keep these feelings alive. And being beaten up by *māyā* should not cause atrophy but heighten one's awareness and awaken one to the need for my precious link to my spiritual master.

What are the qualifications of the spiritual master who can instill transcendental knowledge in the hearts of the disciples?

He has realized the knowledge, beyond mere book knowledge. His every act is surrender to Kṛṣṇa. He wholeheartedly serves the mission of Lord Caitanya, the *saṅkīrtana* movement, the chanting of the holy names. Like the potent husband who plants the seed of pregnancy in his wife, the qualified spiritual master brings about the birth of Kṛṣṇa consciousness in the heart of the disciple.

Great devotees like Arjuna, fully "aware of the transcendental qualities of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa," praise Him even in the midst of their fearfulness. How can this point best be brought across to the so-called intellectuals or casual readers who may see these prayers and other beautiful *Bhāgavatam* prayers as mere decorative literary ornaments, poeticizing the appearance of a mythical Lord, rather than real utterances made in the height of distress? After all, wouldn't great fear normally bring about a *lack* of clear thinking, what to speak of measured, thoughtful praise?

Tell them of the great qualities of Arjuna, who prayed to Lord Kṛṣṇa previously on the battlefield of Kurukṣetra, and now in one-on-one combat with Aśvatthāmā. He was no ordinary person who ran in panic to a sentimental God in his mind. It is also for the good of others that Arjuna leaves these prayers, so that people can see the proper system for approaching God in distress. Convince them that Arjuna could overcome his panic and become coolheaded and reassured in the presence of his God, as he did at Kurukṣetra. As for Kṛṣṇa being mythical, we have much evidence that this is not so. The experiences of great souls throughout the ages attest to their coming into the presence of the Lord, and they have set it down in the *śruti* and *smṛti*, or heard and remembered scriptures called Vedic literature. Kṛṣṇa can be experienced even today by a person who chants the *mahā-*

mantra and associates with Him in sound vibration. The sound vibration has power to clean a beginner's heart and bring him to higher stages of pure devotion, wherein he can witness the names, pastimes, and qualities of the Lord in trance.

Devotee-readers can effectively insulate themselves from slipping into seeing the *Bhāgavatam* as mythology by praying to Kṛṣṇa, the Lord of the Yadus, the Lord of the *gopīs*. Pray for divine vision. Pray to Lord Nṛsiṁhadeva, with His nails as sharp as thunderbolts, to tear out the doubts in our hearts and install devotion to Him and devotion to the *Bhāgavatam* as it is.

One of the conventions we Westerners have come to accept as familiar about prayer is the way it is offered: kneeling with hands folded in *praṇāmās*, etc. Would Arjuna have offered his prayers this way?

It was not necessary for Arjuna to follow external conventions in his offerings of prayers. In fact, the *Bhāgavatam* mentions that Arjuna is racing in his chariot with great speed in his chase of Aśvatthāmā. So it might not have been possible to take his hands off the reins or to kneel down on the chariot while praying. A devotee is able to fix himself in *samādhi*, bringing the mind to the heart and meditating with all devotion on the dearmost. He can do this in any situation, regardless of external distractions.

Was Arjuna praying out loud or in his mind, or does it matter?

It does not matter, but Sanātana Gosvāmī, in his *Śrī Bṛhad-bhāgavatāmṛta*, establishes that chanting out loud is more effective than chanting only in the mind. When you chant out loud, you use two senses (mind and tongue vibration), and therefore you have a better chance to capture the flickering mind and fix it on Kṛṣṇa. Also, when you chant out loud, you give other living entities a chance to benefit by hearing the all-auspicious holy names.

How does the spiritual master save those who don't want to be saved—for example, those who think, "I like the material inferno. I want to burn there. It feels like home to me."

This willful disregard for the mercy seems to mark the worst kind of sufferer: he who does not even have a clue that

he is suffering. In Viśvanātha Cakravartī's *Śrī Gurvaṣṭakam*, the spiritual master is described as a cloud pouring the rain of mercy on the souls in the blazing world of suffering. But if a so-called disciple runs away from the cloud of mercy or hides himself under an umbrella, then what can a spiritual master do? Sometimes he grabs the errant disciple by the hair and brings him back into the circle of obedience. But if a disciple repeatedly goes away, then the spiritual master is not responsible for such a soul who has broken the essential vows again and again.

"By his words, the spiritual master can penetrate into the heart of the suffering and inject transcendental knowledge, which alone can extinguish the fire of material existence." In this verse, the spiritual master is considered the "mercy representation" of the Lord, to instill fearlessness into the devotee's heart. This is indeed wonderful and enlivening to hear. Still, sometimes a disciple may experience this as theoretical only. What is it that allows the experience of a genuine guru-disciple relationship to be realized, and result in real fearlessness? What is the disciple's responsibility in this matter? And what about a spiritual master who is unable to function as "mercy representative" of God to his disciples, due to his being overly selfish?

The duty of a disciple is to surrender to the order of the spiritual master and serve him with love. A perfect example is our Śrīla Prabhupāda, who took the order of Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura to preach in the Western countries and went at an elderly age and in poor health to America. Prabhupāda demonstrated great fearlessness in the midst of his unsteady situation. He was granted that by Kṛṣṇa directly. As for the spiritual master who is unqualified to give fearlessness due to his being "overly selfish," he should not have taken disciples to begin with. A spiritual master has to be focused on Kṛṣṇa and on his spiritual master, and then he will be in the position to give mercy to those who come to him for shelter. If he is selfish and interested only in his self-gratification, he will not be able to pass on the mercy which he has inherited from the Lord and the guru. Therefore, the real connection will not take place.

COMMENTS ON ANSWERING QUESTIONS

It can become tedious. You feel like a Mr. Know-It-All. Sometimes you honestly say, "I don't know the answer to that." But you can't do that too often. You have to begin some answers not knowing how they will come out. You just go forward, forming some words and sentences and hope it will develop into clarity and substance.

Śrīla Prabhupāda, especially in the early years, allowed questions after his lectures. When the audience was mostly his disciples, he would let them go on at length asking questions, and sometimes he'd spend a great deal of time answering individual questions. In later years, he didn't take so many questions, except in public lectures.

The questions are not supposed to challenge. They should inquire submissively. A challenging spirit is not good. At Ratha-yātrā festivals, the devotees set up a auestion-and-answer booth, and a sharp devotee—often a *sannyāsī*—is chosen to field questions from the crowd. The questions tend to be edgy and confrontational. The inquiry in this book is more submissive, but doubts are regularly put forward to be cleared up. That is proper.

"If God is all-good and all-powerful, why do we have to suffer in this world?" The question stuns you. But then—you don't think of a clever, new retort—you *remember*. What answer did Śrīla Prabhupāda give in his books and lectures? You remember and put it in your own words.

In the purport to this verse, Prabhupāda writes, "A devotee of the Lord is always fearless because of the protection given by the Lord." It's simplistic to just gloss over the fact by saying that you have to be detached. It's worth discussing. Detachment from the body, from family members, from devotees whom we love is not so easily realized. It's easy to speak of detachment in a superficial way, but when faced with a life-threatening situation, the reality of attachment is thrust in one's face. It's a balancing act in some ways to attain fearlessness. A cold, impersonal,

fatalistic attitude may get someone somewhere to fearlessness, but a visceral revelation of the fragility of our material existence will snap it.

It's not wrong to admit you're scared or to grieve over the departure of a dear one. But you have to settle your grief in Kṛṣṇa; accept that it's His inevitable will. We want to remain humane, while at the same time attaining transcendental detachment. We want to remain vulnerable, yet, by dint of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, above the throes of tragedies. This state can be attained not superficially, but by gradual surrender to Kṛṣṇa and learning to trust in His will.



VERSE 23

tvam ādyaḥ puruṣaḥ sākṣād īśvaraḥ prakṛteḥ paraḥ
māyāṁ vyudasya cic-chaktyā kaivalye sthita ātmani

"You are the original Personality of Godhead who expands Himself all over the creations and is transcendental to material energy. You have cast away the effects of the material energy by dint of Your spiritual potency. You are always situated in eternal bliss and transcendental knowledge."

COMMENT

In much of the *Bhāgavatam*, devotees like the *mahājanas* describe the Lord's unlimited qualities in their prayers. It can be noted that the particular prompting for Arjuna to pray in this case is his fear. A normal materialist in this situation who had some amount

of faith would pray for relief from the distress of imminent loss of one's own life, yet Arjuna does not make fear, or even the Lord's defeating of fearful demons, his focus. He doesn't bargain with Kṛṣṇa or promise renewed faith in Him should he survive. Instead, he chooses to bring out the Lord's qualities of all-powerfulness, His transcendence, His spiritual potency, bliss, and transcendental knowledge. Since Arjuna is His intimate servitor and friend, we know he is not engaging in flattery for some purpose of his own. Is one of Arjuna's intentions in first offering praise to show he is not approaching the Lord out of selfishness? In another way, is one of the purposes of praising the Lord by glorifying His unlimited qualities to show that a devotee does not approach Him merely for some material benefit?

Prayers of glorification are natural responses to turning one's attention toward the Supreme. In the face of meditation on Kṛṣṇa, one's own desires or motives in approaching the Lord take a back seat, and praise issues forth from the awed or intimate devotee. Dhruva Mahārāja deliberately went to Lord Viṣṇu to gain material wealth, but once he saw the beautiful form of the Lord, he said, *svāmin kṛtārtho'smi varaṁ na yāce*: Now that I have seen You, Lord, there is nothing else I want in the material world." So despite Arjuna's dire situation, first the prayers of glorification issue forth, and then the personal request.

Beyond praying for immediate relief in any situation, the pure devotee is praying to the Lord as the infinite and intimate Deity. As for his own physical safety, a devotee knows that Kṛṣṇa will save him or Kṛṣṇa will allow him to be physically destroyed, and there is nothing to pray about that. *Māre kṛṣṇa rākhe ke, rākhe kṛṣṇa māre ke*—whoever Kṛṣṇa wants to save, no one can kill, and whoever Kṛṣṇa wants to kill, no one can save. The prayers, therefore, are recognition and devotion to the Supreme Truth, the Supreme Person. It's clear here that although Arjuna is in imminent danger, he is taking his time to praise the Supreme Being, and that is his mood.

This expanding of the Lord spoken of by Śrīla Prabhupāda is not like a balloon expanding, nor is it like the genetic cloning

of the material scientists. How can those of us whose minds are clouded by materialistic imagery understand His wonderful expansions?

Kṛṣṇa and His expansions have been compared to an original candle and other candles which are lit from it. The other candles may have the same lighting capacity, but they are lit from the original candle. Kṛṣṇa's expansions are given the power that they need in order to carry out their tasks given by Kṛṣṇa. The Viṣṇu expansions of Lord Kṛṣṇa are individual persons. They emanate from Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and They possess almost all of His qualities. The living beings (tiny *jīva* souls), along with His different energies, are all also expansions of the original primeval Lord.

It's a mind-blowing statement for someone who was brought up in the West: "The Lord is addressed herein as the original Personality of Godhead. From Him all other Personalities of Godhead expand." At first, to grasp this concept is hard, even if you know the analogy of the original candle and all other candles. It's difficult to comprehend because we think that God must be one with no second. How can one overcome the confusion? Personalities like Rāma and Nrsimha, etc., are all so worshipable, so how is it a monotheism? How to explain it to, say, a Muslim?

The same example. The original powerhouse and the expansions of light. He is so powerful, He maintains His own identity, yet empowers other expansions with individualities of their own and, as required, "wattage" almost equal to His. This does not become pantheism. It's God and His separate Viṣṇus, His servitor devas. So we can say to the Muslim, "Allah akbar"—God is one, and there are no other gods to equal Him.

A PERSONAL NOTE:

You answer so many questions so intensely you get a headache. It's hard to sort out the questions, put them in order. Hacking down undergrowth with a machete. Kṛṣṇa and His energies, Prabhupāda, what he said, what the questioner wants

answered.

Mālatī Prabhu has written to all Vaisnavis asking for a liver transplant for Śyāmasundara Prabhu. You have to have blood type O. Am I compassionate enough to volunteer? I'd volunteer, but I'd hope I wouldn't qualify. I have too many long-range plans (travel to India), plus I fear dying in surgery. Who would pay for it? It's on my mind as I try to concentrate on Chapter Seven. J.G. suggests I wait a few days and then phone Mālatī and ask if anyone has come forward in response to her request. Then consider further. Find out your blood type. You'd have to travel to Chicago, change your life, spend weeks in bed recuperating.

I phoned my doctor, and he suggested I not volunteer for a liver transplant because my health is not strong enough.

In the absolute spiritual world, it appears that everything is complete and perfect. For us to become qualified to enter this realm, we have to become completely perfect through purification of *bhakti*. It is said, though, that Lord Caitanya is very merciful, and if we simply give our lives to ISKCON, He will make up for any lacking. Devotees tend to capitalize on this statement and compromise on their practice, saying that Mahāprabhu will come to save us if we are not one hundred percent there. There's an anecdote told of Śrīla Prabhupāda saying that if you are seventy percent there, you can enter the kingdom of God. Here is the story from Jayapatāka Swami: "Once Śrīla Prabhupāda was giving a lecture about how we have to be cent percent Kṛṣṇa conscious. He was ramming home the point that we have to surrender to Kṛṣṇa one hundred percent. At the end of the class, the devotees were in a sober mood. They were looking down, thinking, 'Who can come up to the standard of complete surrender?' As if he could read their minds, Prabhupāda relaxed his mood a little bit and said, 'If you can be ninety percent Kṛṣṇa conscious, then you can also go back to Godhead.' He was on a large, high *vyāsāsana*, four feet in the air, and had to go down some steps to get off the *vyāsāsana*. As he started down, he said, 'Even if you are eighty

percent surrendered, Kṛṣṇa will still take you.' Then he got off the *vyāsāsana* and started walking away. His *cadar* was flowing behind him, dragging on the ground. He stopped, looked at the devotees and said, 'Even if you are seventy percent Kṛṣṇa conscious, still Kṛṣṇa will take you.' He threw his *cadar* over his shoulder and walked off with his head high."

What is the ultimate criteria and minimum qualifications to go back to Godhead? We go back to Godhead by truthfulness and purity, not simply by propaganda. We have to sincerely go there and show Kṛṣṇa by our acts of surrender in this lifetime that we are His pure devotee. Not being one hundred percent but still going back to Godhead means you try your best. You give your all despite your inherently flawed nature, and Kṛṣṇa picks up the balance. Therefore, it is said of Kṛṣṇa, *bhāva-grāhī janārdana*, He sees the good in our actions.

VERSE 24

sa eva jīva-lokasya māyā-mohita-cetasaḥ
vidhatse svena vīryeṇa śreyo dharmādi-lakṣaṇam

"And yet, though You are beyond the purview of the material energy, You execute the four principles of liberation characterized by religion and so on for the ultimate good of the conditioned souls."

COMMENT

This verse speaks about the fourfold path of *pavarga—dharma, artha, kāma, moksa*. This refers to a religion which is pursued for the purpose of economic development—economic development

in pursuit of sense gratification, and in the end, when sense gratification is frustrating, one pursues liberation. Sometimes, a devotee still thinks that he needs to work hard to enjoy the "fruits." How can he overcome the mentality of "work hard and then enjoy"?

To try to enjoy the material world is to be in illusion. Prabhupāda writes, "They are attacked by the material energy, and they want to enjoy her under false pretexts, although in essence, the living entity is unable to enjoy. One is eternally the servitor of the Lord, and when he forgets this position, he thinks of enjoying the material world, but factually, he is in illusion." The theological belief that God made this world for the humans to enjoy is another misconception. He made it as a place to live out karmic reaction and as a place for gaining enlightenment in devotional service and liberation from the cycle of birth and death. *Dharma* should not be executed for achieving economic development, it should be *premā-bhakti*: pure, unmotivated service for the pleasure of the Lord. And work should be executed for the pleasure of the Lord.

We have heard about Stockholm syndrome, where out of fear and helplessness, a kidnap victim begins to positively identify with and befriend his captors. Would this be an apt metaphor for a sincere devotee who gets diverted from devotional service by *māyā's* "attack" and begins to "befriend" the illusory energy, trying falsely to enjoy within it, like Indra during his pig days?

If a devotee gives up his aloof stance toward *māyā's* attack and begins to befriend her, then he is like the person in Stockholm syndrome. *Māyā* is never our friend, nor are we helpless in her control; Kṛṣṇa will always save the sincere servitor who calls out to Him.

In the purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "The Personality of Godhead Śrī Kṛṣṇa, out of His causeless mercy, descends on the manifested world without being influenced by the material modes of nature." What does "causeless mercy" mean?

The Lord is not impelled by any other source to give His mercy. He gives it out of His own free will. It comes because He wants

to give it, not necessarily because someone earns it. No one has caused it. When and if Kṛṣṇa wants to give His mercy, He does, and no one can check Him. Nor should anyone speculate on why His mercy is descending.



VERSE 25

tathāyaṁ cāvatāras te bhuvo bhāra-jihīrṣayā
svānāṁ cānanya-bhāvānām anudhyānāya cāsakṛt

"Thus You descend as an incarnation to remove the burden of the world and to benefit Your friends, especially those who are Your exclusive devotees and are rapt in meditation upon You."

COMMENT

In the purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "It appears that the Lord is partial to His devotees. Everyone is related to the Lord. He is equal to everyone, and yet He is more inclined to His own men and devotees." How do we reconcile the contradiction of Kṛṣṇa being impartial and yet being partial to His own friends and devotees? How can one say that He is impartial?

A king can be simultaneously impartial to all his subjects and give them all equal protection and yet show special fondness for his own family members and coterie of friends. It is natural that he act so, and not impartially. In the *Bhagavad-gītā*, Kṛṣṇa repeatedly asks that we surrender to Him and become His devotee. Those who respond to this call become very dear to Kṛṣṇa, and those

who do not remain outside His special love. It is not the Lord's fault.

This verse raises the apparent paradox that Kṛṣṇa is equal to everyone, friend to every living entity, and simultaneously is especially disposed to His devotees. While this special disposition is often explained as reciprocal love between God and His devotee and therefore not a disruption to the "equal to all" proviso, it leaves room for doubts. For example, if God comes to reclaim all fallen, suffering souls, and He has the power to cancel *brahmāstras*, why doesn't He get on with the job of rescuing us and avert our further suffering? Apparently, He chooses not to. Sometimes He saves someone who might seem to deserve it less than someone else (say, Ajamila), and sometimes He leaves us to work through our own envy and nescience, regardless of the fact that out of compassion, He accompanies us as Paramātmā. Some of us may be trying quite hard to comply with God's prescriptions, but may require many more births to give up our enjoying spirit (perhaps more easily understood as the desire to lord it over others). We have heard intelligent atheists ask, "If God really exists and is truly compassionate, why doesn't He get us out of here?" We can say, "Well, it is a paradox; it is *acintya*—He is equal to all and special to some." Sometimes He tries really hard (or effortlessly) to appear "equal," as with the ten thousand queens of Dvārakā, but if we each didn't need to be uniquely special and with God, why did He bother to give each of them the impression that they alone had His companionship? Apparently, each soul should want to have Kṛṣṇa's undivided attention and to give Him their undivided attention.

You may call it a paradox, but it is not a contradiction. The verse states that God is especially inclined toward His devotees and "kinsmen," those who are His exclusive worshipers. They are so because of their good use of free will, whereas those who are out of the circle have not used their will to become eternal, loving servants of the Lord. They don't develop their uniquely special relationship with Kṛṣṇa, and so He does not give them the impression that they each alone have His companionship.

Each soul has it, but it is a question of developing it. One has to seek it and have the good fortune to find a bona fide spiritual master. Then one can come out of the category of souls who are unspecial and become one who is very dear to Kṛṣṇa.

In his purport, Prabhupāda writes, "No one can be His father, and yet no one can be His son." We cannot help but think of the many times Prabhupāda has stated (sometimes in response to Christians about Jesus Christ), "Why should God have only one son? We are each sons of God."

The spiritual master does not make mistakes or misstatements; he is not *cañcalā*, like an ordinary human being, and his words are never contradictory to the *śāstras* or his own previous remarks. He preaches according to time, place, and audience. Devotees have always encountered doubters (even some who are initiated devotees) who point to Prabhupāda's apparently saying one thing in one instance and another thing in another instance regarding that same philosophical point. It is best we accept it as an aspect of the spiritual master's transcendental variegatedness as the same quality of Kṛṣṇa's variegatedness.

Prabhupāda writes in the purport, "There is nothing mundane about His kinsmen and relations in devotional service." He appears to mean that all the tribulations they faced were part of the *līlā*. Does it mean that all things that happen to devotees in modern days—all the tribulations that often come in service—are also sort of a pastime, like we are part of the same movement of Lord Caitanya, part of Mahāprabhu's *līlā*?

We cannot claim to be part of Mahāprabhu's *līlā* in the confidential way that His contemporary devotees were, great souls like the Six Gosvāmīs and close associates in Bengal and Oriya. But to the degree we faithfully follow Śrīla Prabhupāda, who comes in disciplic succession from Lord Caitanya, we can claim to be part of that "*līlā*" of Lord Caitanya. It is not confined to activities performed in India or activities performed only in the Medieval age, when Lord Caitanya was present. That is part of the meaning of the expression, "There is nothing mundane about His kinsmen and relations in devotional service." They

are transcendental to time and place and can appear even in foreign countries around the world, thanks to the pioneering work of our Śrīla Prabhupāda, which was executed on behalf of Mahāprabhu's mission.

PERSONAL COMMENT

We went to the hospital today for an ultrasound bladder test. The results were not good. Dr. Barrera said I have to undergo surgery and have parts of the overgrown prostate gland removed. He asked me whether I would do it in the United States, and I said yes. This is another reason for my early departure from Mexico. I will tell Aghāri that I plan to leave in two weeks.

VERSE 26

kim idaṁ svit kuto veti deva-deva na vedmy ahaṁ
sarvato mukham āyāti tejaḥ parama-dāruṇam

"O Lord of lords, how is it that this dangerous effulgence is spreading all around? Where does it come from? I do not understand it."

COMMENT

In the purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "Anything that is presented before the Personality of Godhead should be so done after due presentation of respectful prayers. That is the standard procedure, and Śrī Arjuna, although an intimate friend of the

Lord, is observing this method for general information." The method is clear—if you are in trouble, praise the Lord, and then ask what you want. But should we take it that Kṛṣṇa actually has a soft spot and that he likes poets? Just look at the poetry— *deva-deva na vedmy aham*—everything is there: contrast, repetition, personal call, humility. Does Kṛṣṇa have a preference for heartfelt poetry and for devotee-poets?

Yes, Kṛṣṇa is drawn not just to the formality of prayers offered before asking for something, but He's drawn toward the devotee-poets who speak from the heart in *uttama-śloka*, best-spoken verses. How is it possible that in such a dangerous and urgent situation, Arjuna could offer prayers of glorification before asking Kṛṣṇa for help? It seems difficult to imagine that we would ever be able to do this in a pressing situation, but we should learn to practice this procedure. If we do not, we are disrespectful to the Lord and fail to acknowledge His greatness, His ability to save us. It doesn't take much time to offer sincere prayers; it just takes presence of mind that we are standing before Kṛṣṇa, the Almighty, and then prayers of glorification will flow naturally, even before we make our urgent request.

In modern-day ISKCON, it appears that there is too much doubt in terms of who should be adored, respected, or glorified. Nowadays, even obeisances to the Vaiṣṇavas seem to be dwindling. But simply by following the Vaiṣṇava etiquette, Kṛṣṇa becomes pleased. Is failure to respect devotees a principal reason why we don't advance nicely?

Offering respect and obeisances to devotees is like offering the same to Lord Kṛṣṇa. We should give devotees the benefit of the doubt, not see them with a fault-finding mentality.

The Lord's dear friend Arjuna is certainly not being casual here, yet the reader gets a distinct sense he is taking his time making full glorifications of the Lord, despite the imminent danger. How are we to understand that Arjuna even has the time for this? The *brahmāstra* effulgence is approaching!

The best way for Arjuna to react to the speedy approach of the *brahmāstra* is to take shelter in Kṛṣṇa, and the best way to do that

is to first offer prayers. Therefore, he makes the time or takes the time to do it. And Kṛṣṇa, who is Time itself, is able to stretch the time, so that Arjuna is able to pray, even before asking Kṛṣṇa for more "practical" help in the dire situation.

Are the prayers vocalized, or do they take place in the clear mind of the pure devotee, Arjuna?

Either way. Vyāsadeva has given us the prayers in literary form, written down. But originally, we can see Arjuna speaking to Kṛṣṇa, or we may imagine him only thinking these prayers in his mind. The main point is that they are sincerely offered, enunciated, and put down in perfect knowledge of the inconceivable Lord and His powers. The Lord, being all-cognizant, is fully aware of the unfolding events regarding the *brahmāstra*. Is it a correct perception that He appears to be waiting for Arjuna to complete his prayers before acting, or will He act in His own time, whether His devotee offers Him prayers or not?

Kṛṣṇa has been waiting for Arjuna to complete his prayers, and only after that does He respond to the situation, how to counteract the weapon of Aśvatthāmā. Kṛṣṇa knows perfectly well how to act and when to speak to Arjuna in a military fashion. But He does not "jump the gun"; He takes the time for Arjuna to complete His prayers, and then by His own sweet will, in His own sweet time, He acts. Therefore, His action appears to be dependent on His devotee's prayers. That's how Kṛṣṇa likes it.

Similarly, would the Lord have acted as Varāha to rescue the Vedas or save the world from Hiraṇyakaśipu's terrorism as Nṛsiṁha if Brahmā had not approached Him on the shore of the ocean of milk? In other words, is it the Lord's pastime to act only when requested by His pure devotee? The request of Advaita Ācārya also come to mind.

The Lord likes to respond to the prayers and helpless cries of His devotees.

PERSONAL NOTE:

I wrote to one of my disciples, informing her of my upcoming

departure from Mexico and move to Delaware. She replied that it seemed sad that the community down here didn't work out. I feel a melancholy about it. We were such a promising group when we started out a year ago, but gradually, the spirit has dwindled, and devotees have departed. Now there's almost no one left, and the upkeep of the hacienda is financially threatened. So you feel sad. You could have stayed four more months, but you decided to leave early, get on with your life.

VERSE 27

śrī-bhagavān uvāca
vetthedaṁ droṇa-putrasya brāhmam astraṁ pradarśitam
naivāsau veda saṁhāraṁ prāṇa-bādha upasthite

"The Supreme Personality of Godhead said: Know from Me that this is the act of the son of Droṇa. He has thrown the hymns of nuclear energy [brahmāstra], and he does not know how to retract the glare. He has helplessly done this, being afraid of imminent death."

COMMENT

How can we substantiate to a nondevotee audience that this subtle science of chanting mantras and making weapons existed thousands of years ago?

We must rely on the ancient scriptures for evidence. Other forms of proof prove faulty. There are three main forms of knowledge, according to Vedic understanding: *pratyakṣa, anumāna,* and *śabda-brahma.* The first one (*pratyakṣa*) is direct perception and is faulty. If you look at the sun planet in the sky, it looks as big as a plate, although it is millions of times larger than the earth. But the senses cannot give us accurate information. The second form of gaining knowledge, by inference, is also faulty. We may hear some children

playing outside of the house and conjecture that the sound is produced by children, but actually, that is just a guess. Similarly, sounds on the roof would have to be substantiated by going there to see for yourself. Mental conjecture is another form of faulty proof. But *śabda-brahma,* hearing from authority, is perfect. You may read in a newspaper that an earthquake took place in a distant part of the world. You accept the authority of the newspaper. Similarly, we accept the supreme and perfect authority, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, in His words in *Bhagavad-gītā* and the words of His pure devotees in disciplic succession, as recorded in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam.* Vyāsadeva is the literary incarnation of Kṛṣṇa, and when he describes *brahmāstra* weapons in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam,* we have to accept it because there is no other form of proof. Vyāsa's descriptions are handed down to us from thousands of years ago without flaw or interpretation, and we can accept them with certainty.

Prabhupāda is pointing out the sheer folly of one's learning the science of destruction without also knowing the remedy (retraction). Now the world is beset with nuclear weapons, which governments admit are nonretractable and can cause permanent, life-scarring damage for many generations to come. The materialists will argue, "Everyone just has to be careful about not making mistakes with these weapons." But when pressed, materialists cannot think of a solution to the danger to the world posed by these weapons. Nor is there any protection from the rogue state or individual who chooses, despite everything, to use them. While there is no reason for devotees to join in the anti-nuke lobby, for example, or attend demonstrations, what are practical or acceptable responses to this situation, other than constant emphasis on the holy names as our true shelter?

Devotees can enter the political arena for Kṛṣṇa's sake. They can give lectures and write articles on the risks of nuclear warfare. They can appeal to the governments in the name of God for sanity in protecting His living entities and His creation, And they can prepare to offer refuge to those who are devastated in times of attack. Devotees should certainly aim their preaching against the development and use of superweapons. They address the root

cause of this by pointing out that governments do not recognize the supremacy of the Supreme Lord and the fact that He is the owner and maintainer of the whole material cosmos. Nothing should be done without His permission, since everything is owned by Kṛṣṇa. Śrīla Prabhupāda referred to this as the peace formula, and wrote a widely distributed pamphlet on the subject. The ideas addressed in that pamphlet should be used by his followers to confront the political thinkers who feel that, in a dangerous age, it is necessary for nations to arm themselves with nuclear weapons in the name of self-protection.

Punishment is meant for rectification. In modern-day ISKCON, we see many cases where punishment is used as a means to silence a vocal devotee. Vaiṣṇava compassion is sometimes based on a decision of popular vote. What is the balance between punishment and compassion in a Vaiṣṇava society?

Actually, a Vaiṣṇava should never be punished, just as women and children are not punished. As long as one is acting as a Vaiṣṇava, he or she should be treated compassionately, even if they have different opinions than authorities in ISKCON. Punishment can only be meted out if one behaves as a non-Vaiṣṇava, as Aśvatthāmā has done. Otherwise, all mercy should be extended to devotees within the circle of love.

Aśvatthāmā made so many mistakes, yet he was still punished by the Lord directly. How is it that this *brahma-bandhu* got the association of Kṛṣṇa even after committing such acts?

Aśvatthāmā's handling by Kṛṣṇa directly is not only a favor upon him by the Lord, but it's an example of stern handling. Therefore, Prabhupāda writes, "As the son of a *brāhmaṇa*, he should not have made so many mistakes, and for such gross negligence of duty, he was to be punished by the Lord Himself."

How can we understand a hymn to be so powerful? We know that in killing, swords are worse than words.

The *brahmāstra* was not an ordinary hymn as sung in churches. It was a subtle science of weaponry. Prabhupāda writes, "It is a different science, and in the days gone by, such science was

cultivated in the land of Bharata-varsa. The subtle science of chanting hymns is also material, but it has yet to be known by the modern material scientists."

In reading this section and the purport, one feels that Śrīla Prabhupāda is saying, "You don't even know this subtle material science." And then he seems to be further explaining, "It is not spiritual but has a direct relationship to the spiritual." He seems to be praising this subtle material science. Śrīla Prabhupāda does not do this often. Usually, whatever the problem is, he recommends the direct spiritual solution. He never advises us to try out higher, advanced material ways of solving problems. How come this rare display of "praising" of subtle science of chanting hymns?

He is demonstrating the advancement of society in the land of Bhārata-varṣa in the ancient days. Not only were they more inclined toward direct devotional service and prayers to Kṛṣṇa, but even their subtle material science was beyond what NASA is able to send up in space or develop as weaponry. It is another example of the superiority of the former culture that he is able to praise it even materially and point out the connection between subtle material and direct spiritual that existed in those days.

In a lecture on this verse in Vṛndāvana, Śrīla Prabhupāda brought out an intelligent question by one of his disciples: "We have seen so many temples. Why are they so neglected?" He answered: "The temples have become the means of livelihood. That is the defect. Temple is not meant for means of livelihood. Then it will deteriorate. How long can you falsely worship Deity and make show or *ārati*? You cannot go on very long time. That is not possible. You'll be disgusted. Unless there is feeling, *bhāva*, that "here is Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa has very kindly come here to receive, to take, accept my humble service. He's so great that He cannot be approached by a person like me." This is the humility in what Prabhupāda calls *bhāva*. It is a symptom of real feeling, the real thing, unlike the fake, paid professional one. It is the "humble" *bhāva*.

Śrīla Prabhupāda states, "But the son of Droṇācārya, who

made use of this subtle science, did not know how to retract." By reading these statements, one is reminded of modern warfare, where the modern scientists fire weapons at each other, neither one knowing how to retract them. At most, if they want to avert a tragedy, they fire another weapon and blow up the earlier weapon. From the explanation offered by Śrīla Prabhupāda, it seems that all bona fide warriors in the days of yore knew how to retract their own weapons, and only because Aśvatthāmā didn't know how to counteract his own weapon in this particular incident was Arjuna asked to counteract it by releasing another one. Thus it was a last resort, out of a kind of helplessness. Even in acts of violence, the Vedic culture was so refined. How can we be refined gentlemen in an age of such degradation? By chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa we are getting purified, but do we make some efforts to refine ourselves on our own? If so, to what extent? What are the subtleties involved here?

We can study the lives of the refined yet heroic figures in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and *Mahābhārata* and other Vedic literatures. We can also associate with the still-refined culture of India. Prabhupāda has said that India's culture is dead now, but even a dead elephant is still valuable for his tusks, hide, etc. In other words, there are still strong remnants of Vedic culture existing in Bhāratavarṣa, the land of Vaiṣṇavism, and if we live there, it will rub off on us. Then we can learn refinements, such as how to "retract our weapons."

VERSE 28

na hy asyānyatamaṁ kiñcid astraṁ pratyavakarśanam
jahy astra-teja unnaddham astra-jño hy astra-tejasā

"O Arjuna, only another brahmāstra can counteract this weapon. Since you are expert in the military science, subdue this weapon's glare with the power of your own weapon."

COMMENT

Here Kṛṣṇa advises His friend how to deal with a frightening situation. He gives purely military advice on how to cleverly first release Arjuna's own *brahmāstra* mantra and then withdraw them both at the same time by retracting his own. In a lecture on this verse, Prabhupāda said: "So do not think that this violence or fighting is bad. No. Nothing is bad when it is utilized for Kṛṣṇa. And nothing is good when it is utilized for your sense gratification. Everything is bad." We may have a hard time thinking that military action of any kind can be good. Even after years of reading *Bhagavad-gītā*, our modern upbringing impedes us from seeing it transcendentally. Should we just shut up and accept it, or can we have our own more peaceful interpretation of what Kṛṣṇa is actually doing (that is, saving lives)w?

A student of *Bhagavad-gītā*, a follower of Kṛṣṇa, has to accept that Kṛṣṇa's urging Arjuna to fight is not bad. Kṛṣṇa has His own transcendental reasons, and they are superior to that of the worldly pacifist.

Apparently Arjuna had the power to counteract Aśvatthāmā's weapon all along, so why did he request permission from the Lord? As a warrior, might he not have acted immediately on the Lord's behalf to counteract the weapon? Or was this pastime specifically Arjuna's opportunity to offer the Lord wonderful prayers?

The Supreme Lord wanted to hear the prayers of Arjuna before He gave him advice as to how to counteract Aśvatthāmā's weapon. So the prayers were part of the pastime. Arjuna might have had the power to counteract Aśvatthāmā's weapon, but he did not know specifically what to do, and Lord Kṛṣṇa had to advise him as to the exact strategy. So both the prayers and the Lord's military advice were necessary and part of the same pastime of Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna cooperating in an urgent time.

It is not difficult to create problems, but we need an expert person to solve them. If we are aware that we do not know how to do something, is it better to do it anyway, thinking that Kṛṣṇa

will arrange, or to avoid it, fearing to create problems we are unable to solve?

In the case of Aśvatthāmā, he did something he should not have done, releasing a weapon he did not know how to retract. Arjuna needed an expert person to solve the dilemma, and so he turned to Kṛṣṇa. That was the superior way. He did not go ahead and try to do something, thinking that somehow or other, his own method would work, or that Kṛṣṇa would step in and help him. He specifically approached the Lord for intelligence in the matter. Yet, as servants of Kṛṣṇa, we may sometimes have to go ahead and act on His behalf, even without knowing the solution in advance. We are not such intimate devotees to expect Kṛṣṇa to directly tell us how to overcome our problems by specific strategies. We are advised to approach the spiritual master or to remember his instructions to give us light on the path. In addition, the Lord appears as a spiritual master within the heart, as the Supersoul, and a transparent devotee can be guided from within. It is certainly better to somehow or other act to solve our problems rather than to remain inert and crippled for want of knowledge of what to do.

The subtle appears to be more powerful than the gross, as is the case with mantra versus yantra. What are some of the cleansing effects of the sincere chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra?

The cleansing effects are mentioned in Lord Caitanya's first verse of *Śikṣāṣṭakam*. He says the chanting of Hare Kṛṣṇa—the *saṅkīrtana* movement—cleanses the heart of all dirty things and enables us to see the true self as it is. It increases the ocean of transcendental bliss, and gives us a taste of the nectar for which we are always anxious.

PERSONAL NOTE:

Reading *A Poor Man Reads the Bhāgavatam*, Volume 1, enjoying all the writing on ordinary topics, the willingness to make lists, admissions, telling of the place I'm writing in ("mice occupy

the bottom half of the room and lizards roam at the top"). Tell of Madhu's starving, my headaches. I want to do that again. I also spoke a lot about the project itself and how I enjoyed it and had a strong desire to continue it for a long time. How does that explain the eight-year period I stopped writing it? I felt it was too strenuous to do the question research. I think I didn't want to write long sections of straight *śāstra*, but wanted to do *all* free-writing. Now I'm willing to be more śāstric again.

But can you give yourself permission
to be playful with the Lord
in His big text?

Can you find your way
to the rhythm (and blues)
in His service?

Is ordinary talk allowed, or
do you think it's taboo
since you've recently been censured?

"I'm harmless," my revelations
are not scary. I do not
threaten anyone. "Why don't they
leave us alone? It's a big movement."

Talk of enjoying the morning
shower, of suffering the back-
bites of brothers, who are like
crickets in the night, keeping me
awake as I imagine them criticizing
all over the world, and finally

taking action against SDG
who has to decide how to
respond. Remember the

saying: "My life has been filled with calamities, most of which didn't happen"? You are like that in your worry-head.

VERSES 29–30

sūta uvāca
śrutvā bhagavatā proktaṁ phālgunaḥ para-vīra-hā
spṛṣṭvāpas taṁ parikramya brāhmaṁ brāhmāstraṁ sandadhe

saṁhatyānyonyam ubhayos tejasī śara-saṁvṛte
āvṛtya rodasī khaṁ ca vavṛdhāte 'rka-vahnivat

"Śrī Sūta Gosvāmī said: Hearing this from the Personality of Godhead, Arjuna touched water for purification, and after circumambulating Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, he cast his brahmāstra weapon to counteract the other one. When the rays of the two brahmāstra s combined, a great circle of fire, like the disc of the sun, covered all outer space and the whole firmament of planets."

COMMENT

None of us is supposed to know how the sun globe is at the time of annihilation, yet this image is used to describe the effulgence of the two *brahmāstras* combined. How can this image help us to understand the scene?

We can just imagine. It is the greatest explosion that ever takes place in the life of the universe. So the *brahmāstras* appear to be as great as that. Something so powerful and destructive is beyond our comprehension. Therefore, the description of the sun planet at the time of annihilation remains a good example of what the *brahmāstras* were like in the sky.

Why is it not possible today to properly chant mantras from the Vedas to counteract imminent dangers?

There was a special technique involved that was known especially to *brāhmaṇas* and *kṣatriyas* in the military field. The science has been lost with the diminishment of Vedic culture in the age of Kali. The most effective mantra available to us in Kali-yuga is the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra. The word *man* means "mind," and *tra* means "to deliver." The Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra is sometimes called the great mantra for deliverance, because it alone can counteract all the bad elements of this unfortunate age. The *mahā-mantra* is not meant for use as a battle weapon, such as a nuclear warhead, but it is for clearing away the demonic mentality that is behind the use of the megaweapons.

Prabhupāda states that the heat of the explosion was like the heat of the sun during the *pralaya*, or the end of the world. The concept that the world ends is a strong idea, but on the other hand, it is commonly used in a far from scientific way by fanatical religious sects. Should Vaiṣṇavas use it at all in their preaching? There is even one religion that had the written prediction that the end of the world would take place in the early twentieth century. When it did not happen, a major branch became revisionists, whereas a hard-core minor group remained "true" to the book and stayed as a schism in minority. A few devotees just love this topic about the end of the world, but to some, it does not create excitement. Can we just avoid it then, when and if asked about it?

There *is* a *pralaya*, or end of the world, as described in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. The world will be destroyed by fire and by flood after a long, long time. But the Vaiṣṇava *ācāryas* have not usually used the fact of annihilation as a "scare tactic" to awaken people to God consciousness. It is enough to awaken to the fact that we will be annihilated at the end of our present body, and all we have will be taken away from us, including our identity. Preaching is usually more positive, emphasizing the joys of the eternal self and the importance of gaining as much Kṛṣṇa consciousness as possible in this one lifetime so that it will continue in the next.

Even when *pralaya* occurs, it is not the end of the world, but a period of mass disruption, after which the living entities are absorbed in the body of Mahaviṣṇu for a long spell and then generated again into a new universe for new life in the cycle of birth and death.

PERSONAL COMMENT

A week left before departure. Don't worry so much that you are being criticized. *Everyone* is the object of criticism nowadays. Appear at festivals when possible, and be open to visits. Make a campaign: "Here I am, I'm doing all right. I'm a member in good standing."

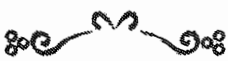
Are you capable of lecturing as you used to do in the old days? Are you good enough? Can you come out of retirement and give 1980s-type sermons? Or is something else required of speakers these days (lots of *ślokas*, memorized sections of books, etc.)?

"You don't have to perform." He said I could just read from my books, take questions.

We are running out of *maṣanas*. Sitting with Ollie in silence for long periods of time, positioned by the open windows to catch the breeze. Jaya-Govinda has gone to Sunday mass with his wife and nine-month-old son. Sometimes the baby causes too much commotion and has to be removed from the church. After I leave, JG and his family will return to Italy. No one will be able to replace him, no one as sweet and considerate. This house, with its two big rooms with arched brick ceiling, has been my home for eleven months. I have been left alone here with complete privacy. My self-willed eviction causes sweet sorrow. Out the window, in one direction it's grassy with trees. In the other direction is the many-roomed hacienda, "ex-Hacienda la Petaca." Soon I'll be living in one room, sharing a house with other fellows.

Dictating my answers to letters, a very important function for me. I'll have to get a new typist. He has to be someone living with me. "Dear so-and-so. Formalities. I received your letter of April 14. Somehow or other it got 'buried' in my incoming mail,

and I only read it today. I'm sorry about this because I really want to correspond with you regularly."



VERSE 31

dṛṣṭvāstra-tejas tu tayos trīl lokān pradahan mahat
dahyamānāḥ prajāḥ sarvāḥ sāṁvartakam amaṁsata

"All the population of the three worlds was scorched by the combined heat of the weapons. Everyone was reminded of the sāṁvartaka fire which takes place at the time of annihilation."

COMMENT

How could the people remember or have experience of the *sāṁvartaka* fire?

They could not remember or experience it, but they had heard about it from authorities. Thus, on seeing the combined heat of the *brahmāstras*, they could declare, "Oh! This is like the fire at the time of annihilation!"

Prabhupāda comments that the three worlds (heaven, hell, and middle earth) were affected by the *brahmāstra's* heat, which was just like the fire of devastation (as stated in Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura's *ṭīkā*, *sāṁvartakaṁ pralayāgnim*). The concept of *tri-loka* (heaven, lower areas, and the earth) is a very common concept to any religion—or as they say, "the universal myth." Is there any visualization for a contemporary man that can make him feel this universal structure, such as looking in the sky at night? How

can we relate in real feelings to things like this, which many will consider to be superstition or myth?

The three worlds are beyond our limited perception. You cannot see them by looking at the sky at night. That does not make them unreal. There are so many things beyond our perception. Even the stars within our one tiny universe cannot be seen through gigantic telescopes. Again, they have to be "seen" by hearing, just as we learn of the existence of Japan even without going there when we hear about it from authorities.

Is it the will of Kṛṣṇa that bad things happen to His devotees?

Pure devotees are usually spared from calamities, but even if they have to suffer, they practice detachment in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Also, the suffering that devotees undergo may be for their ultimate purification.

In the purport to this verse, Śrīla Prabhupāda states, "No planet, therefore, is without living beings, as less intelligent materialistic men think." The *paramahaṁsa* nature of Prabhupāda is displayed here. He takes out a very beautiful point, even though the main discussion is about something else. How do we develop our writing so that we too take the essence out of what is needed to be presented, and present only that which is essential?

In *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Kṛṣṇadasa Kavirāja states that true eloquence is to speak the truth concisely. Verse 31 states that the population of the three worlds felt the heat of the *brahmāstras*, and Prabhupāda briefly elaborates on it with one sentence by stating that all the worlds are populated. He makes a subtle addition to the information in the verse. His addition is a strong challenge to the materialistic scientists, such as the astronomers who claim there is population only on one tiny planet. It is an example of his typically strong "smashing" technique. In one blow (one sentence), he destroys the opposition. Having succinctly made his point, he ends the purport with no further comment.

The movement of Lord Caitanya is far more important than the merging of a couple of *brahmāstras*. Is it felt all over the

universe?

In the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Kṛṣṇadasa Kavirāja states that the chanting of Lord Caitanya in the home of Śrīvāsa Ṭhākura penetrated the whole universe. In the *Caitanya-bhāgavata*, it is stated that the chanting movement of the Lord will spread to every town and village of the world. The demigods rejoice when vigorous *kīrtana* is performed. Therefore, although Lord Caitanya's movement may appear small at present, the devotees should perform *kīrtana* with all their strength, so that the true potential of the movement can be felt throughout the universe. As stated in Lord Caitanya's *Śikṣāṣṭakam*, the *saṅkīrtana* movement is an ever-expanding ocean of bliss that cleanses the minds of all living beings. So the *saṅkīrtana* movement of Lord Caitanya, as conducted by the Lord and His associates, certainly extends throughout the three worlds even today.

"O nectar of the ocean of all Vedic scriptures, O most prominent transcendental fruit of all the Vedas, O You who are enriched with the jewels of all spiritual, philosophical conclusions, O You who grant spiritual vision to all the people of the world, O life-breath of the Vaiṣṇava devotees, O Lord, You are the sun which has risen to dispel the darkness of the Kali-yuga. You are actually Lord Kṛṣṇa, Who has returned among us."

"O *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, I offer respectful obeisances unto You. By reading You, one attains transcendental bliss, for Your syllables rain pure love of God upon the reader. You are always to be served by everyone, for You are an incarnation of Lord Kṛṣṇa."

"O *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, O my only friend, my only companion, O my teacher, O my great wealth, O my deliverer, O my good fortune, O my bliss, I offer respectful obeisances unto you."

"O *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, O giver of saintliness to the unsaintly, O uplifter of the very fallen, please do not ever leave me. Please become manifest upon my heart and my throat, accompanied by pure love of Kṛṣṇa." (From Sanātana Gosvāmī's *Kṛṣṇa-līlā Stava*, translated by Kuśakratha dāsa, verses 412–416.)

PERSONAL COMMENT

O *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, please allow a poor man to stay at Your feet. The morning sky is gray, and there is very little wind. We plan to go to the hot water spa in a couple of hours. Today we attempt two difficult phone calls, one to the Social Security office and one to Medicare, to inform them of our change of address and to find out if we have medical insurance to cover the prostate gland operation. It will be hard to even get someone on the telephone who will be attentive to our situation and take some clear action. We have to make ourselves clear to them.

O *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, I'm asking and answering questions from Your text. Please bless me to do it nicely, with clear depth. At the hot water spa, I do physical therapy exercises and look at the other people bathing there. Today will be my last day.

O *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, let me continue to receive questions and give answers according to Śrīla Prabhupāda. I've done some today, but now I'm fighting back sleep. Nārāyaṇa K. will bring me some homemade cookies. He pushes me through the therapy exercises, extending and contracting my legs and arms. You can do it better when your body is underwater. But it gets too hot in the caves. We rarely talk directly about Kṛṣṇa or scriptures. He asks me, "Do you have anything on your mind?" and "Is anything troubling you?" We discuss issues of the day.

O *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, Your shelter is the best thing in the world. This book is helping me to gradually enter into it. *Bhāgavatam* and chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa. My disciple Janmāṣṭamī wrote me that he chants a quota of twenty rounds a day in the *puṣpa samādhi* at Māyāpura. He said, "I'm getting tremendous reciprocation with

Śrīla Prabhupāda in the *samādhi*." Another disciple who has been too sick to chant for years wrote me that she believes Kṛṣṇa loves her and accepts her even though she's not able to do her spiritual practices.



VERSE 32

prajopadravam ālakṣya loka-vyatikaraṁ ca tam
mataṁ ca vāsudevasya sañjahārārjuno dvayam

"Thus seeing the disturbance of the general populace and the imminent destruction of the planets, Arjuna at once retracted both brahmāstra weapons, as Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇadesired."

COMMENT

In the purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "By His will only can one execute what He desires." In our decision-making process and in our destructive and constructive activities, how can we discriminate what is *māyā's* will from what is Kṛṣṇa's will? Is *māyā* independent of Kṛṣṇa? Isn't everything ultimately a matter of Kṛṣṇa's will?

Māyā tempts us to do destructive activities under her influence, against our best interests. We can discriminate between her activities and Kṛṣṇa's by following the directions of guru and *śāstra*. Kṛṣṇa never dictates something against our best interests, but *māyā* is His external, deluding energy. She has a thankless task, under the will of Kṛṣṇa, to mislead the living entities. As powerful as she is, one can stay free of her clutches by taking shelter of the Lord.

All glories to Arjuna, who is always in a position to carry out the direct will of the Lord! Śrīla Prabhupāda here attacks the mentality of thinking that atomic weapons can destroy the entire creation as "childish imagination." He points out how these armaments are not powerful enough to do this, yet the materialists are obsessed with continued weapons buildup. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "Natural laws work under His supervision," so how is one to understand this buildup as the will of the Lord?

The nuclear buildup is allowed by Kṛṣṇa in His policy of giving the fools and rascals a limited free rein to act as they like. They do so at their risk and at the risk of the lives of millions of "innocent" citizens. God has forbidden it, yet they continue to act in dangerous ways, so what can He do? He has given them all free will as part of their inherited humanity, and that means freedom to do wrong as well as right. Kṛṣṇa is always ready to help, but not if a rebel adamantly denies the Lord's guidance or His very existence.

In his purport, Prabhupāda states, "Similarly, there are many agents of the all-powerful Lord, and by His will only can one execute what He desires." We are all trying to serve the mission in our own ways. Here Śrīla Prabhupāda says, ". . . what He desires." How do we prevent this statement from giving us a fatalistic idea? One might take this statement to mean that one should just sit at home and do nothing; ultimately, whatever Kṛṣṇa desires is going to take place through his agents.

One need not be fatalistic, thinking that everything the Lord desires is being done by His agents. You can yourself become an agent of the Lord. He is willing to empower each living entity to serve in His mission according to one's capacity. Even if one is not as powerful as Arjuna, he can render service that is highly pleasing to Kṛṣṇa.

Everything happens by the will of the Lord. For a devotee, this is easy to understand, but for a nondevotee, it is very hard to put this together with the news broadcast every day. How do we help them understand it?

The catastrophes, wars, and corruption reported in the daily

news can be understood as the will of the Lord by reference to karmic reactions and misused free will. These are ultimately under the will of Kṛṣṇa, but are given as punishment to the disobedient living beings.

Is the suffering of His devotee always due to residual karma? What is token reaction?

After initiation by a bona fide spiritual master, a devotee is free from karma. Whatever suffering he experiences is compared to the pain he might feel if he put his finger in the fan that is slowing down after the plug has been removed. Token reaction refers to a devotee's receiving a small punishment for a great offense. According to karmic calculation, he should be executed by the guillotine, but all he receives is a small nick on the finger. This is the Lord's special treatment of His devotee beyond the cause and effect of karma.

There is a reassurance in the purport that the world can be destroyed by the will of the Lord, not by the whims of tiny politicians. Why then are devotees afraid of nuclear disasters and are starting to build bomb shelters?

They should not have spent their time building bomb shelters. Better to go on chanting and hearing and working to spread the movement of Lord Caitanya. Even if the demons are allowed to scorch large portions of the earth, the bomb shelters would not preserve us, and it is better that we go out chanting the Lord's holy names.

PERSONAL NOTE

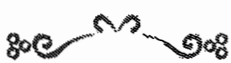
Decided I'm not going to watch videos anymore, once I get to Delaware. Wear my *sannyāsa* clothes every day. Try a change for the better in *japa*. There are opportunities; I approach my sixty-eighth birthday. No meat, fish, or eggs; no smoking or drinking; no illicit sex.

Jaya-Govinda has been packing all morning. Boxes for trucking. I've been packing too, two suitcases for the plane. I insist ordinary concerns have a place within Kṛṣṇa conscious

literature, but I'm still the only one doing it. I tell them, *yukta-vairāgya*, totally convinced. But you have to be very humble, with feelings of your unworthiness (*dainya*) that help you qualify to tell your story. No vainglory: "I packed my suitcases, I'm a great guy." Little man approaching sixty-eight. Approach the doctors and ask for anesthesia. "Be careful as you cut it out." You don't have to tell them, they're pros. It's nothing personal.

Concerns of an ordinary devotee. Travel day: I hope the planes will fly all right. A three-hour layover in Houston. You have to go through immigration and customs with your luggage, I think. No grains cooked by karmīs—start this strictly in Delaware. But maybe a slice of pizza in Houston. Chant as you go; feel Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare, Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare. Feel it starting up in short, sustained bursts. It will have to be silent so as not to disturb fellow travelers. Take a train from one terminal to another. Through the security check, take off your shoes. Sit in the wheelchair, go to the front of the line.

Read in an early volume, "I'm fifty-four years old." That was long ago. *Tempus fugit*. Prabhupāda came to America at seventy years of age. He was with us for eleven years. He remained beautiful, strong, writing his books, managing his ISKCON, raising money for temple construction. Pushing the young men and women to do book distribution, teaching them through lectures and books. "If you want to know me, read my books." They are still following his instructions. But many have gone away. They have been mistreated by his successors, or they have succumbed to *māyā*.



VERSE 33

tata āsādya tarasā dāruṇaṁ gautamī-sutam
babandhāmarṣa-tāmrākṣaḥ paśuṁ raśanayā yathā

"Arjuna, his eyes blazing in anger like two red balls of copper, dexterously arrested the son of Gautamī and bound him with ropes like an animal."

COMMENT

Aśvatthāmā is referred to as "Gautamī-sutam," and he is said to be bound like an animal. Is his lineage mentioned in the same line to bring out the contrast?

Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "Aśvatthāmā was a bona fide son of Droṇācārya and Kṛpī, but because he had degraded himself to a lower status of life, it was proper to treat him as an animal and not as a *brāhmaṇa*."

Sometimes we see devotees who degrade themselves to a lower status of life. How should we relate with them? Generally, it doesn't seem that it is part of our *dharma* to catch them like animals as Arjuna did.

We do not see fallen devotees who are as horrendous as Aśvatthāmā, killing the five sleeping sons of Draupadī and throwing the *brahmāstra* at Arjuna. Nor are we in a position of military strength or a direct dispenser of *dharma* under Kṛṣṇa's direction, as Arjuna was. We should be sympathetic with devotees who have become fallen and offer them friendship. Encourage them to associate once again on friendly terms with devotees. Compassion is the better part of discretion in such cases.

Kṛṣṇa says that for those who have been honored, dishonor is worse than death. How can a devotee deal with humiliation?

In the *Bhagavad-gītā*, Kṛṣṇa says that a devotee is equiposed in honor or dishonor. "Dishonor is worse than death" is particularly applicable to *kṣatriyas* who act as cowards on the battlefield.

Thus, Kṛṣṇa addressed Arjuna in these terms at the beginning of the *Bhagavad-gītā*, when Arjuna refused to fight. But in a later chapter of *Bhagavad-gītā*, Kṛṣṇa teaches Arjuna that a devotee is transcendental to honor and dishonor, being fixed in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. This is transcendental to worldly considerations. Worldly people may give him fame or infamy, but he remains fixed at the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa in devotional service.

We often hear that someone is "not a human being" or that he or she does not deserve to be treated as a human being. This verse indicates that Aśvatthāmā lost his normal human rights because of his actions. Does this mean that in Vedic times there was a concept of human rights? Some say it's a modern invention and that no such thing existed in the Vaiṣṇava tradition.

Human rights are not of modern invention, but they existed in olden times also. But those rights could be taken away by a representative of Kṛṣṇa if a person acted inhumanly. A person could not be a gangster and yet be protected by tricky lawyers and loopholes in the law. Nor was a worldly, imperfect constitution held higher than the direction of God and His codes, as found in the *Manu-saṁhitā*. In Kali-yuga, when there is no Kṛṣṇa conscious king or governmental authority, strict Vedic codes cannot be enacted. Among themselves, the Vaiṣṇavas should deal kindly with each other and recognize a person's rights humanely.

Aśvatthāmā is an enigmatic character. We have heard that he is still living, and that he will become Vyāsadeva in the future. How is it possible that someone who acted in many horrible ways is still living and will become Vyāsa? Did he not receive his karmic reactions?

As we shall see, there was long debate in the military camp as to how Aśvatthāmā was to be treated. Kṛṣṇa argued in favor of his being killed, but Draupadī gave a softhearted point of view that she did not want to cause another mother to suffer as she was suffering. King Yudhiṣṭhira agreed with her. Ultimately, Kṛṣṇa agreed with the king, and Arjuna also, and Aśvatthāmā was spared. He was killed and yet not killed by having his hair cut off in odd places. The next to last verse of the chapter states,

"Cutting the hair from his head, depriving him of his wealth, and driving him from his residence are the prescribed punishments for the relative of a *brāhmaṇa*. There is no injunction for killing the body." (*Bhāg.* 1.7.57) So Aśvatthāmā was sent into exile as his karmic reaction. By Kṛṣṇa's desire, Aśvatthāmā is to eventually purify himself and become eligible to take the position of Vyāsa. That is the Lord's causeless mercy and cannot be questioned.

PERSONAL COMMENT

Today is Aghāri's birthday. He is fifty-four. He presented me with a CD of me singing *bhajanas* with devotees. It was made by his whole team, with computers, artwork, etc. "These songs and Mahārāja chanting *japa* at the end are our effort to make an offering of love in the midst of divisive and judgmental times." Aghāri talks to me about our close four and a half years together. He wants me to keep in touch. He looks for my January-February trip to India. He thinks good things will happen to me, especially in my meeting with Rādhānatha Swami in his Chowpatty territory. And the Puri *parikramā*, with Dhanurdhara Mahārāja, Jayādvaita Mahārāja, and Guṇagrahi Mahārāja, which Aghāri predicts will be very friendly.

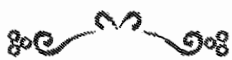
Loud sounds of people packing—boxing with "peanuts" insulation, taping with a screeching tape applicator and talking back and forth—surround me as I try to write. I wrote to Maṇḍaleśvara today, saying I was down to three days left in Mexico before I leave. I look forward to it, I said, but I have anxiety about travel, about new places and people. The operation. . .

A few *mahā-mantras* in the afternoon sound fresh, with surprising good taste. For one who has lost the taste, he'll have to fight to gain it back through effort and discipline with *japa* buddies, on beads which go only halfway, and then he's returning in the other direction on his rosary.

The ice-cream bungalow man driving slowly up the street playing a tune, and children rushing out of their houses clutching dimes and quarters. He stops for sales, opens the door and

reaches into the insulated refrigerator for popsicles, fudgesticks, whatever you want, and he makes change from a silver change-maker attached to his belt. He's a romantic figure to the kids.

And now it's time to return to the military camp, where Arjuna has brought the tied-up Aśvatthāmā for judgment. He is to be punished. I have gone astray on purpose. But digression and off-the-track is not a bad thing if your heart is set on Kṛṣṇa in the end. It's an admittance you are open to all life, including your faults, your inability to remain in constant *samādhi*. Your pleasure in the world, your anxiety. Your gratefulness to Swamiji.



VERSE 34

śibirāya ninīṣantaṁ rajjvā baddhvā ripuṁ balāt
prāhārjunaṁ prakupito bhagavān ambujekṣaṇaḥ

"After binding Aśvatthāmā, Arjuna wanted to take him to the military camp. The Personality of Godhead Śrī Kṛṣṇa, looking on with His lotus eyes, spoke to angry Arjuna."

COMMENT

How can we dovetail anger in devotional service to the Lord?

A devotee can be angry at the demons who blaspheme Kṛṣṇa and angry at their demonic activities. There is no fault in this, but it is a virtue.

It seems Kṛṣṇa sympathizes with Arjuna's emotional status by being in anger, even though His anger is otherworldly. This may be part of Kṛṣṇa's way of reciprocating in the individual

and personal relationship with His pure devotees. But in this context, Prabhupāda considers Arjuna "impure" due to his anger, compared to Kṛṣṇa, who is perfectly pure. We know, however, that Arjuna is a pure devotee. Is Prabhupāda here using Arjuna's situation for his didactic purpose only, or can we also understand that Kṛṣṇa reciprocates in such a personal way as to get "emotionally involved" in His relationship with His devotees who are not pure yet?

Prabhupāda is using Arjuna's situation as an example when he compares him to Kṛṣṇa and calls him a conditioned soul. Arjuna is actually not a conditioned soul. Kṛṣṇa actually approves of Arjuna's anger and asks him to act on it and kill Aśvatthāmā.



VERSE 35

mainaṁ pārthārhasi trātuṁ brahma-bandhum imaṁ jahi
yo 'sāv anāgasaḥ suptān avadhīn niśi bālakān

"Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa said: O Arjuna, you should not show mercy by releasing this relative of a brāhmaṇa [brahma-bandhu], for he has killed innocent boys in their sleep."

COMMENT

Brahminical status is not a birthright; the actual qualifications count. Prabhupāda aimed at creating a society of *brāhmaṇas*. Because he initiated his disciples into the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, they were already acting on the platform of Vaiṣṇavas, and a Vaiṣṇava is above the *brāhmaṇa*. So he initiated his disciples with

brahminical initiation just to prove to the world (especially to the *smārta-brāhmaṇas* of India) that the Vaiṣṇava is automatically a *brāhmaṇa*. But there may be a tendency to think that just by being a member of ISKCON or trying to follow Prabhupāda, one is considered a *brāhmaṇa*—in other words, all ISKCON members are qualified *brāhmaṇas*, or at least many ISKCON devotees pose themselves as such. At the same time, many devotees do not have either brahminical aptitude or ways or standards. This may cause a kind of "schizophrenia" in such individuals, and much confusion in society (both in ISKCON and generally). How can this sociological issue be seen from a perspective of Prabhupāda's teachings?

If Prabhupāda's initiated disciples do not actually take up the brahminical way of life, then they are like *brahma-bandhus* and not real *brāhmaṇas*. With the initiation goes a great responsibility; they have to keep themselves clean, chant sixteen rounds of Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra and hear *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* daily, chant *gāyatrīs*, and follow all the brahminical standards of ISKCON. Otherwise, they are just like *brahma-bandhus*, friends of the *brāhmaṇas* but not actual *brāhmaṇas*.

In the purport to this verse, Śrīla Prabhupāda says, "Therefore, as by birth only one does not become a high court judge, so also one does not become a *brāhmaṇa* simply by birthright but by acquiring the necessary qualifications of a *brāhmaṇa*. As the high court judgeship is a post for the qualified man, so also the post of a *brāhmaṇa* is attainable by qualification only." Once, a devotee asked a question of a senior devotee, and he quoted another senior devotee by saying something similar to what Prabhupāda said. The senior devotee shot back by saying, "A person born in a *brāhmaṇa* family has an advantage. An engineer's son is more likely to become an engineer because talks related to engineering are heard often at his home." The devotee was a little disturbed at that time because what the senior devotee said made sense, but his practical observation did not match the senior devotee's statement. Most of the devotees around him were not born in *brāhmaṇa* families. In fact, *brāhmaṇas* whom he would invite to

programs used to come and attend, but they never got really serious about devotional service. What are the advantages as regards coming to devotional service, if someone takes birth in a *brāhmaṇa* family in today's age? If both are taking to Kṛṣṇa consciousness, will someone taking to Kṛṣṇa consciousness from a *brāhmaṇa* background have an advantage over someone taking to Kṛṣṇa consciousness from a non-*brāhmaṇa* background?

There is no advantage to taking birth in a *brāhmaṇa* family in today's age. First of all, chances are that they are not actually following brahminical standards in their family life. Aside from this, even if they are following, they will tend to be puffed up about their religious life and not willing to bow down to the feet of the Vaiṣṇava guru and Vaiṣṇava devotees. Everyone has an equal opportunity to surrender to Kṛṣṇa and to Lord Caitanya's movement in this age, regardless of whether he is *brāhmaṇa* or non-*brāhmaṇa*. But he must be humble.

In his purport to this verse, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "The post of a *brāhmaṇa* is attainable by qualification only." It is not uncommon for an individual devotee's absorption in the activities of Kṛṣṇa consciousness to wax and wane over the course of his life. For example, as a young man, one's enthusiasm may be such that one can totally absorb oneself in some devotional activity (such as book distribution) without experiencing any extraneous thoughts or distractions. Yet, as time passes, things change; the not-so-young man becomes beset with distractions, and he can no longer remain one-pointedly absorbed in his service. Consciousness is not a static thing; it evolves and develops over the course of one's lifetime. Moreover, the mercy of Lord Caitanya is such that one's consciousness can be radically transformed very quickly. The system of *brāhmaṇa*, *kṣatriya*, *vaiśya*, and *śūdra*, with its fixed sets of qualities and psychological characteristics, seems somewhat rigid and inflexible, given the dynamic evolution of consciousness that some may experience in the course of their lives. Are the *varṇas* to be viewed as definitive psychological types into which all devotees naturally fit? Can such a rigid system of categories accommodate the lived experience of a devotee over

the course of his life as he moves along in the current of Lord Caitanya's mercy?

He may change. The example of book distribution is a good one. That service demands utmost surrender and daring. It also demands physical stamina to go out every day fulltime and approach the nondevotees one-to-one. While some may keep it up their whole lives, there is a tendency for a book distributor to retire and take up more brahminical work. Also, a renounced *brahmacārī* may lose his determination with the passage of time and change of consciousness, and desire to enter the *gṛhastha āśrama*. Sometimes one gets attracted to the holy *dhamas* of India, such as Māyāpura and Vṛndāvana, and desires to spend his life there. So as consciousness is fluid and changeable over the course of a lifetime, one may change one's *varṇa* and *āśrama*. But one should not be changing constantly by whims. Once fixed in a particular work and attitude, one should carry it out seriously and strictly as long as possible.

In *Living With the Scriptures*, I wrote as follows: "Our real concern should be never to disgrace our spiritual master by falling from the standard of *brāhmaṇa* as defined in the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. All concession has been made and all risk taken by Śrīla Prabhupāda to bring us to the brahminical standard. If we fall, then it is the worst ungratefulness. In attending to brahminical details, the Western devotees—at least those of the present generation—may be open to committing certain discrepancies. But as long as we do not neglect the main activity of regularly chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa, strictly avoiding the four sinful activities, and fully engaging our energies in authorized preaching work, then the criticisms are mistaken. . ." But is there a limit to the discrepancies we may commit and still be considered acceptable in the eyes of guru and Kṛṣṇa?

The discrepancies I refer to are the inability of devotees to follow all the brahminical rituals and niceties. Some of them are not even recommended for Vaiṣṇavas, whose only concern is to please Kṛṣṇa and not the sociological standard of caste *brāhmaṇas*. However, devotees should be very careful about their

cleanliness in bodily habits and in clothing. They should also practice cleanliness of the mind as a brahminical requirement. All this goes hand in hand with chanting the holy names and following the regulative principles.



VERSE 36

mattaṁ pramattam unmattaṁ suptaṁ bālaṁ striyaṁ jaḍam
prapannaṁ virathaṁ bhītaṁ na ripuṁ hanti dharma-vit

"A person who knows the principles of religion does not kill an enemy who is careless, intoxicated, insane, asleep, afraid or devoid of his chariot. Nor does he kill a boy, a woman, a foolish creature or a surrendered soul."

COMMENT

Prabhupāda concludes his short explanation of the principles of religious war by saying, "Violence carried out on religious principles is far superior to so-called nonviolence." This is such a sensitive issue nowadays. How can we advocate the point Prabhupāda is making in his statement?

My tendency is to say that Prabhupāda is here referring to the days of yore, when powerful *kṣatriya* Vaiṣṇavas fought with armies on battlefields. Certainly Prabhupāda never advocated violence to his disciples. He knew that if his members committed violence against demoniac institutions such as slaughterhouses, hamburger joints, abortion clinics, liquor houses and brothels, we would be considered fanatical cult members, and the result would be adverse propaganda for Lord Caitanya's movement.

He preferred that we follow the example of Lord Caitanya and fight with cultural weapons—distribution of books, setting an example by living like "perfect gentlemen and ladies." In our preaching, we speak boldly against the slaughterhouse and hope that people will come to an awakening by hearing higher knowledge, such as the knowledge of the karmic reaction to ghastly acts.

The criteria to distinguish religious war from mundane war is that religious war is directly ordered by Kṛṣṇa. This was the case on the battlefield of Kurukṣetra, when, for various reasons, Lord Kṛṣṇa provoked Arjuna to fight, even when Arjuna was reluctant. Wars of politicians and so-called religionists (extremists) do not qualify as religious wars. Religious sects that carry on "jihad" in the name of God, blowing up innocent citizens with suicide bombs, hardly qualify as truly working under God. They have become the anathema of modern civilization, and no sane person looks on them favorably. The current members of the Vaiṣṇava tradition lack numbers, strength, and the terrorist attitude to conduct war on the forces of evil. Their duty is to fight by peacefully pushing on the *saṅkīrtana* movement of Lord Caitanya, which "kills" demons by saving the person and killing his demoniac spirit. Prabhupāda seemed to support that war was for a different age when he states, "Formerly, war was never declared by the whims of selfish political leaders; it was carried out on religious principles, free from all vices."

The slaughterhouse spreads its karmic reaction in a wide, poisonous net. The killing of cows does not take place as an isolated act in which no one is affected. First of all, the animals are killed in the most cruel ways, and then their flesh is cut up and packaged for selling. Whoever eats it gets ensnared in the karma—all those billions of people who entered McDonald's and other hamburger and meat-eating places. Śrīla Prabhupāda, during the Vietnam War, even said there was a direct relationship between President Johnson's slaughter of cows and the dying of young men on the battlefields. So it is no exaggeration to say the slaughterhouse causes material affliction to society, country, and

the people in general.

The intricacies of morality are sometimes very difficult to decipher, especially if one is not very deft and thoroughly learned in all the *śāstras*. In the midst of being confronted with various dilemmas and controversies in daily life that leave us undecided, not knowing what is right or wrong, what should we do?

In the *Bhagavad-gītā*, in the purport to verse 18.78, Śrīla Prabhupāda gives instructions on the supreme morality: "There are many less intelligent persons who take *Bhagavad-gītā* to be a discussion of topics between two friends on a battlefield. But such a book cannot be scripture. Some may protest that Kṛṣṇa incited Arjuna to fight, which is immoral, but the reality of the situation is clearly stated: *Bhagavad-gītā* is the supreme instruction in morality. The supreme instruction of morality is stated in the Ninth Chapter, in the thirty-fourth verse:

man-manā bhava mad-bhakto
mad-yājī māṁ namaskuru
mām evaiṣyasi yuktvaivam
ātmānaṁ mat-parāyaṇaḥ

"One must become a devotee of Kṛṣṇa, and the essence of all religion is to surrender unto Kṛṣṇa (*sarva-dharmān parityajya mām ekaṁ śaraṇaṁ vraja*). The instructions of *Bhagavad-gītā* constitute the supreme process of religion and of morality. All other processes may be purifying and may lead to this process, but the last instruction of the *Gītā* is the last word in all morality and religion: surrender unto Kṛṣṇa. This is the verdict of the Eighteenth Chapter."

PERSONAL COMMENT

Reading a book I wrote twelve years ago in Collinacopague, Ireland, *The Story of Retreat*. About living in a cold house and reading and writing out loud. Reclusive. And not in the śāstric format, like *A Poor Man*, but all talking from myself. I liked it.

People could read it. I have written so many books like that, telling of the locale and the daily rounds. Piling up retreats or written on the run at busy times. My own voice. Talking to the self and Kṛṣṇa.

Don't let writer's block occur. Just go on talking. In that book, I told of preparing a seminar on *Bhagavad-gītā* verses. Asked the students to write their responses to scenarios I describe from verses in which Kṛṣṇa is speaking directly to them. This proves I can be writing (my vocation) and still give lectures. Don't say you've lost the ability. They come out simple, but they can be like Prabhupāda's (although without quoting Sanskrit *ślokas*). And even Sanskrit *śloka* memorization could be built up again.

Someone once said writing about yourself is false ego and not Kṛṣṇa consciousness. A Vaiṣṇava writes about Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna. He is merely a mouthpiece to praise and instruct what *they* have said. He's a mouthpiece, as on a horn, not a person. If he has any doubts about his own Kṛṣṇa consciousness, he should not mention it or not speak at all as Kṛṣṇa's representative. To speak, he has to be one hundred percent perfect. Any dwelling on imperfections is *prajalpa*.

I don't believe that. I think he should speak as a whole person. That's honest. Done rightly, without self-indulgence, it's a relief to the hearers: "A *person* is talking to us, and he admits his humanity."

You should be a transparent medium, without arrogant self-praise or unnecessary dwelling on your inadequacies. But you can't be an incorporal, invisible preacher. We want to see a vigorous, jolly guru. And yes, a preacher who's not afraid he'll lose his profile by making some self-deprecating humor along the way. Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura and Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura set the example in their songs of very personal confessions of unworthiness and *they actually felt that way*. So do not tell us Vaiṣṇavas don't speak of themselves in their presentations of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. They do so expertly and with good results.

VERSE 37

sva-prāṇān yaḥ para-prāṇaiḥ prapuṣṇāty aghṛṇaḥ khalaḥ
tad-vadhas tasya hi śreyo yad-doṣād yāty adhaḥ pumān

"A cruel and wretched person who maintains his existence at the cost of others' lives deserves to be killed for his own well-being, otherwise he will go down by his own actions."

COMMENT

Śrīla Prabhupāda seems to be supporting capital punishment. To what extent is this applicable in the modern social context, where there is so much corruption, even in the governments and police departments? Would it not be misused?

Capital punishment can hardly be supported by Vaiṣṇavas nowadays, since the government and justice systems are so imperfect and corrupt. It was possible and supportable when a Vedic government was intact. Justice could be dispensed according to *śāstra* and moral codes. Today's police and legal systems often kill persons who are later proven to be innocent of the crimes.

In his purport, there is a stern warning against killing—including animals. We can see how, in order to apply this in our personal lives, we had better live with Vaiṣṇava devotees only. What happens when we cannot live with Vaiṣṇava devotees only and thus become somehow involved with participating in violence for our own well-being? How can we influence our unfavorable environment with the Vaiṣṇava worldview when we seem to have such little influence?

Living in a society of devotees is always advised for staying clear of sinful implications. Just by regularly associating with nondevotees, one will gradually pick up their bad habits. Aside from protecting oneself, the devotees preach to try to save the

fallen souls. We do not mind that we appear to be without influence, but we preach to please Kṛṣṇa. If He is pleased with our efforts, then we are successful.

This verse states that a person who kills others deserves to be killed for his own well-being. It seems to open the floodgates to revenge killing, feuding, and vendetta. For example, one might say, "You killed my relative, and therefore you deserve to die," whereas another might say, "That relative of yours whom I killed did himself kill my relative, and so my killing your relative was for his own ultimate well-being." Are there any special qualifications that one must possess before one carries out that execution of a killer? In a God conscious society, can any citizen carry out the execution of a killer, or should such executions be restricted to the apparatus of the state?

It is not that any citizen can carry out revenge in a Vedic society and kill those he thinks deserve to be killed. The complaint has to be judged by the king, and so private citizens place their grievances before him for ultimate judgment.

Lord Caitanya gives us an easy process, but we are so forgetful. We have so much difficulty acknowledging our own part in sinful activity. We put up so much resistance to the idea that sin even exists, what to speak that *I* commit sin and must be punished.

A person who has approached a spiritual master and received initiation learns about the laws of karma and is convinced of the existence of wrong acts and their reactions. He also learns of his own karmic involvement in sin. In the Ajāmila section of the Sixth Canto, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes in a purport that one who becomes a devotee should always remember the difference between what he was and what he is now since receiving the holy names. He should make a firm resolve never to commit sin again and adhere to it.

Doubting Thomas: "If your God is a merciful God, wouldn't He just forgive me, let bygones be bygones, since I sinned in ignorance of His laws? It's more convenient for me to accept a merciful God than a punishing one. . ."

Even when done in ignorance, whoever takes part in the

killing of animals is subject to punishment by the laws of nature. In the purport, Prabhupāda writes, "He who gives permission, he who kills the animal, he who sells the slaughtered animal, he who cooks the animal, he who administers distribution of the foodstuff, and, at last, he who eats such cooked animal food are all murderers, and all of them are liable to be punished by the laws of nature." Ignorance is no excuse.

Doubting Thomas: "Yes, but I did not do the killing, I'm just doing the eating. It's not fair that I should be held as responsible in the eyes of God... anyway, I have accepted His Son as my personal savior; he will forgive me for sure, no matter what I do... and besides, God put the animals here for our use, so what can be the harm in killing?"

God did not put the animals here for our use. The animals are living beings in lower species of life due to their past karma, but they have as much right to live as the human beings. A living being in the body of a cow who is slaughtered has his karmic evolution disturbed. She was meant to live a long life, but cruel humans have cut her off in her prime of youth. Appealing to Jesus Christ will not help one. He taught the Ten Commandments, one of which is, "Thou shalt not kill," and this applies to animals as well as humans.

Doubting Thomas: "I cannot be at fault because I am innocent (I didn't know). And neither are the slaughterhouses—the Bible says we can eat meat, and anyway, the slaughterhouse is simply man's innovation to allow many to enjoy meat. I think maybe you vegans are jealous because vegetarianism has not caught on like McDonald's has around the world. Anyway, everyone knows the animal has no soul, so what is the crime?"

The animal shows all symptoms of having a soul, just as a human has. The symptom of the soul is consciousness. If you prick or scare an animal, he feels pain. They have consciousness, but it is of a lower order. If a man has two sons and one of them is very intelligent but one is retarded, does it mean that the man will allow his retarded son to be killed?

The Vedic statement that one living entity lives at the expense

of another applies to animals, not humans. The food prescribed for human beings is vegetarian—vegetables, fruit, grains, milk. Even his teeth are made for eating vegetables; he does not have the teeth of a carnivore. If one argues that the vegetarian is also eating living beings because vegetables are life, the Kṛṣṇa conscious reply is that such food is allotted to the human beings for their survival. Besides, a devotee is not merely a vegetarian. He eats vegetables because Kṛṣṇa asks that the food be offered to Him. In *Bhagavad-gītā*, He states, "If one offers Me with love and devotion a leaf, a flower, fruit or water, I will accept it." (*Bg.* 9.26)

PERSONAL COMMENT

I'm residing in Rehoboth Beach, Delaware, in Śāstra's house in the suburbs. Observed Janmāṣṭamī and Prabhupāda's Vyāsa-pūjā with big feasts in the company of Vaiṣṇavas. Now we are settling into a routine. In Mexico, they told us I needed to get an operation for an enlarged prostate gland ASAP, but now that we are in the USA, we learned I have to get insurance first, and so can't even see a doctor until next month. At least that means I'll be able to attend the Philadelphia Ratha-yātrā on September 22.

In his lecture given on Prabhupāda's Vyāsa-pūjā, Dhanurdhara Swami compared Śrīla Prabhupāda to Lord Caitanya's servant Govinda, to Haridāsa Ṭhākura, and to Rūpa Gosvāmī. He said Śrīla Prabhupāda was empowered by his spiritual master, Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī, for surrendering completely to his order. He was like Govinda, who never acted for his own sense gratification but acted boldly to please his master. As Haridāsa Ṭhākura was devoted to the holy name, Śrīla Prabhupāda was dedicated to carrying the holy names wherever he went, chanting and teaching the process of chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa. And as Rūpa Gosvāmī was a great transcendental author of many Vaiṣṇava books, so was Śrīla Prabhupāda. I didn't hear the lecture (it was passed my bedtime), but Śāstra told me about it as we walked

along the boardwalk on Rehoboth Beach. They say the boardwalk will soon be empty, and it will be a good place to walk and sit without distraction; a good place to chant *japa* while watching the sunrise.

DREAM DIALOGUE:

"You need proof."
"I've been chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa for forty years. That's proof enough."

PREACHER

I feel guilty because
I'm not a preacher;
so I tell myself, although
this is a śāstric preaching book.
I've even written a book
called *Visitors* in which I
tell of ambivalent feelings
about meeting people to tell
them about Kṛṣṇa.

The introverted advantage.
There's a place for it.
You have to
be who you are

and use your nature
to please the Lord, but
you can't do just what
you want.

VERSE 38

pratiśrutaṁ ca bhavatā pāñcālyai śṛṇvato mama
āhariṣye śiras tasya yas te mānini putra-hā

"Furthermore, I have personally heard you promise Draupadī that you would bring forth the head of the killer of her sons."

COMMENT

In Oscar Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the character Lord Henry Wotton states that resolutions "are simply checks that men draw on a bank where they have no account." If one is not the doer of one's activities, in what sense can one be said to be the maker (or breaker) of one's vows?

Although *Bhagavad-gītā* states that the material nature is the doer, the living entity is still responsible for his acts. By indicating his proclivity (his free will), the *jīva* invites *māyā* to engage him in acts of goodness, passion, and ignorance. He *does* have a "bank account" with the world and can deposit or withdraw from it. He can effectively make or break vows, with consequences.

VERSE 39

tad asau vadhyatāṁ pāpa ātatāyy ātma-bandhu-hā
bhartuś ca vipriyaṁ vīra kṛtavān kula-pāṁsanaḥ

"This man is an assassin and murderer of your own family members. Not only that, but he has also dissatisfied his master. He is but the burnt remnants of his family. Kill him immediately."

COMMENT

In the translation of this verse, the Lord seems to incite Arjuna to give Aśvatthāmā a good lesson, even though Arjuna doesn't seem to be too much interested in it. The Lord even reminds Arjuna of His promise to Draupadī. It is really amazing to read about the equanimity of the Lord in verse 34, and to hear Him inciting Arjuna now. In the purport to verse 34, Śrīla Prabhupāda describes the Lord's anger as transcendental: "Therefore, even if He is angry, the object of anger is blessed. He is unchanged in all circumstances."

Kṛṣṇa's reminding Arjuna of his duty toward Aśvatthāmā is not in contradiction to His mood as stated in verse 34. The Lord is always in control of His mind and senses beyond the influence of *māyā*. He is upholding religious principles by His asking His devotee to kill the aggressor, and there is nothing wrong in that.

Duryodhana was evil-minded. Why then was he displeased with Aśvatthāmā's action?

Killing five sleeping babies was a heinous act, disapproved of even by Duryodhana, who preferred to act according to right *kṣatriya* codes. Duryodhana avoided infanticide and was at least a better man than Aśvatthāmā in his standard of conduct.

In the purport to this verse, Śrīla Prabhupāda says, "Aśvatthāmā, the son of Droṇācārya, committed murder by killing the five sleeping sons of Draupadī, by which he dissatisfied his master Duryodhana, who never approved of the heinous act of killing the five sleeping sons of the Pāṇḍavas." Even villains of bygone ages like Duryodhana had some understanding of what is right and what is wrong. Today's so-called heroes are the ones who support even more heinous activities than the one mentioned above, like cow slaughter. What does this imply for devotees practicing devotional service in today's age? Or is it simply a sign of the degradation of people today?

So-called respectable ladies and gentlemen of today regard the arguments against cow slaughter as outrageously illogical and sentimental. They think that the animals are soulless objects

and that we are free to do anything we like to them without any consequences. Of course, they are the ones with outrageous logic, poor intelligence, and mean sentiments. As mentioned throughout the *Bhāgavatam* and Prabhupāda's preaching, the slaughterhouse is an abomination and a cause of nefarious evils in society. Therefore, in former ages, in which there was no slaughterhouse and in which men like Duryodhana did not eat cows, society was more advanced than today's society (which is praised by its advocates as more advanced and progressive).

Śrīla Prabhupāda quotes from the *dharma śāstras* to emphasize that a criminal should be punished. Sometimes we hear that compassion is a higher principle than justice. What criteria can we follow in deciding when to apply justice and when to apply compassion in dealing with a culprit?

It is sometimes an act of compassion for the state to kill a culprit because then, in his next life, he will not have to come back and suffer the reaction for his murders. Kings and *brāhmaṇas* had to weigh the case of a particular culprit according to time, place and circumstances before deciding whether to treat him leniently or give him the full punishment according to the law.

How should we think, feel, and react when we have been exposed for our weakness or some stupid thing we did, and what are some of the steps we can take to rectify?

When we are exposed, we should not resent it but become humble. Neither should we lament in a vague way, but we should take practical steps to rectify the situation. Our spiritual master does not want to see us simply cry tears and sit in front of him; he wants to see us take practical action. So when our foolishness is exposed, we should not indulge in histrionics but pray for cool thinking and discrimination—and act on it.



VERSE 40

sūta uvāca
evaṁ parīkṣatā dharmaṁ pārthaḥ kṛṣṇena coditaḥ
naicchad dhantuṁ guru-sutaṁ yadyapy ātma-hanaṁ mahān

"Sūta Gosvāmī said: Although Kṛṣṇa, who was examining Arjuna in religion, encouraged Arjuna to kill the son of Droṇācārya, Arjuna, a great soul, did not like the idea of killing him, although Aśvatthāmā was a heinous murderer of Arjuna's family members."

COMMENT

When the *jīva* is of a different opinion than the Lord, isn't that *māyā*?

Sometimes a devotee takes a different view in order to serve the Lord. Arjuna will eternally be spoken of in unflattering terms by persons who are vastly inferior to him simply because he took the position of a conditioned soul so that his Lord's desire to speak *Bhagavad-gītā* could be fulfilled. The gopīs also disagree with Kṛṣṇa, but this disagreement is based on the highest level of oneness with the Lord's desires.

Since the Lord is in everyone's heart (everyone in the passage from *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, everyone in ISKCON, everyone on both sides of the issues that often appear to divide ISKCON) and since the Lord gives intelligence to everyone who is "always engaged in worshiping Him with love," then what does that tell us about disagreements among devotees?

Disagreements among sincere, pure devotees are not serious altercations. If disagreements lead to schisms, it means the devotees are not sincere in following their spiritual master, who has asked them to work together if they love him. Although devotees may be dictated to in different ways by the Supersoul, they have to come to compromise, without strongheaded

insistence on their own individual ways.

Here in is Kṛṣṇa playing "guess what I'm thinking"? Is He saying that there is only one way to handle this, and if you don't agree, you're wrong and in *māyā*? Or is he modeling for us the ideal behavior of a guru/teacher/ruler/leader?

Kṛṣṇa's not saying there's only one way. Although He tells Arjuna to kill Aśvatthāmā, Kṛṣṇa ultimately agrees with Draupadī's differing opinion. He is testing the devotees in different ways, "just to magnify the sense of duty... All pure devotees come out successful in the respective tests by the Lord" (purport to verse 40).

As for the varied opinions of devotees of what is right (what is Kṛṣṇa conscious), are all those opinions more or less given to each devotee by the Lord within the heart as He reciprocates with each devotee in kind? And if so, should we see arguments and discussions as battles to determine whose heart is purest and is thus getting the "clearest reception," or should we see them as opportunities for reaching a more reconciled accord? And if it is the latter, then could we assume that the act of many devotees agreeing is often more pleasing to the Lord than an isolated instance of one devotee being more right than everyone else?

Śrīla Prabhupāda created a Governing Body Commission to manage his ISKCON. He once remarked that "this is the age of democracy," and so he preferred a rule by the votes of a selected majority for running his society. Aside from the GBC majority, there is the sometimes even more influential force of the larger number of devotees, the "grass roots" of ISKCON, who form opinions over the years on the most important matters. Even official resolutions cannot overcome the popular opinion of the masses.

Can the "my way or the highway" attitude sometimes indicate leanings toward impersonalism and an intolerance of individual variety within the oneness of the absolute? And can the tendency to argue authoritatively be a mix of knowing some *siddhānta* but having some leanings toward the neophyte platform of quarreling and claiming to be right?

Too much passionate quarreling among devotees is always a sign of neophyte-ism. Devotees should be mature in their behavior and judgments and come to compromise quickly for the pleasure for their spiritual master. And they should be tolerant toward the individuality of devotees within the vast movement and not squelch out the members' unique expressions.

Kṛṣṇa tests Arjuna, His pure devotee, by instructing him to kill. But Arjuna's sense of duty and sensitiveness are strong enough to pass the test. Usually tests are difficult, or we are unable to even perceive them as such, and our faith may dwindle. What are some suggestions as to how to identify, face, and deal with adversarial situations or tests on our *bhakti* path?

Any obstacle is a test from Kṛṣṇa, so it's easy to recognize them as such. We best protect ourselves from difficulties on the *bhakti-mārga* by taking shelter of the regulative principles—no illicit sex, no meat eating, no intoxication, and no gambling. Pray to Kṛṣṇa for clear discrimination between right and wrong. Pray to Him for strength to act rightly.

Śrīla Prabhupāda writes that the Lord tests His pure devotees in order to magnify the sense of duty. What does this mean?

The Lord wants to glorify His devotees. When He tests them and they succeed, then the world sees the greatness of Kṛṣṇa's devotees. This is His desire. As Lord Kṛṣṇa states in *Bhagavad-gītā*, "Declare it boldly: My devotee is never vanquished."

In the purport to this verse, Śrīla Prabhupāda says, "Lord Kṛṣṇa encouraged Arjuna outwardly just to test Arjuna's sense of duty. It is not that Arjuna was incomplete in the sense of his duty, nor was Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa unaware of Arjuna's sense of duty." It is interesting because Yudhiṣṭhira also in a way refused to carry out the orders of Lord Kṛṣṇa (when Kṛṣṇa asked him to inform Droṇācārya about the death of Aśvatthāmā), and he is derided for this—his chariot, which had never touched the ground, then did so on account of this lapse on his part. Kṛṣṇa really meant that Yudhiṣṭhira should do so, whereas here it is mentioned that He is just testing Arjuna. How do we understand when the Lord is testing us and when He is not?

He is always testing us, but we have to discern what He actually wants us to do. In the case of asking Yudhiṣṭhira to tell a lie, the Lord was dead serious—He wanted Yudhiṣṭhira to do it despite his reputation as a man who never lies. The Lord wanted him to give up that worldly distinction for a higher purpose, the Lord's desire. When Yudhiṣṭhira failed to comply, he was degraded. In the case of Arjuna, the Lord asked him to kill Aśvatthāmā, and Arjuna disagreed. But Kṛṣṇa was not displeased. He tested Arjuna's intelligence and was pleased by how Arjuna acted—by not killing Aśvatthāmā, yet punishing him in a way that was satisfying to all. A pure devotee "reads" Kṛṣṇa's mind and knows what He truly wants him to do.

The Lord here gives Arjuna *carte blanche* to kill the son of Droṇācārya, a perfect action according to the principles of religion. Might Arjuna's hesitation imply that he knows Kṛṣṇa's innermost desire, or is he waiting for the Lord's inspiration?

Arjuna's hesitation and deliberate decision not to kill Aśvatthāmā indicates his knowledge of the Lord's inner desire. Had he been convinced that Lord Kṛṣṇa was unequivocally ordering him to kill Aśvatthāmā, he would have at once obeyed. But he sensed there was another way to carry out the Lord's (and his own) desire to punish Aśvatthāmā without actually killing him.

Is Arjuna meant to be an example to so-called "religious warriors," who go to war sure in an understanding of their scriptures?

Arjuna can be cited as an example to the modern-age jihadists, or Islamic extremists, who go to war too certain that it is under the sanction of holy scripture.

PERSONAL COMMENT

I read Thomas Merton's *Day of the Stranger* about life in the hermitage. I could do something like that. At 5:00 A.M., four of us gather at the open window and begin *japa*. At this time of year, it's totally dark on this suburban block, with only a few

front-door houselights to break up the darkness. The weather is comfortable for T-shirts or *kurtas*. It's better to chant with a few buddies than all alone, which tends to produce daydreaming. The sound of others chanting keeps you in check. Still, after an hour I get sleepy. Break the drowse with some conversation. Then back to work. We're each drinking water. Everyone's got their own Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare, but there's no conflict—it's harmonious.

About 6:00, the first light appears, and you can distinguish the upper outline and treetops from the lower ground. Then I start concentrating on the horizon at the spot I know where the sun will first appear. Around 6:30, the tip of the orange sun ball peaks up from the land. Quickly, it rises in the sky until it's a whole orange ball, and then it diffuses into sunshine and the day begins. We'll watch the sunrise every day.

Just heard the present tenant of my townhouse is going to move out by the end of this month. That means I'll be able to move in by November at the latest.

At 7:00 A.M. the men go downstairs to prepare breakfast. I take a half-hour nap. We recently had granola and fruit for breakfast. While I honor the *prasādam*, Nitai-Gaurāṅga reads to me. Then all of us get together for *kīrtana* and reading and discussion, from 8:00 to 9:00 A.M. Then I work on this book. We've walked three days in a row on the Rehoboth Beach boardwalk, starting at 11:00 A.M. Is this something we'll do every day?



VERSE 41

athopetya sva-śibiraṁ govinda-priya-sārathiḥ
nyavedayat taṁ priyāyai śocantyā ātma-jān hatān

"After reaching his own camp, Arjuna, along with his dear friend and charioteer [Śrī Kṛṣṇa], entrusted the murderer unto his dear wife, who was lamenting for her murdered sons."

COMMENT

Śrīla Prabhupāda writes that everyone has a relation with Kṛṣṇa in one of the five primary *rasas*. For most of us, people living in the middle of a materialistic world, it seems too distant to pursue or envision our eternal *rasa* with Kṛṣṇa. Still, Śrīla Prabhupāda is talking about it. How should we apply in our lives purports like this one?

Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "Everyone can thus enjoy the company of the Lord in the spiritual realm if he at all desires and sincerely tries for it by the process of *bhakti-yoga*." Prabhupāda doesn't indicate that it will be very easy, but that by working in *vaidhī-bhakti*, we will eventually come to the stage—perhaps at the end of our life—when we will attain full love of God and know our *rasa* with Kṛṣṇa. If one can transfer to *kṛṣṇa-loka* at the end of this lifetime, he or she has perfected the human form of life. This can be done under the guidance of the perfect spiritual master. But so much depends upon the disciple to know and serve in his eternal *rasa* with Kṛṣṇa. When the devotee is fit to know these things, then they are revealed by Kṛṣṇa.

Kṛṣṇa is not known all over the world because of insufficient spreading of the teachings of *Bhagavad-gītā*. Actually, this deficiency is being remedied by the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement. Kṛṣṇa's book, *Bhagavad-gītā, is* world famous and appreciated by scholars and true spiritualists as the book of

transcendental knowledge par excellence. As stated in *Bhagavad-gītā*, Kṛṣṇa is known directly only through *bhakti-yoga*. He responds to love and devotional service. He is not accessible by the paths of meditation and speculation.



VERSE 42-43

tathāhṛtaṁ paśuvat pāśa-baddham avāṅ-mukhaṁ karma-jugupsitena
nirīkṣya kṛṣṇāpakṛtaṁ guroḥ sutaṁ vāma-svabhāvā kṛpayā nanāma ca

uvāca cāsahanty asya bandhanānayanaṁ satī
mucyatāṁ mucyatām eṣa brāhmaṇo nitarāṁ guruḥ

"Śrī Sūta Gosvāmī said: Draupadī then saw Aśvatthāmā, who was bound with ropes like an animal and silent for having enacted the most inglorious murder. Due to her female nature, and due to her being naturally good and well-behaved, she showed him due respects as a brāhmaṇa."

"She could not tolerate Aśvatthāmā's being bound by ropes, and being a devoted lady, she said: 'Release him, for he is a brāhmaṇa, our spiritual master.'"

COMMENT

Draupadī's point of view is described as being less than the men's. But then Śrīla Prabhupāda praises her view as that of a pure devotee. "But in spite of all this, Draupadī desired that Aśvatthāmā be at once released, and it was all the same a good sentiment for her. This means that a devotee of the Lord can

tolerate all sorts of tribulation personally, but still such devotees are never unkind to others, even to the enemy. These are the characteristics of one who is a pure devotee of the Lord" (verse 43 purport). We want to favor her point of view. This section of the *Bhāgavatam* seems to center on mercy and forgiveness and on the heart of the pure devotee. This is juxtaposed with the themes of *dharma*, duty, and justice. Our tendency may be to side with the "less discriminatory" view of Śrīmatī Draupadī. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes in his introduction to *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* that understanding the *Bhāgavatam* is easier through the causeless mercy of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. Kṛṣṇa, as the father of religion and as a *kṣatriya*, is saying to Arjuna, "Kill him immediately." Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu agreed not to kill Jagai and Madhai, and they became pure devotees of the Lord. It seems there is a difference in emphasis from Dvāpara-yuga to Kali-yuga. The mercy given by Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu—and not the Vedic *dharma* that decrees "kill the offender"—seems to be the precedent for the present age. Of course, there is no difference between the two in one sense. Still, one would rather offer too much forgiveness (especially within ISKCON, which is the closest thing we can find to Vedic *dharma* on this planet) then to offer too much condemnation. Resolve the apparent contradiction. Is her point of view sentimental? Is the men's view (including Kṛṣṇa's) too judgmental?

She dares to speak her mind, even contrary to Kṛṣṇa's expressed view that Aśvatthāmā should be immediately killed. In the end, her viewpoint prevails. King Yudhiṣṭhira is convinced by it, and then everyone, including Kṛṣṇa, agrees that Aśvatthāmā's life should be spared. Everyone but Bhīma agrees to it, and Arjuna finds a way to punish Aśvatthāmā without killing him.

Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote several letters on his expectations for these high standards to be reached in order for the disciple to be given the sacred thread. Here are a few samples of such letters he wrote:

"I have already cautioned you that the second initiation should be given out only when you are certain that the devotee

is really following all our principles, so now instruct her further on the seriousness of following the regulative principles of Kṛṣṇa consciousness." (Letter to Bhakti, March 23, 1974)

"I have also accepted Bhojadeva dāsa and Ṛṣikesa dāsa for second initiation, trusting that you have carefully examined their devotional behavior for the past year and that they have not deviated from the regulative principles. It is not that automatically we have to award a devotee second initiation after he has been with us for a certain time, but the qualifications have to be there." (Letter to Ṛṣabhadeva, June 9, 1974)

"I appreciate that you say you have very carefully considered the names, and the candidates have had several interviews and written statements before you would consider them, both for first and second initiation. I am especially concerned that the second initiation not be taken cheaply, and devotees who do not even rise early be recommended for *brāhmaṇa*." (Letter to Jayatīrtha dāsa, June 18, 1974)

Prabhupāda's letters should be read and discussed at *iṣṭha-goṣṭhīs* in order to help us remember the high standard he required for brahminical initiation. Temple managers should not indulge in the practice of recommending devotees for initiation simply in order to increase the number of *pūjārīs*. Then we will be able to maintain and bring back the high expectations of Śrīla Prabhupāda, as expressed in these letters.

VERSE 44

sarahasyo dhanur-vedaḥ savisargopasaṁyamaḥ
astra-grāmaś ca bhavatā śikṣito yad-anugrahāt

"It was by Droṇācārya's mercy that you learned the military art of throwing arrows and the confidential art of controlling weapons."

COMMENT

The purport describes the use of subtle mantra weapons, as used by King Daśaratha and others. Are ISKCON devotees paying any attention to rediscovering these subtle Vedic sciences, and more importantly, should they?

It is not the business of devotees to learn the use of subtle weapons. Nor are they interested in gross weapons. They are interested in fighting the evil effects of Kali-yuga by carrying out the *saṅkīrtana* method of Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu.

In this verse, Draupadī is asking Arjuna to feel grateful to Droṇācārya for teaching him the military art. Gratitude is a wonderful quality for a Vaiṣṇava. Since he or she is always God-centered (*īśāvāsyam*), his greatest gratitude is toward Śrī Kṛṣṇa, his dearmost friend. A devotee acknowledges that his very life is dependent on Kṛṣṇa, and so he offers back everything he does in acts of sacrifice to the Lord. Similarly, the devotee is grateful to his guru for leading him out of the darkness of ignorance with the torchlight of knowledge, or, as expressed in *Gurvaṣṭakam*, by Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura, the guru is the cloud of mercy showering the conditioned soul and putting out the fire of *saṁsāra*, the sufferings of repeated birth and death. A devotee is grateful to other devotees, who give him their association and keep him alive in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. He is grateful for the opportunities he has to preach Kṛṣṇa consciousness to innocent people. He is grateful to the cows who give him their nutritious milk, and so in gratitude he does not kill the cow, even if she stops giving milk. He is grateful to the earth for producing grains and vegetables, and grateful to the farmers, who actually work to bring forth the earth's eatables. He is grateful to his own mother and father, who gave birth to him and raised him when he was helpless. And a devotee knows that all these separate and multifarious feelings of gratitude are ultimately owed to the Supreme Lord, from whom all things flow.

In the purport, Prabhupāda writes, "A *brāhmaṇa* should become a teacher, regardless of what his department of knowledge

is. A learned *brāhmaṇa* should become a teacher, a priest, and a recipient of charity. A bona fide *brāhmaṇa* is authorized to accept such professions." This clarification is inspiring, but it may not always be applicable in the West. What if one had to accept a profession which is not suitable for a *brāhmaṇa*? Would one's livelihood get contaminated? Would one lose his dignity and brahminical roles in ISKCON society? Would one disappoint guru and Kṛṣṇa?

According to the purport, a *brāhmaṇa* would not get contaminated by taking on professions that seem suitable for a *brāhmaṇa*. ISKCON operates on a principle higher than strictly following the *varṇas* (*brāhmaṇa, kṣatriya, vaiśya,* and *śūdra*). In ISKCON, the members act solely for the pleasure of guru and Kṛṣṇa. This is the standard for Vaiṣṇavas. A devotee takes on activities that are apparently that of a *śūdra* when he cleans and sweeps the temple. Devotees engage in business for the Lord's interest, and they also act as *brāhmaṇas*. They are always free of contamination and above material designation.

PERSONAL COMMENT

Merton's impersonalism. *Dialogues with Silence*: *Prayers and Drawings*. God is always unknown, we are in darkness. Become nothing. He calls his essay *Day of a Stranger* because, as a monk, he is a stranger in America; his day is so unlike a typical day of most American citizens. As a Hare Kṛṣṇa person, I too am a stranger in America. We don't do what they do.

Been getting more headaches since we've come to Delaware. (I've been telling people I don't get headaches anymore.) Baladeva tells me it's not alarming yet. I've been taking medicines to subdue them. He asked me if I've been feeling any stress (as a possible cause). I said writing *A Poor Man* is stressful; it's an obligation and a satisfaction. He said since I've been here, I've increased my activities—doing more writing, daily walks, observing the holidays. Merton mentioned that his life in the hermitage was free of obligation, and this was characteristic of the life of a monk

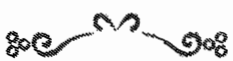
in solitude. That sounds attractive to me, and perhaps largely necessary.

I'd like to go into the bookstore on the beach and look for journals and diaries. They may help me in my writing. In the past, I consulted many. This form allows you to open up; it's attractive to yourself and readers—open communication. They look over your shoulder while you make acts of confession. Without Kṛṣṇa consciousness it has no value, but with Kṛṣṇa consciousness—well, I contend that confession is necessary and is a form of preaching.

You can't think of what to say. But then a little opening occurs to you. You enter it, and more is revealed. It's a tunnel; it's an unraveling ball of yarn.

I heard Dhanurdhara Swami lecturing live over conference call this morning. He was jumping from subject to subject. Told incidents from his life, people he's met recently, and then he returned to the subject matter of the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. A good way to lecture. I should have confidence I can do that too. The word "I" used twice within a sentence—don't be afraid of it.

Last night we watched a film, *Awakenings*. It was about people with a rare disease who are chronic catatonics. They can't be cured, but they can be helped by medicine and love. They can't come out of their catatonic state, frozen in stiff postures. Spending their whole lives that way. Their lives pass by with no apparent emotion or inner (or outer) activity. It was based on a true story. A doctor treated them with special medicine and got miraculous results, but after a while they lapsed. Karma. Strict laws of material nature. Watching that movie, I developed a headache. Recognize that I'm frail and should limit my activities. How does this reflect on our upcoming trip to India?



VERSE 45

sa eṣa bhagavān droṇaḥ prajā-rūpeṇa vartate
tasyātmano 'rdhaṁ patny āste nānvagād vīrasūḥ kṛpī

"He [Droṇācārya] is certainly still existing, being represented by his son. His wife Kṛpī did not undergo a satī with him because she had a son."

COMMENT

Here Aśvatthāmā is being described as a representative of Droṇācārya without any evidence of his assuming any of the responsibilities that would go with this title, such as caring for and protecting his mother, providing for her, upholding his father's good name, etc. Based on his ghastly dealings in this chapter, Aśvatthāmā doesn't seem worthy of being saved, so isn't Draupadī, in all her wisdom, stretching things a bit by describing Aśvatthāmā's "qualifications"?

Draupadī is describing some valid reasons why Aśvatthāmā's life should be spared. After Droṇācārya's death, his wife Kṛpī would normally have undergone the *satī* rite, or suicide, unless she had some offspring. Kṛpī had her son, Aśvatthāmā, and as the son, he was the representative of Droṇācārya. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "A widow is a widow only in name if there is a son of her husband existing. So in either case, Aśvatthāmā was the representative of Droṇācārya, and therefore killing Aśvatthāmā would be like killing Droṇācārya."

Giving him the absolute benefit of the doubt, can it be said of Aśvatthāmā that he sincerely believed he would be pleasing his spiritual master—irrespective of his catastrophic loss of judgment—by killing the boys?

This is not discussed in the *Bhāgavatam* as a reason for keeping him alive. Aśvatthāmā cannot be exonerated because of his sincerity of intention. The way to hell is paved with good intentions.

Whatever he may have thought of, whatever his motivation, his action was heinous, disapproved of by all authorities, and displeasing to his guru.



VERSE 46

tad dharmajña mahā-bhāga bhavadbhir gauravaṁ kulam
vṛjinaṁ nārhati prāptuṁ pūjyaṁ vandyam abhīkṣṇaśaḥ

"O most fortunate one who knows the principles of religion, it is not good for you to cause grief to glorious family members who are always respectable and worshipful."

COMMENT

What are the criteria to determine who is a worshipful family member?

Draupadī pleads that a worshipful family member should be treated carefully. According to Draupadī's reasoning, anyone who is actually a member of a respectable family should be dealt with carefully, even if he or she misbehaves. They should not be insulted because it invokes grief for the family.



VERSE 47

mā rodīd asya jananī gautamī pati-devatā
yathāhaṁ mṛta-vatsārtā rodimy aśru-mukhī muhuḥ

"My lord, do not make the wife of Droṇācārya cry like me. I am aggrieved for the death of my sons. She need not cry constantly like me."

COMMENT

Draupadī's compassion, as shown by not wanting to make Kṛpī suffer as she was suffering, is amazing. What can we ordinary *sādhakas* do in order to develop and increase our compassion and forgiveness?

Śrīla Prabhupāda was once asked, "What can we do to become sincere?" He answered by posing a question: "How do you become a thief?" The devotee answered questioningly, "By thieving?" "Yes," answered Prabhupāda. By committing acts of thievery (in the association of thieves), one becomes a thief. By acting sincerely, one becomes sincere. By extending oneself (acting selflessly) in acts of compassion, one becomes compassionate and forgiving. The development of all these good qualities requires practice. Practice makes perfect.

VERSE 48

yaiḥ kopitaṁ brahma-kulaṁ rājanyair ajitātmabhiḥ
tat kulaṁ pradahaty āśu sānubandhaṁ śucārpitam

"If the kingly administrative order, being unrestricted in sense control, offends the brāhmaṇa order and enrages them, then the fire of that rage burns up the whole body of the royal family and brings grief upon all."

COMMENT

Queen Draupadī is making laudable, even wonderful, arguments, but is she addressing them specifically to Arjuna? Surely she does not include Arjuna in the ranks of kings "unrestricted in sense control"?

Draupadī is making a general statement about the kingly order who may on occasion act unrestrictedly in sense control. But she is specifically addressing Arjuna for the purpose of asking him to refrain from killing Aśvatthāmā. She would consider that act one of unrestricted sense control. So in her description of unrestricted kingly orders, it may be taken as a description of Arjuna, her husband. "If the shoe fits. . ."

PERSONAL COMMENT

Devotees are asking me how come Prabhupāda states that "women are no better than boys" and lack discriminatory power. One of them wrote as follows: "The purport to verse 42 is one that people have had problems with, myself included. Śrīla Prabhupāda could have said something very nice about Draupadī and about the *'varṇa-svabhava'* or beautiful nature of women in general. Instead, he chose to say something that in my own estimation and the estimation of others comes off as harsh, perhaps even demeaning. This statement is especially difficult in light of the verses in this section, which only glorify Draupadī and her compassionate nature.

"I am convinced, based on his personal character, that Śrīla Prabhupāda did not hate women, but there has always seemed to be a disparity to me between Prabhupāda the person—full of undying compassion and mercy, affection and respect for his disciples, regardless of sex—and Prabhupāda the writer, who at times made sharp comments, which can be hard for me to swallow at times. As I find that this inhibits feelings for Śrīla Prabhupāda, what can I do? How can I understand what seems to be these two sides of Śrīla Prabhupāda?"

I find I have no question to give in my "śāstric" section, and I confess it here. It seems to us that women do have discriminatory power that is as good as men, so I don't know what to say. As a disciple of Śrīla Prabhupāda, I am somehow not troubled by it, but only by "overlooking" it. I make some rationalization, some explanation that he is explaining the Vedic way and it may not be applicable to us. It is certainly not applicable to women in the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement.

Another devotee submitted a similar question which is hard for me to handle (although I already handled it in another question-answer):

"Śrīla Prabhupāda appears to have preferred the discriminatory powers of a man to judge between right and wrong over the mild and gentle nature of Draupadī. While he offers respect for her gentleness when confronted with the murderer of her five sons and maintains her gracefulness and respect, Prabhupāda nonetheless appears to elevate the superiority of masculine intelligence.

"However, her qualities are reflected in the *Śikṣāṣṭakam* of Śrī Caitanya. For example, "Being devoid of all false prestige and ready to offer all respects to others, being humble and more tolerant than a tree, one can chant the holy name constantly." Why then are these qualities of tolerance and *ahiṁsā* not "higher" or more advanced than the masculine, judgmental, discriminative, moral right and wrong that he is putting forward as superior?

"Because Draupadī is a woman, she's being compared, and there seems to be a hierarchical flaw in the philosophy. Which is better, to be tolerant or discriminative?"

This same devotee wrote me, "Leaving your book aside for a second, can you actually write me back an answer to the question: What the bleep does Prabhupāda mean in this phrase, 'Women as a class are no better than boys, and therefore they have no discriminatory power like that of a man'? Just between you and me, can you shed some light on what I perceive as a really weird statement?"

Devotees are also puzzled when Śrīla Prabhupāda appears to

contradict himself. In this section, he several times writes that Draupadī's opinion is womanly and not as substantial as a man's, but then he asserts that her view is that of a pure devotee. How come he says one thing and then another? It seems he has a right to do that. "Do I contradict myself?" wrote Walt Whitman. "Very well, then I contradict myself. I contain multitudes." A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds; I believe Emerson said that. One thing can be right, and another thing (apparently in contradiction) can also be right.



VERSE 49

sūta uvāca
dharmyaṁ nyāyyaṁ sakaruṇaṁ nirvyalīkaṁ samaṁ mahat
rājā dharma-suto rājñyāḥ pratyanandad vaco dvijāḥ

"Sūta Gosvāmī said: O brāhmaṇas, King Yudhiṣṭhira fully supported the statements of the Queen, which were in accordance with the principles of religion and were justified, glorious, full of mercy and equity, and without duplicity."

VERSE 50

nakulaḥ sahadevaś ca yuyudhāno dhanañjayaḥ
bhagavān devakī-putro ye cānye yāś ca yoṣitaḥ

"Nakula and Sahadeva [the younger brothers of the King] and also Sātyaki, Arjuna, the Personality of Godhead Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, son of Devakī, and the ladies and others all unanimously agreed with the King."

VERSE 51

tatrāhāmarṣito bhīmas tasya śreyān vadhaḥ smṛtaḥ
na bhartur nātmanaś cārthe yo 'han suptān śiśūn vṛthā

"Bhīma, however, disagreed with them and recommended killing this culprit who, in an angry mood, had murdered sleeping children for no purpose and for neither his nor his master's interest."

COMMENT

So Queen Draupadī's opinion prevailed, and she elicited the support of King Yudhiṣṭhira. After that, Lord Kṛṣṇa and others all unanimously agreed. In his purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda cites the strengths of Draupadī's point of view: that one should show proper respect to a great family, and therefore not kill Aśvatthāmā and not make Mother Kṛpī mourn for her son as Draupadī had to mourn for her sons. If Aśvatthāmā's life is to be spared, the question still remains, How is he to be punished? Lord Kṛṣṇa leaves it up to Arjuna to deal with Aśvatthāmā so that he is not killed, yet effectively "killed" (or stripped of all his power).

VERSE 52

niśamya bhīma-gaditaṁ draupadyāś ca catur-bhujaḥ
ālokya vadanaṁ sakhyur idam āha hasann iva

"Caturbhuja [the Four-armed One], or the Personality of Godhead, after hearing the words of Bhīma, Draupadī and others, saw the face of His dear friend Arjuna, and He began to speak as if smiling."

COMMENT

Lord Kṛṣṇa displayed his four-armed form so that He could better hold apart Draupadī and Bhīma. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "We can imagine Bhīma ready to kill while Draupadī is obstructing him. And in order to prevent both of them, the Lord discovered another two arms." Originally, the primeval Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa displays only two arms, but in His Nārāyaṇa feature He exhibits four. He also displayed thousands of arms in his *viśva-rūpa*, as shown to Arjuna. So if he is called *caturbhuja*, there is no contradiction.

How is it that the Lord was smiling? The situation seemed to be very serious, but still Kṛṣṇa is described as smiling.

To Lord Kṛṣṇa, the situation was not grave or dangerous, although it may have seemed so to others. His smiling is similar to the situation at the beginning of *Bhagavad-gītā*. There, Arjuna confesses to Kṛṣṇa his desperate condition and unwillingness to fight. He surrenders to Kṛṣṇa for direction. The Lord then smiles at Arjuna, glad that he has surrendered, and amused at his bewilderment over duty.

PERSONAL COMMENT

We had our first morning program today. I led the *Gurvaṣṭakam* prayers and *kīrtana* for about fifteen minutes, then we read *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* verses and purports. We read one verse at a time and then, if something occurs to one of us, we ask a question or discuss it. That goes for half an hour.

Tofu weenies in hot dog buns with mustard, macaroni with cheese, Boston baked beans, root beer for lunch. "That's imaginative," I said.

"It's standard comfort food," he replied. Vegetarian *prasādam*. Two weenies, you feel sleepy afterwards. Later in the afternoon you can buy French fries cooked in peanut oil from Thrashers on the boardwalk.

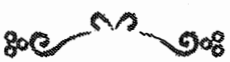
I read from *An Unquiet Mind*, by Kay Redfield Jamison, the

woman with manic depression disease. She controls it by lithium and psychotherapy. I have four other autobiographical books. I think they may indirectly help me with my writing here. My theory is that good writing is always infectious.

I can write what I want. It's meant for Kṛṣṇa consciousness, sometimes in the back door. I don't confess *everything*, not since I've been reprimanded. But we do walk on the boardwalk, and sit and people-watch. And chant *japa* before dawn by the open window.

An Unquiet Mind was candid. She seemed to tell everything. Admitted she did so with initial hesitancy because of the risk. Wow. Told about her own insanity. Bravery. What's the point? Honesty helps people. "One of those rare books that have the power to transform people—and even save them." I'd like to do that too.

When you're old like me, the hours in the day go by quickly. They don't drag. Before you know it, another day is gone, and then a week. Like sand sliding down the hourglass. You might as well face yourself and be who you are.



VERSES 53–54

śrī-bhagavān uvāca

brahma-bandhur na hantavya ātatāyī vadhārhaṇaḥ
mayaivobhayam āmnātaṁ paripāhy anuśāsanam

kuru pratiśrutaṁ satyaṁ yat tat sāntvayatā priyām
priyaṁ ca bhīmasenasya pāñcālyā mahyam eva ca

"The Personality of Godhead Śrī Kṛṣṇa said: 'A friend of a brāhmaṇa is not to be killed, but if he is an aggressor he must be killed. All these rulings are in the scriptures, and you should act accordingly. You have to fulfill your promise to your wife, and you must also act to the satisfaction of Bhīmasena and Me.'"

COMMENT

Devotees have always been fascinated by the pastime of Kṛṣṇa directly telling Arjuna to kill Aśvatthāmā (with Bhīma's agreement in verse 51), but Arjuna finding another solution. This incident happened right after Kurukṣetra and after the *Gītā* had been spoken. The final point of the *Gītā* is surrender fully to Kṛṣṇa. Yet here, despite Kṛṣṇa's direct order to kill Aśvatthāmā, Arjuna doesn't do it. He doesn't want to kill the son of his guru, the son of a *brāhmaṇa*. He refrains from killing on religious principles, despite Kṛṣṇa having told him to abandon all varieties of religion and surrender to Him. In verses 53 and 54, Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna that he must act in such a way as to satisfy seemingly contradictory requirements, but goes on to say that Arjuna must also act to satisfy "Bhīmasena and Me." This phrase seems to show that Bhīma and Kṛṣṇa have the same position, i.e., that Arjuna should kill Aśvatthāmā. It seems bold that Arjuna devised a clever way of punishing Aśvatthāmā. It is true that there were contradictory orders given by different persons, but

with the lesson of *Gītā* being to surrender completely to Kṛṣṇa, the obvious course of action seems to have been to ignore all the scriptures and other persons and just do what Kṛṣṇa said—kill Aśvatthāmā. How can we know when to be as bold as Arjuna and find a creative solution to a conflict despite what appears to be a clear instruction from guru or *śāstra*?

This is a difficult question to answer. Perhaps the only answer is the one given in Prabhupāda's purports, that Kṛṣṇa is testing Arjuna. The Lord's order to kill Aśvatthāmā is a test of Arjuna's intelligence. In the end, Kṛṣṇa accepted Arjuna's decision and was pleased with it. Arjuna "killed" Aśvatthāmā without literally killing him. This was a particular instance of inspiration and higher obedience between the Lord and His pure devotee and cannot be imitated by the average devotee. Normally, devotees should strictly follow the orders of the spiritual master and abide by the scriptures. Take the direct path and don't invent your own action.

It appears that Lord Kṛṣṇa further wants to confuse Arjuna by asking him to please his wife and Bhīma both, and even Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself, even though the first two have completely opposing views. But then in verse 56 it is explained that "thus being insulted, the humiliated Aśvatthāmā was simultaneously killed and not killed by the intelligence of Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna." At this point, it is clear that Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa actually instructed His devotee in mysterious ways. In this incident, He speaks in a way that is apparently confusing, but to His pure devotee there is no confusion, and in fact this apparently confusing statement has an opposite effect on him. He gets an insight into solving the situation and comes up with a solution that is as in accordance with the scriptural injunctions and yet very practical. This is an example of the unique ways in which Kṛṣṇa can help a devotee. A devotee or an outsider may think that the Lord is confusing or distracting the devotee, but the pure devotee can see through the fog and utilize every word the Lord speaks to him to help himself and any other person with problems steer his way out of the maze. Arjuna acted according to time, place and person and

his own inclination, and satisfied the Lord.

From these verses, it looks as if Kṛṣṇa wants us to please many people at the same time. Sometimes in real life it is not so easy to do this. We have heard also that it is not possible to please everyone. Therefore it was Arjuna's brilliance that he was able to please all the persons present despite their contradictory views. This was a sign of his higher intelligence. If we cannot do this, then we have to act in a way that carries out our authentic convictions in accordance with guru, *śāstra* and *sādhu*. Certainly while acting in the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement we may not please everyone in the world, but we have to please Kṛṣṇa, and then our mission is successful.

VERSE 55

sūta uvāca
arjunaḥ sahasājñāya harer hārdam athāsinā
maṇiṁ jahāra mūrdhanyaṁ dvijasya saha-mūrdhajam

"Just then Arjuna could understand the motive of the Lord by His equivocal orders, and thus with his sword he severed both hair and jewel from the head of Aśvatthāmā."

VERSE 56

vimucya raśanā-baddhaṁ bāla-hatyā-hata-prabham
tejasā maṇinā hīnaṁ śibirān nirayāpayat

"He [Aśvatthāmā] had already lost his bodily luster due to infanticide, and now, moreover, having lost the jewel from his head, he lost even more strength. Thus he was unbound and driven out of the camp."

COMMENT

Why is cutting someone's hair or moustache or cutting someone's jewels as good as death according to Vedic culture? We Vaiṣṇava devotees have to cut all our hair and moustache and beard except for one small *śikhā*, and that is considered holy.

The cutting of Aśvatthāmā's hair was a great humiliation for him. He was so much shamed that it was considered as good as death. Arjuna had brought him into the military camp bound by ropes, like an animal. And now the cutting of his hairs by Arjuna's sword was certainly a further and ultimate insult to the son of a *brāhmaṇa*. The Vaiṣṇava keeps his head shaved for reasons of cleanliness and also in the tradition of humility. The *śikhā* is his trademark or signature that he is a devotee of Lord Kṛṣṇa. This is not a symbol of shame or humiliation but a great pride to the devotee, and it is pleasing to Kṛṣṇa.

Arjuna further humiliated Aśvatthāmā by not sentencing him to death but driving him out of the camp into exile. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes that a compromise was made by Arjuna in order to satisfy everyone. Sometimes in life, when we compromise, we do not satisfy one party or the other. Is it not better to sometimes to take one clearly defined position? How will we know when it is best to compromise or take a stand on a particular issue?

A devotee doesn't compromise in his allegiance to Kṛṣṇa. Even if it is unpopular, he follows Kṛṣṇa's instructions as taught in *Bhagavad-gītā* and handed to him in particular by his spiritual master. There is no compromise with the material world. But sometimes in order to get along more smoothly, and, ultimately, to obtain Kṛṣṇa's favor, a devotee may intelligently compromise with the world. He does this as a tactic and doesn't entangle himself or lower his standards of pure Kṛṣṇa consciousness. It is very difficult for a pure soul to live in the material world, and so he may have to make some compromises, but as far as possible, he should not. He should take the trouble to find pure foods, a decent form of earning a living, and right association

with likeminded persons. Sometimes in disagreements among devotees, the only solution is to find a compromise so that things can go forward smoothly.



VERSE 57

vapanaṁ draviṇādānaṁ sthānān niryāpaṇaṁ tathā
eṣa hi brahma-bandhūnāṁ vadho nānyo 'sti daihikaḥ

"Cutting the hair from his head, depriving him of his wealth and driving him from his residence are the prescribed punishments for the relative of a brāhmaṇa. There is no injunction for killing the body."

COMMENT

Here is further evidence that Draupadī was right in her opinion not to kill Aśvatthāmā. Arjuna did not kill him but cut the hair from his head, took away his wealth, and drove him away from his residence into exile. Acting in this way, he satisfied the Pāṇḍavas and Lord Kṛṣṇa and properly punished Aśvatthāmā.



VERSE 58

putra-śokāturāḥ sarve pāṇḍavāḥ saha kṛṣṇayā
svānāṁ mṛtānāṁ yat kṛtyaṁ cakrur nirharaṇādikam

"Thereafter, the sons of Pāṇḍu, and Draupadī, overwhelmed with grief, performed the proper rituals for the dead bodies of their relatives."

COMMENT

A *sannyāsī's* body is not burned but buried in the ground, surrounded by a mound of salt. Others are burnt on a funeral pyre on the banks of a sacred river, and their ashes are distributed into the river. It is not that the survivors of the dead, the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī, were detached from their dead relatives and therefore did not grieve. It is not wrong for a devotee to be overwhelmed with grief. At the same time, he uses his philosophical acumen to distinguish between the body and the soul and eventually sees things in their proper perspective. Thus attaining transcendental vision, he or she becomes purified and gains detachment through the deaths of their relatives.

Thus end a poor man's comments on the First Canto, Chapter Seven of the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, entitled "The Son of Droṇa Punished."

PERSONAL COMMENT

I received a couple of questions too personal to be answered in the śāstric section, so I will deal with them here. One was as follows:

"Our goal in spiritual life should be to always pass the test of guru. In this way, one should always be very alert moment to moment. Can you give some methods and advice, based on your own realizations in regards to how you have passed all your tests in your relationship with Śrīla Prabhupāda, and even after Śrīla Prabhupāda left, you still keep coming out with flying colors? You have been a perfect disciple in your guru-disciple relationship with Śrīla Prabhupāda. We hear the terms 'perfect, more perfect, and most perfect' in regards to Kṛṣṇa living in various places. If you were to relive your life with Śrīla Prabhupāda, are there some aspects of your relationship that you would like to be more perfect and some most perfect?"

I have not passed all the tests of my spiritual master. I have had

an outstanding falldown since his disappearance. In the act of falling down, I said to myself, "I don't give a damn what anyone says." With this defiance, I failed the test of my spiritual master. I was willfully disobedient. It remains a blot on my career, and the GBC has taken away my right to initiate disciples. If I had been more closely linked with Prabhupāda, I would not have disobeyed. After all, I knew the difference between right and wrong. Now I remain faithful to Prabhupāda and carry on under the easy yoke of his instructions. ("Do you remember the famous men/ who had to fall to rise again?/ So pick yourself up/ dust yourself off/ and start all over again.")

Here's another question that I felt was too personal to answer in the śāstric section:

"In your book *He Lives Forever*, you commented in relation to Madri entering the fire when Pāṇḍu died that after the guru leaves, it becomes difficult for the disciple to continue—the pain of separation is so intense. But the only reason the disciple lives on in the mortal world is to fulfill the mission/order of the guru. Can you speak a bit on your own deep attachment in your quest to please him since he left?"

I cannot boast of deep attachment. But I do know that I am very happy when I get on a roll of recalling Śrīla Prabhupāda before an audience. I feel most confident as a speaker and wish it could continue indefinitely. This is a sign that I am still personally attached to His Divine Grace and that my feelings are alive. I think I was most alive in the early years, when Prabhupāda was so accessible to us and when he indicated to me that I was a favorite, trusted disciple. As the movement grew into hundreds and thousands, Prabhupāda became less accessible. But I should not complain. As late as January 1977 I served him for a month as his personal secretary in Bhubaneswar and Māyāpura and got to hear him dictate his letters daily and lecture. And I got to be with him personally, physically. In 1974, I was his masseur and personal secretary for over six months. I still live to serve him and his movement, yet I have no choice but to do it my way. As Popeye says, "I am what I am." But am I Prabhupāda's man?

I think so; I wish to be. Or quoting Erasmus, "It is the chiefest point of happiness that a man is willing to be what he is"—a devotee of Śrīla Prabhupāda.



First Canto

Chapter 8

VERSE 1

sūta uvāca
atha te samparetānāṁ svānām udakam icchatām
dātuṁ sakṛṣṇā gaṅgāyāṁ puraskṛtya yayuḥ striyaḥ

"Sūta Gosvāmī said: Thereafter the Pāṇḍavas, desiring to deliver water to the dead relatives who had desired it, went to the Ganges with Draupadī. The ladies walked in front."

COMMENT

Once in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, or devotional service, do we have to offer food and water to forefathers periodically? If not, then why did Caitanya Mahāprabhu go to Gaya for the *śraddhā* ceremony? In one purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda says that if offerings to forefathers are stopped, generations of family members remain in hell. Is this true for devotees also?

Devotees do not have to perform the offering of food and water to the forefathers. In the *Bhagavad-gītā*, Arjuna expresses

his fear that if he fights, it will cause a disruption through the destruction of family and family customs. In the purport, however, Prabhupāda writes as follows: "Such help rendered to forefathers is a family tradition, and those who are not in devotional life are required to perform such rituals. One who is engaged in the devotional life is not required to perform such actions. Simply by performing devotional service, one can deliver hundreds and thousands of forefathers from all kinds of misery. As stated in the *Bhāgavatam* (11.5.41): "Anyone who has taken shelter of the lotus feet of Mukunda, the giver of liberation, giving up all kinds of obligation, and has taken to the path in all seriousness, owes neither duties nor obligations to the demigods, sages, general living entities, family members, humankind or forefathers." (*Bhagavad-gītā* 1.41 purport)



VERSE 2

te nīnīyodakaṁ sarve vilapya ca bhṛśaṁ punaḥ
āplutā hari-pādābja- rajaḥ-pūta-sarij-jale

"Having lamented over them and sufficiently offered Ganges water, they bathed in the Ganges, whose water is sanctified due to being mixed with the dust of the lotus feet of the Lord."

COMMENT

This is an especially important chapter in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. Śrīla Prabhupāda lectured on all the *ślokas* of Queen Kuntī's prayers, and his talks were edited into a book, *The Prayers of Queen Kuntī*. She reveals herself to be a highly philosophic devotional

lady, capable of offering *uttamaśloka*, or finely composed prayers saturated with a devotee's sentiment of love of God.

The Lord is on His chariot about to leave for His kingdom in Dvārakā, and Queen Kuntī is pleading with Him to please stay with her and her sons, the Pāṇḍavas, in Hastināpura. The scene reminds us of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's leaving Vṛndāvana on the chariot of Akrūra and the *gopīs* pleading with Him not to leave them. The moods are different; Queen Kuntī is in parental relationship with Kṛṣṇa, and the *gopīs* are in the *rasa* of conjugal lovers. But both are on the absolute platform of pure love of God; both are feeling the pangs of separation from Kṛṣṇa.

The first sixteen verses of the chapter deal with a separate subject matter, the saving of Mahārāja Parīkṣit in the womb of his mother Uttarā. In the first verse, we see Kṛṣṇa walking with His relatives, the Pāṇḍavas and the lady members of the family. Śrī Kṛṣṇa is playing the part of a human being and observing the custom of honoring those who died in the battle of Kurukṣetra. Devotees love to see Kṛṣṇa acting in His loving, humanlike dealings more than they like to see Him acting as the supreme controller of the universes. The Lord mixes with His family members (He is a cousin to the Pāṇḍavas), laments with them over their dear ones lost in battle, offers water to the Ganges and bathes in the sacred river side by side with His devotees.

This is a news report extract on the Ganges: "As reported in an article by Charles Arthur in the June 8, 1999 issue of *The Independent* in England, new information has been gathered by scientists at the Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi, India, regarding how the glaciers in the Himalayas are retreating. The glacier above Gangotri, from which the Ganges river starts, has retreated about one kilometer in the past twenty years or so. In fact, it has been determined that these glaciers are retreating faster than anywhere else on the planet. Professor Syed Hassain, the main author of the report, relates that all of the glaciers in the middle Himalayas are retreating. He warns that many of the glaciers in this region could disappear by 2035. New fears are that the meltwater could produce catastrophic floods as mountain

lakes overflow. "As I explained in my book, *The Vedic Prophecies: A New Look Into the Future*, the Vedic texts reveal that such holy rivers as the Ganges will dry up and become only a series of small lakes, at best. In this way, it may practically disappear, as did the Sarasvatī River. This latest report surely seems to show the possibility of this happening sooner than expected. This also shows a reason that the origination mouth of the Ganges, at the ice cave called Gaumukh, above Gangotri, is retreating farther away as the years go by. So those travelers who wish to journey to this mouth of the holy Ganga will have to travel further up into the hills as times go by. This also indicates why this mouth of the Ganges is always changing in its appearance.

"Getting back to the way the glaciers are retreating, at the University of Colorado in Boulder, the research team has found that the mountain glaciers are diminishing in the West as well. The Alps have lost nearly fifty percent of their ice in the last one hundred years. The major glacier at Mt. Kenya has lost eight percent of its size, and fourteen of the twenty-seven glaciers in Spain are gone. The disappearing of the mountain glaciers is also reported in an article by Lily Whiteman in the January/February, 1999, issue of *National Parks*. It is stated there that there were more than a hundred and fifty glaciers in Glacier National Park in Montana back in 1850. Now there are only fifty, and it is expected that these will also disappear within the next four decades. This is primarily blamed on the increase in global temperatures by only one degree since the 1800s. Glaciers, because of being too solid and stable to show short-term variations in climate, are particularly good barometers of global warming.

"In regard to the Vedic tradition, it explains that the Ganges fell from heaven to earth and was caught on the head of Lord Śiva. This was to prevent the intense damage that the force of it would cause to the earth if it fell directly onto the planet. This took place at Gangotri, where the water backed up into the mountains, where much of it froze. The course of the Ganges is said to still flow through the universe and come down to the earth planet. However, much of the river water comes from underneath the

glacier. If the glacier at Gaumukh does continue to recede or melt away, and if the Ganges would ever cease its flow or begin to dry up, it would certainly mean the end of the era, and it would have a drastic effect on the Vedic spiritual culture as we have known it in India. Indeed, it would never be the same." [Stephen Knapp (Śrī Nandanandana dāsa)]

Furthermore, the quality of the water is also troubling. Sewage is getting mixed into the water in many places, such as Bhopal. This brings to mind the predictions that just as there may be wars over oil today, there will be water wars in the future. Śāstra says that Ganga *jala* is never contaminated and one should overlook the apparent contamination and take a bath and be purified. But with the sewage contamination at some places as much as thirty times above what is accepted, shall we still overlook it?

When asked a similar question, Prabhupāda once answered, "That depends on your faith." A devotee of the Ganges will overlook even filthy objects floating there, or dead bodies, and take his bath and say his *gāyatrī*.

VERSE 3

tatrāsīnaṁ kuru-patiṁ dhṛtarāṣṭraṁ sahānujam
gāndhārīṁ putra-śokārtāṁ pṛthāṁ kṛṣṇāṁ ca mādhavaḥ

"There sat the King of the Kurus, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, along with his younger brothers and Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Gāndhārī, Kuntī and Draupadī, all overwhelmed with grief. Lord Kṛṣṇa was also there."

COMMENT

Grief is emphasized. War affected all the survivors in one way or another because everyone lost a dear relative, son, husband, father, etc. War is so painful, hellish, full of loss. . . Separation from the brave soldiers who died there was so intense the survivors remained in shock. "The Lord, therefore, was equally sympathetic toward all of them, and therefore He began to pacify them befittingly." Kṛṣṇa was expert and knew how to speak to each survivor just befitting their mental attitude. He did not pacify the women exactly as He did the men, but all were given transcendental instructions. He taught them the eternal nature of the soul and how the persons they loved had not actually died but had taken new births in higher realms.

Sometimes we hear that one should not lament for those who die. However, we see that even the Pāṇḍavas, who were great devotees, lamented. To what extent is it proper that a person who wants to progress spiritually laments about dying or suffering people? Is it something natural or is it an illusion?

In *Bhagavad-gītā*, Lord Kṛṣṇa explains to Arjuna that he should not lament for the living or the dead. The soul within the body is eternal and cannot be killed. But it is natural that a softhearted Vaiṣṇava grieves when another Vaiṣṇava leaves the world. He is very sorry that he will no longer get the association of his dear friend who shared Kṛṣṇa consciousness with him. A devotee therefore grieves over dying, but he takes solace in transcendental instruction, such as Kṛṣṇa gives to the Pāṇḍavas here in this section of the *Bhāgavatam*.

Chapters Seven to Eleven are important in the *Bhāgavatam* because they are the only chapters before the Tenth Canto where we see *svayam bhagavān kṛṣṇa* personally. This first verse of Chapter Eight is the culmination of the events in the previous chapter. The Pāṇḍavas are now taking their bath after their sons' funeral and are pouring out water for all their relatives who were killed during the battle of Kurukṣetra. The Pāṇḍavas have suffered so much, and even though Yudhiṣṭhira is finally king and their

suffering should now be over, they have had to face the deaths of their five sons. But it is significant that Kṛṣṇa has remained with them throughout their suffering, and as Prabhupāda mentions in the purport to this text, He is still with them "among the family members," as "overwhelmed with grief" they complete the funerary rites for their dead. How does a devotee reconcile his or her suffering with Kṛṣṇa's presence during that suffering—His presence in the knowledge that He is instrumental in everything that he or she is experiencing?

Kṛṣṇa's presence in a devotee's life does not always mean that the devotee does not experience suffering. The Pāṇḍavas were always with Kṛṣṇa, and yet they suffered so many travails, as recorded in the *Mahābhārata*. A devotee does not demand that Kṛṣṇa become the order supplier and remove life's thorns. Rather, he or she prays to Kṛṣṇa for constant remembrance of the Lord, and thus he assures himself of Kṛṣṇa's ultimate shelter after death. If the devotee experiences suffering in this world and yet remains in the presence of Kṛṣṇa, it's to be understood that his suffering is not direct karmic reaction. Upon the time of spiritual initiation, a person's chain of karmic reaction is stopped. What he suffers thereafter is either token reaction (receiving a pinprick for a crime that should normally result in capital punishment) or some personal handling of the devotee's case by the Lord Himself.

In the purport to *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 1.15.46, Śrīla Prabhupāda mentions that the Pāṇḍavas performed supreme pious work in this lifetime and also in their previous lives. But we have the understanding from Śrīla Prabhupāda's books that when Kṛṣṇa appears in this material world to perform His pastimes, His eternal associates also appear with Him to assist in His pastimes. How can the Pāṇḍavas, who are eternal associates of the Lord, have a previous life's *sukṛti*?

In *Bhagavad-gītā*, Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna that both the Lord and Arjuna had many, many lives of associating together, but Kṛṣṇa remembers them whereas Arjuna, the living entity, forgets them. Arjuna was with Kṛṣṇa in previous lives, but forgets.

Also, in the Tenth Canto of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, it is stated that the cowherd boys who play with Kṛṣṇa underwent heaps of pious activities in order to become the Lord's playmates. There is nothing contradictory about the statement that the Lord's eternal associates perform pious activities in order to gain His association.

This verse states that Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira and his brothers, as well as Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Gāndhārī, Kuntī, and Draupadī, were all grieving over the deaths of their relatives. In the process of becoming a devotee, a person comes to see the world in a very different way from the way the nondevotees view the world. It often seems that, in becoming a devotee, one leaves the mundane world of the materialists behind, and that world often seems to include one's family members. Yet, this verse describes the depth of feeling that the Pāṇḍavas felt for their deceased relatives. Is it wrong for a devotee to become "transcendental" to the materialistic views of their nondevotee parents and siblings? Is emotional detachment from one's materialistic family members to be encouraged? How should a devotee relate to his or her materialistic family members?

It is not wrong to be emotionally detached from one's materialistic parents, especially if they regularly practice habits such as intoxication, illicit sex, meat eating, and gambling. If one wants to make his or her parents an object of mercy, the devotee may give them special attention through phone calls, visits, and distributing *prasādam* to them. If the parents are receptive and favorable, this is a good form of preaching, but the devotee should not compromise his or her devotional principles in the name of family attachment.



VERSE 4

sāntvayām āsa munibhir hata-bandhūñ śucārpitān
bhūteṣu kālasya gatiṁ darśayan na pratikriyām

"Citing the stringent laws of the Almighty and their reactions upon living beings, Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa and the munis began to pacify those who were shocked and affected."

COMMENT

Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "The victims of war, namely, the family members of the Kurus, were lamenting the problems of death, and the Lord pacified them on the basis of knowledge." The knowledge He taught was that no one can change the stringent laws of nature, which are made under the order of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. The orders of the Lord are called *dharma*, and as long as we are in the material world, our duty is to follow these orders. If we become free of the material world, then in the liberated stage we can render loving service unto the Lord. Then we can see Kṛṣṇa face to face. Unfortunately, under the influence of *māyā*, we accept a short life as all-in-all and become illusioned by possessing country, home, land, children, wife, etc., which are factually illusions. By cultivating spiritual knowledge, we realize that we have nothing to do with this material paraphernalia. This comes about by associating with the Lord's devotees. This is a summary of the pacifying instruction given by Lord Kṛṣṇa to the victims of war.

Sometimes survivors of dead relatives become unreceptive to solacing words. They curse God for being so cruel. How can we preach to survivors of dead relatives so that they don't get angry?

It requires great tact. We are not as expert as Lord Kṛṣṇa. On the one hand, if people are pious, they become receptive at a time of great difficulty in their lives. But many turn to cynical thoughts

about God and providence. To such people it is better to wait and not impose yourself upon their great disturbance. It requires timing. A too "preachy" intrusion into a person's raw sorrow can be counterproductive. Better to soothe them with kind, human acts until such time passes that they become receptive to the cold facts of birth and death and are able to transcend them with a cool head for transcendental knowledge.

The ability to hear is based on emotional status. One devotee states that when he is in a state of depression, he is not able to hear Kṛṣṇa conscious teachings. He experiences severe mood swings. He even has an attraction for misery and considers it romantic. He can't get rid of it. But he has to fight it. As Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna in *Bhagavad-gītā*, "Armed with *yoga*, O Bharata, stand and fight." (*Bg.* 4.42)

In this verse, Kṛṣṇa and the *munis* pacify the grief-stricken, "citing the stringent laws of the Almighty and the reactions upon living beings." Aside from this, Prabhupāda writes that no one can overcome the stringent laws of nature. Aside from the laws of nature, Prabhupāda calls the problems of life—"the reactions taking place under the time factor"—insoluble. No one can overcome the influence of time and the reactions of karma. The verse actually states that there are no remedial measures. Prabhupāda builds his purport around the idea that Kṛṣṇa's stringent laws are a reflection of His desire. That is, the universe functions with His desire in the center, not ours. Real religion, he says, means to recognize this and serve the master of time and fate. Related to this, Kṛṣṇa has introduced Himself in the previous chapter (and continues in this chapter) as capable of instilling fearlessness in the heart of the devotee. Here, Prabhupāda says, he "pacified them on the basis of knowledge." The knowledge He gives is of His own power over us and everything around us. How does this knowledge create fearlessness? What should our response be to this kind of knowledge?

Our response should be to feel that Kṛṣṇa is our protective father and that we are like small children who have no one else to turn to. We have full faith that our father can protect us. Actually,

in the small world of a child growing up, he will look up to his father as the supreme protector and think he is greater than any other man. Gradually he learns that this is illusion. But in the case of Kṛṣṇa, with clear knowledge one learns more and more that it is true: we can take full shelter in Kṛṣṇa, and this will create fearlessness.

It would seem that if we truly saw ourselves as we are in all our smallness, with nothing that is our own, we would be more afraid. Prabhupāda says elsewhere that the reason we don't surrender to Kṛṣṇa is because we doubt that Kṛṣṇa is a person and that He will protect us. How can we trust that Kṛṣṇa will actually protect us? *Bhagavad-gītā* tells us that His protection will be proportionate to our surrender to Him. But what if we can't surrender fully as Arjuna did in the previous chapter (and was saved from the *brahmāstra*), and how in this chapter Uttarā will also be saved, along with Parīkṣit? Are we lost?

We are lost if we don't believe that Kṛṣṇa is a person and that He will protect us. Prabhupāda has said that while chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, we should cry out to Kṛṣṇa like a child calling for its mother. Kṛṣṇa is our mother and father. We must have this much natural faith.

Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "This clearance of the misgivings of material existence at once takes place by association with the Lord's devotees, who are able to inject the transcendental sound into the depths of the bewildered heart and thus make one practically liberated from all lamentation and illusion." Why for some of us does it take so long to become detached, or why do we again go back to our pre-liberation habits?

Liberation from bondage is real, palpable, and tangible, and even a new devotee gets some taste of it. The series of choices a living entity makes *after* that, it seems—the unwillingness to change set-in habits—can kill spiritual benefits.

In the purport to this verse, Śrīla Prabhupāda says, "In our material stage, we can see neither ourselves nor the Lord for want of spiritual vision." Normally, we hear many people question us and our teachings by questioning, "Where is your God? Show

us God. Then we will accept what you are saying." Here Śrīla Prabhupāda makes an interesting statement that we cannot even see ourselves in the material conception, what to speak of seeing God.

In the purport to this verse, Prabhupāda says, "The victims of war, namely, the family members of the Kurus, were lamenting the problems of death, and the Lord pacified them on the basis of knowledge." Generally, when someone dies and devotees are invited to speak at the ceremony, the talk is a very mild one, considering that the audience is in a state of mourning. But here it is mentioned in the verse that "citing the stringent laws of the Almighty and their reactions upon living beings. . ." The Lord tried to soothe the disturbed members by telling them about the stringent laws of the Almighty.

PERSONAL COMMENT

Reading a book, *The Introvert Advantage: How to Thrive in an Extrovert World*. I'm an introvert. They get their energy by going within, whereas the extroverts recharge their batteries by outside contacts. Extroverts outnumber introverts by three to one. Extroverts are considered more healthy, but this is an unfair prejudice. The two are different; one is not better than another. Introverts don't like big social gatherings; they prefer being with just a few close friends. They don't consider acquaintances as friends. They like to be alone, but they also need to get out sometimes in order to remain healthy. They should not be afraid to be who they are. They don't like socializing. They like to think before they speak; extroverts tend to "shoot from the lip." Introverts sometimes appear aloof, quiet and mysterious to others. In a test for whether you are an introvert, the following points were listed: "I don't like overstimulating environments. I can't imagine why folks want to go to horror movies or go on roller coasters. I like people to come to my home, but I don't like them to stay too long. I like to share special occasions with just one person or a few close friends rather than have big

celebrations. I form lasting relationships." I resonate with these points. He's not necessarily shy or narcissistic but just inward. Gets tired with too much outward stimulation; prefers to put on his pajamas and go to bed. We live in an extrovert's world, and the introvert has to learn how to cope. I feel good about reading this book and getting my bearings. You're born with it; it's in your genes. You shouldn't be discouraged by others' attitudes toward your introversion or develop low self-esteem because of it. It's perfectly all right to be an "innie."

Can a devotee, especially a preacher, be an innie? The book gave examples that many public figures are introverts. Abraham Lincoln was one, and many actors. They just need a private life, recharging themselves with alone time. He (or she) is not self-indulgent. He is just a particular kind of being *who gets his strength by going within.*

VERSE 5

sādhayitvājāta-śatroḥ svaṁ rājyaṁ kitavair hṛtam
ghātayitvāsato rājñaḥ kaca-sparśa-kṣatāyuṣaḥ

"The clever Duryodhana and his party cunningly usurped the kingdom of Yudhiṣṭhira, who had no enemy. By the grace of the Lord, the recovery was executed, and the unscrupulous kings who joined with Duryodhana were killed by Him. Others also died, their duration of life having decreased for their rough handling of the hair of Queen Draupadī."

COMMENT

In the purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "In the glorious days, or before the advent of the age of Kali, the *brāhmaṇas*, the cows, the women, the children and the old men were properly given protection." Who protected them?

They were protected by the administrators (government), the *kṣatriya* class. The glorious days are gone, and none of these important individuals are given protection. *Brāhmaṇas* should be free to study the *śāstras* and engage in fulltime Kṛṣṇa consciousness, Deity worship, and receiving and giving charity, with no obligation to earn their living.

The cows provide humankind with "the most miraculous form of food, i.e., milk for maintaining the finer tissues of the brain for understanding higher aims of life." Unfortunately, in Kali-yuga, no protection is given to the cows, and they are sent by the thousands to the slaughterhouse every day.

"The protection of women maintains the chastity of society, by which we can get a good generation for peace, tranquility and progress of life." In the days before Kali- yuga, women were protected by their fathers and brothers in childhood and then turned over to a husband, who took responsibility for their protection for the rest of their lives. But in the present age, women are exploited, abused and ogled over as sex objects. In the *Bhagavad-gītā*, it is stated that when women are unprotected, the result is *varṇa-saṅkara*, or unwanted population. "To insult a chaste woman means to bring about disaster in the duration of life." Therefore, when Duḥśāsana and company roughly handled the hair of Queen Draupadī and attempted to strip her in a public assembly, they all died untimely.

The protection of children gives humanity its best chance to prepare the way for freedom from material life. The protection of children begins from the first day of conception of the child. This enactment of pure sex life is known as *garbhādhāna-saṁskāra*.

The protection of old men and women gives them a chance to prepare themselves for a better life after death. Men should be given freedom to enter the renounced order of life, *sannyāsa*, and women should live under the shelter of their grownup sons or relatives.

The Vaiṣṇavas should especially be protected, since they are completely surrendered to serving Kṛṣṇa and dedicated to His mission of spreading Kṛṣṇa consciousness. They are not even

obliged to serve their material parents or country, because they are rendering the best welfare work by their unalloyed service to Kṛṣṇa. When society (government) does not offer protection to the devotees, they turn to Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet and seek shelter there. They are confident that Kṛṣṇa will protect them under all circumstances.

Prabhupāda writes here about the five groups of people that should be protected by a civilized society. We have seen in ISKCON that sometimes we have failed in offering these forms of protection. How can we fully apply Śrīla Prabhupāda's call to action in protecting these five groups?

We can take his purport seriously. We cannot bring about these changes in the nondevotee civilization, but at least we can do it within our own spiritual communities. Prabhupāda personally spoke of the importance of cow protection. He said they should not be protected just as useless pets, but their milk should be utilized in ISKCON restaurants and in worshiping the Deities and feeding the devotees and guests. And the bulls could be used to pull the plows. ISKCON has not much developed as a spiritual care institution, and this is a lacking. What can we say? The members and leaders of the Society should form guidelines to give protection to the *brāhmaṇas*, women, children and elderly. So many members of ISKCON have dedicated the best years of their lives to pushing on the movement, and they deserve to be supported during their difficult years, especially as they age. ISKCON is not a welfare state, but as it matures, we will see *āśramas* for widows, developed and balanced *gurukulas*, and development of support from congregations. If ISKCON does not develop in these ways, it will fail.

This is a wonderful principle, that the Lord Himself becomes insulted by the threat or insult of His devotee—of course, Lord Caitanya exhibits this feature in His pastimes. So this is another element of faith, since devotees take all kinds of abuse from nondevotees (who are unenlightened), and sometimes other devotees (who are assumed to be enlightened), yet most times there is no immediate, tangible reaction—the Lord chooses to

think in His own way. So is it wrong for a devotee who is being personally challenged, threatened, cheated, to think within himself some version of this: "Because I am a devotee and Kṛṣṇa is so great, the fact that you are insulting me will certainly bring you some bad reaction, since the Lord is looking out for me"? Devotees might be reluctant to think that way—"Who am I, not such a big devotee to expect Kṛṣṇa would react that way if I am harmed"? Can devotees give themselves permission to think that way, or even warn the perpetrator?

It crosses the line and becomes self-indulgent when one thinks, "I *am* a big devotee, so therefore anything you do to me you will regret—I have God on my side."

Doubting Thomas: "You devotees are simply advocating a reversal of progress, taking us back hundreds of years before technology, before industry. And why? What do you have against bigger, better, faster and more efficient anyway? The Internet has brought the world closer together, and our scientists are on the verge of discovering how life itself is created. Your proposal to protect the cow smacks of ritual more than practicality, and your ideas about women needing protection are insultingly out of step. As for the duration of life, statistics show it to be actually increasing."

First of all, devotees are not opposed to all progress. If the Internet and other technologies of "bigger, better and faster" can be used in the service of Kṛṣṇa, then it is not condemned. One who can use material things in service practices a higher renunciation than one who rejects all material things as *māyā*. But certainly much of what goes for material progress can be eliminated. In that sense, devotees are out of step with modern society. They are marching to a different drummer. But they are not wrong to do so. Industrialization and consumerism have brought about much dehumanization, poverty, waste and abuse. A few possess wealth at the expense of many who have nothing. The values of civilization before the current age, Kali-yuga, were much more progressive in the real sense than what we see increasingly in the world today.

Verses and purports like this remind us of the main difference between Western and Vedic social philosophy. Western culture considers the individual to be the base unit of society, whereas Vedic culture considers the group or class to be the base unit. Vedic culture doesn't simply protect *this* woman or *that* cow who may be particularly deserving or innocent but *all* women and cows. Duḥśāsana is held morally culpable by society not only because he insulted a particular woman but because he went against the dharma of his class and "insulted an ideal, chaste woman," representative of a class that should be protected. "This complete outlook is based on factors leading to successful humanity as against the civilization of polished cats and dogs."

VERSE 6

yājayitvāśvamedhais taṁ tribhir uttama-kalpakaiḥ
tad-yaśaḥ pāvanaṁ dikṣu śata-manyor ivātanot

"Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa caused three well-performed Aśvamedha-yajñas [horse sacrifices] to be conducted by Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira and thus caused his virtuous fame to be glorified in all directions, like that of Indra, who had performed one hundred such sacrifices."

COMMENT

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira's fame is not less than that of the king of heaven because he's always in touch with the all-great. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "The sun rays are equally distributed, but

still there are some places which are always dark. This is not due to the sun but to the receptive power. Similarly, those who are cent percent devotees of the Lord get the full-fledged mercy of the Lord, which is always equally distributed everywhere." What does Śrīla Prabhupāda mean by "the receptive power"?

He means the ability of the pure devotees to receive the Lord's mercy. Only they have the strength and qualification to be in line for His exclusive care. As far as the Lord is concerned, He is raining His favor upon one and all, but only the devotees are *interested* to serve Him and be in confidential relationship with Him.

VERSE 7

āmantrya pāṇḍu-putrāṁś ca śaineyoddhava-saṁyutaḥ
dvaipāyanādibhir vipraiḥ pūjitaiḥ pratipūjitaḥ

"Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa then prepared for His departure. He invited the sons of Pāṇḍu, after having been worshiped by the brāhmaṇas, headed by Śrīla Vyāsadeva. The Lord also reciprocated greetings."

COMMENT

The Lord, although acting as a human *kṣatriya*, allowed Himself to be worshiped, because that was the desire of the *brāhmaṇas* present at Hastināpura. They knew Him to be the Supreme Lord and not a mere *kṣatriya*, and so they always offered Him the respects due to the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Lord Kṛṣṇa obeyed their orders and allowed Himself to be worshiped just to set an example, "so that others would follow Him in the future."

The *kṣatriyas* are always obedient to the *brāhmaṇas*.

The Lord taught us how to behave according to his social position. Prabhupāda points out some *varṇāśrama* rules. The members of ISKCON, however, need not give topmost importance to these traditional Vedic rules. They should consider them secondary as long as they chant Hare Kṛṣṇa and follow the basic devotional practices. We need not aim to become Vedic in our way of life. It is more natural to be Westerners and to add Kṛṣṇa to our lives. But the two approaches can be reconciled.

The Lord is transcendental to all orders, yet He follows the social customs, Does He belong to any caste, or is He beyond castes?

The Lord is transcendental to all orders, but He was acting like a human being during His appearance on earth, and so He conformed to the codes for a *kṣatriya*. But how did He conform? He allowed the *brāhmaṇas* to worship Him as the Supreme Lord. This is not merely a social custom but the necessity for all living beings.

VERSE 8

gantuṁ kṛtamatir brahman dvārakāṁ ratham āsthitaḥ
upalebhe 'bhidhāvantīm uttarāṁ bhaya-vihvalām

"As soon as He seated Himself on the chariot to start for Dvārakā, He saw Uttarā hurrying toward Him in fear."

COMMENT

The Lord cannot be accused of partiality because of the special attention He gives His devotees. A king gives protection to all the citizens, but he gives special care to his own children, and there is nothing wrong in that. The reason the Lord gives special attention to the devotees is because they are completely dependent on

Him. Uttarā is threatened by Aśvatthāmā's *brahmāstra* weapon, which is flying fast to destroy the embryo in her womb, and so she runs to the Lord for shelter. She knows that the *brahmāstra* is invincible but that Kṛṣṇa can counteract it.

We should all act like great enunciates and place ourselves financially and spiritually at the mercy of the Lord. Kṛṣṇa likes devotees to follow the proverb, "The Lord helps those who help themselves," but the best way to help yourself is to act for Kṛṣṇa and allow Him to deliver you the outcome as He desires. A verse in the *Bhāgavatam* states that Kṛṣṇa shows His special favor on one by taking away all his material assets, leaving him bereft of family and friends; this makes him turn solely to the Lord for protection. (This verse was particularly relevant to Śrīla Prabhupāda when his business and family life failed in his householder days.) Getting Kṛṣṇa's direct attention is therefore not always so comfortable or easygoing. But it ultimately results in being glorified and given protection like "the little son who is exclusively dependent on his father."

It takes faith to even understand that I am protected by Kṛṣṇa. The pure devotee knows this from within the core of his heart, and he can sense the Lord's protection during his activities. The new devotee may think, "I am completely dependent, therefore I am protected," without knowing yet what dependence means or how Kṛṣṇa is reciprocating. So how can neophytes become more tangibly aware of the Lord's protection in their lives?

Neophytes are forced to see Kṛṣṇa's protection in moments of extreme distress. In the midst of a car accident or similar emergency, devotees cry out to their Lord. This is a common occurrence even for new devotees. There is no need to ask for these occurrences because they come of themselves, and as they do, the devotees learn more and more how they are actually dependent on Kṛṣṇa and how He is saving them.

PERSONAL COMMENT

Jayādvaita Swami is coming here to celebrate Rādhāstami with us.

We will probably both speak something about Śrīmatī Rādhārani to the assembled devotees. Jayādvaita Swami may not want to speak directly about Her. I wouldn't mind doing it, but I won't have the lecture prepared. I don't have books in this house to draw from. The introductory section from *Teachings of Lord Caitanya* is good. Of course Rāmānanda Rāya's conversation with Lord Caitanya has good material, and there are other descriptions in *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, but it may be too advanced. Actually, this is an all-devotee audience, and they are already familiar with *rāgānuga* topics of Śrīmatī Rādhārani. But it's not good to indulge in them. Nonetheless, on Rādhā's birthday, you can lift Her skirts a little to reveal Her lotus feet.

There are three principle purposes for the appearance of Lord Caitanya. The first purpose is to relish the position of Śrīmatī Rādhārani, who is the prime reciprocator of transcendental love of Kṛṣṇa. The second reason for His appearance is to understand the transcendental mellow of Himself. Rādhārani's attraction for Kṛṣṇa is sublime, and to experience that attraction He accepted the mentality of Rādhārani. The third reason that Lord Caitanya appeared is to enjoy the bliss tasted by Rādhārani. He couldn't taste that bliss from the position of Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme male, but He appeared as Lord Caitanya, accepting the emotions and bodily luster of Śrīmatī Rādhārani.

Prema-vilāsa-vivarta. The highest state. Rādhārani feels madness (*divyā-mada*) in separation from Kṛṣṇa. One time She mistook a dark Tamāl tree for Kṛṣṇa and embraced it. Things spurt out without order in my talk. Aint I smart to know Rādhā-*tattva*? And Rādhā *līlā*! Śrī Kṛṣṇa left the *rasa* dance in order to be with the special *gopī* who was His best worshiper. They wandered in the forest. The other *gopīs* trailed after them, tracing their footprints. They figured out that Śrī Kṛṣṇa sat down and made a garland for His special *gopī*. They saw where He stood tiptoe in order to reach flowers in the branches of a tree. Then Śrīmatī Rādhārani said to Kṛṣṇa, "I am tired, I am tired. You can take me anywhere You want." Kṛṣṇa thought that she was acting too proud, and just to increase Her feelings of separation, He

disappeared from Her, leaving Her lamenting in the forest. Her female companions found Her and surrounded Her with great empathy.

One time Śrī Uddhava went to Vṛndāvana to deliver a message from Kṛṣṇa to the *gopīs*. Śrīmatī Rādhārani stood apart from Him and spoke in madness to a bumblebee, taking it to be a messenger from Kṛṣṇa. Her talk is recorded in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* as the *Brahmāra-gītā*.

These pastimes are all within Prabhupāda's books, and then there are the books and dramas of Rūpa Gosvāmī and other *rasika-ācāryas*.

Śrīmatī Rādhārani is *hlādinī-śakti*. There are three internal potencies of Kṛṣṇa: the *sandhinī-śakti*, or the existential potency; the *saṁvit* potency, or the knowledge-giving potency (the knowledge that Kṛṣṇa is God); and the *hlādinī-śakti*, or pleasure-giving energy. When Kṛṣṇa wants to enjoy—we say when He wants to enjoy, but actually, there is no beginning or time when He originated that desire; His relationship with Rādhārani is eternal, She is His eternal consort—He separates Himself into Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. And then in order to realize the three special features of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, He joins again as one in the form of Lord Caitanya. Lord Caitanya experienced the mood of Rādhārani, especially in His last manifested years on earth, in the *gambhīra* at Jagannatha Puri. In the company of His most confidential companions, Rāmānanda Rāya and Svarūpa Dāmodara, He sang songs and recited verses, sometimes chastising Kṛṣṇa for leaving Rādhārani and sometimes expressing His intense longing for reunion with the Lord.

As Kṛṣṇa is the fountainhead and cause of all incarnations, so Rādhā is the cause of all His consorts. "The beloved consorts of Lord Kṛṣṇa are of three kinds: the goddesses of fortune, the queens, and the milkmaids of Vraja, who are the foremost of all. These consorts all proceed from Rādhikā." (*Cc. Ādi* 4.74–75)

Here is more on how Lord Kṛṣṇa fulfilled His three desires. His first desire was to taste the position of Śrīmatī Rādhārani. To Himself He thought, "My mind races to taste the pleasure

experienced by the abode (*āśrayā*), but I cannot taste it, even by My best efforts. How might I taste it? If sometime I can be the abode of that love, only then may I taste its joy." (*Cc. Ādi* 134–135) He also wanted to understand the beauty and attraction that Rādhārani saw in Him. He thought, "My sweetness is wonderful, infinite and full. No one in the three worlds can find its limit. Only Rādhikā, by the strength of Her love, tastes all the nectar of My sweetness. . . There is constant competition between My sweetness and the mirror of Rādhā's love. They both go on increasing, but neither knows defeat. . . If I see My sweetness in a mirror, I am tempted to taste it, but nevertheless I cannot. If I deliberate on a way to taste it, I find that I hanker for the position of Rādhikā." (*Cc. Ādi* 138–139, 142, 144–145) The third desire is to understand the bliss of Śrīmatī Rādhārani. Kṛṣṇadasa Kavirāja goes to great pains to show that Rādhārani's love for Kṛṣṇa is love and not lust. He states that mundane lust is to seek pleasure from the partner for one's own sense gratification. But the desire to please the senses of the lover is actually love. "The desire to gratify one's own senses is *kāma* (lust), but the desire to please the senses of Lord Kṛṣṇa is *premā* (love)." (*Cc. Ādi* 4.165) Śrī Kṛṣṇa desired to taste the exclusive love of Śrīmatī Rādhārani. Lord Kṛṣṇa thought as follows: "Formerly I have appeared in the world to taste mellows, and I shall taste the mellows of pure love in various ways. I taught devotional service that springs from the devotees' spontaneous love by demonstrating it with My pastimes. But these three desires of Mine were not satisfied, for one cannot enjoy them in a contrary position. Unless I accept the luster of the ecstatic love of Śrī Rādhikā, these three desires cannot be fulfilled. (*Cc. Ādi* 4.264–267)

In his drama *Lalita-mādhava*, Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī describes the countenance of Rādhārani as follows: "Her eyes are enchanted by the beauty of Lord Kṛṣṇa, the enemy of Kaṁsa. Her body thrills in pleasure at His touch. Her ears are always attracted to His sweet voice, Her nostrils are enchanted by His fragrance, and Her tongue hankers for the nectar of His soft lips. She hangs down Her lotuslike face, exercising self-control only by pretense, but

She cannot help showing the external signs of Her spontaneous love for Lord Kṛṣṇa." (*Cc. Ādi* 4.260)

If I can remember a little of this on Rādhāstami, my talk will be blessed.



VERSE 9

uttarovāca
pāhi pāhi mahā-yogin deva-deva jagat-pate
nānyaṁ tvad abhayaṁ paśye yatra mṛtyuḥ parasparam

"Uttarā said, 'Oh Lord of lords, Lord of the universe! You are the greatest of mystics. Please protect me, for there is no one else who can save me from the clutches of death in this world of duality.'"

COMMENT

In the purport to this verse, Prabhupāda writes, "One cannot save himself from the cruel hands of death in the material world without having surrendered himself at the lotus feet of the Lord." The pure devotee does not turn to Kṛṣṇa even to save himself from death. When this does happen in the *Bhāgavatam* (Gajendra asks, Uttarā asks—yet Arjuna doesn't when attacked by Bhīṣma), the Lord does not fail His surrendered souls. Is it considered a disturbance or offense when a mixed or neophyte devotee naturally in fear for his material body approaches the Lord in this way? And how common is it that beginner devotees misperceive the Lord's promise of protection to mean, "Oh, I am chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa, so He will also protect my material body should there be danger," but for His own reasons or because the devotee is still chanting with offense, that protection a devotee

desired in a particular situation doesn't manifest, and a devotee loses faith or even sometimes turns against God ("You don't exist; otherwise, where were You when I needed You?").

The Lord is not the order supplier for devotees' material needs. He should not be expected to intervene in every instance, like Superman. Suppose a devotee undergoes a routine surgery, but it turns out to be life-threatening due to complications. He should take it to mean that Kṛṣṇa is giving him some token reaction to past karma. For horrendous acts in the past he has been given just a little suffering. The Lord is dealing with him personally for his ultimate purification. This is a right mentality, rather than railing against Kṛṣṇa for not supplying immediate physical safety.

Parīkṣit Mahārāja was able to understand Śṛṅgi's curse to be real and immediately renounced everything. Kaṭvāṅga was warned his death was but a moment away, and he turned to Kṛṣṇa. Here, however, Uttarā is given no warning about the impending *brahmāstra*, yet she somehow knew and approached Lord Kṛṣṇa on His chariot. Are great devotees somehow made aware of impending doom and are thus given a special opportunity (which they invariably take) to surrender to or remember the Lord? Another example that comes to mind is Śrīla Prabhupāda's dream of Lord Kṛṣṇa in His various forms rowing the boat during Prabhupāda's crossing of the Atlantic (of course, Prabhupāda was already cent percent surrendered).

The devotees are not necessarily clairvoyant in their understanding of impending doom. They understand that the material world is a place where there is danger at every step, and therefore *always* take shelter of Mukunda, the giver of liberation. Whether they get advanced warning or not, pure devotees know Kṛṣṇa is their only protection, and so when danger comes, they run to Him in the mood of Uttarā.

Is duality a relative term to a devotee in this world? Can anyone be above the duality? If so, why was Uttarā so unprotected and fearful?

Living in the material world, the devotees are aware of the

absolute realm beyond duality, but they are still caught up in the dualities of this world until they are completely liberated. As long as we have material bodies and a material conception of life, we will be affected by the dualities of hot and cold, etc. Kṛṣṇa advises Arjuna to tolerate these dualities, which arise from sense perception. So a devotee masters the dualities by his toleration and by his concentration on the Absolute Lord. Anyone living within the material cosmos is within the world of dualities and has to deal with that reality. Great ascetics by their *tapasya* and meditation rise above the dualities. A pure devotee of Kṛṣṇa sees that everything is coming from the Lord, both so-called good and so-called bad. For him, everything is good because he sees it in the light of Kṛṣṇa's mercy. There is nothing wrong with Uttarā's being afraid. Her saving grace was that, in the midst of her fearfulness (which was not for herself but for the embryo in her womb), she ran directly to the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa.

When considering the perfection of devotional service, sometimes we assume that it is not correct to ask the Lord for material protection. However, we have here examples of advanced souls who did ask. When is it correct for us to approach the Lord for protection in this world, and what is the best way of doing this?

It is all right to pray to the Lord for protection when it is a matter of protecting our devotional service—not for ourselves, but for devotional projects. It is not wrong to pray to the Lord, "Let there be a temple" when an *ācārya* has ordered his followers to construct a beautiful temple to glorify Kṛṣṇa. It is not wrong to carry out his order, "Distribute books! Distribute books! Distribute books!" The best way to seek protection is to pray and act. Prayer should be accompanied with earnest activities in the service of the Lord. This will attract Him to protect our projects.

Uttarā was a young girl afraid, but she knew what she was afraid of. I've heard many devotees say that they do not know why they don't surrender to Kṛṣṇa—what is it they are afraid of? Sometimes they are more afraid of Kṛṣṇa than of what we may experience in this world.

Kṛṣṇa has shown Himself since His advent in the pages of the *Bhāgavatam* as *bhakta-vatsala*. We see Him protecting the Pāṇḍavas, who are completely dependent on His protection. But He will also protect those who are only aspiring to become devotees—that is, who haven't discovered their need to become fully dependent on Him.

How can we escape from the cycle of fear and self-protection? We wonder, "If I fall, will Kṛṣṇa catch someone like me?" And although we may say, "Yes," that "yes" can sometimes feel more like a platitude than a conviction. Is it possible for any devotee to say "yes" to this question?

After all, Kṛṣṇa is supremely independent and will ultimately choose to act according to His own desire, not ours. Therefore, it seems to take great courage to be a surrendered devotee, and motivation that is not based on winning Kṛṣṇa's protection but on giving the self. In these texts, Uttarā asks Kṛṣṇa to save her embryo even if she herself is burnt to ashes: "if You so desire." And related to this, it seems to also take courage to face the fact that whatever we're undergoing has been arranged by Kṛṣṇa, and that Kṛṣṇa acts only for His own pleasure. We know from *śāstra* that when He is acting with His devotees, He's acting for *rasa*, the flavor of relationship. We can think that the pain we experience is only because we are so much in need of purification. But here are Kṛṣṇa's great devotees suffering so much.

It's interesting that both Arjuna and Uttarā call out to Kṛṣṇa with different words. Arjuna addresses Him as *mahā-bāho*, mighty-armed, and Uttarā as *mahā-yogin*, the greatest mystic. One wonders whether they are seeing Kṛṣṇa according to the needs of the moment or are revealing something about their more enduring realization of Him. Small devotees can also call out to Kṛṣṇa according to either their need of the moment or how they have come to see Him.

Uttarā went to Kṛṣṇa to save her unborn child, "with the purity of a mother's love." From an external perspective, this doesn't appear to be pure *bhakti*—although, of course, it can be said that she was trying to protect the Vaiṣṇava, and Prabhupāda

also speaks in his purport of a mother's duty to protect her child. But she was not ashamed of who and what she was, of her social position, her gender, her love for her child. She was just a natural person with Kṛṣṇa, and Kṛṣṇa reciprocated according to that. She didn't have anything to hide or something else she had to be when she was approaching. This is what it means to be a personalist—to be a person as one really is with Kṛṣṇa.



VERSE 10

abhidravati mām īśa śaras taptāyaso vibho
kāmaṁ dahatu māṁ nātha mā me garbho nipātyatām

"O my Lord, You are all-powerful. A fiery iron arrow is coming towards me fast. My Lord, let it burn me personally, if You so desire, but please do not let it burn and abort my embryo. Please do me this favor, my Lord."

COMMENT

Uttarā is the daughter of a great king, wife of a great hero, student of a great devotee, and mother of a famous king. Being so fortunate, why was she unfortunate?

Uttarā was not unfortunate. Although threatened by the *brahmāstra* of Aśvatthāmā, who tried to kill the embryo in her womb, Uttarā and the embryo were saved by Kṛṣṇa. They were protected by the Lord, so there was no question of Uttarā's being unfortunate. When it appeared that she was in great difficulty, she turned to Kṛṣṇa and her difficulties disappeared. Her helplessness and sincere cries to Kṛṣṇa were the means by which she attained good fortune in a dangerous situation.

Aśvatthāmā was an abortionist. At least he attempted to create an abortion, but Kṛṣṇa stopped him. Nowadays, the "freedom of choice" movement has become very popular, and women are advised to abort their embryos if they feel any inconvenience. But Vedic science teaches differently. Prabhupāda writes, "The mother of a child has a great responsibility in giving all protection to the child, and therefore Uttarā was not ashamed to express this frankly before Lord Kṛṣṇa." They say that the embryo has no life, but according to Vedic science, life begins at the time of conception, when a spirit soul enters the woman's ovum. The mixture of the male sperm and the female substance forms a pea-like structure which eventually grows and grows through nine months until it is ready to come out. To kill or abort the embryo, even in the beginning stages, is the same as committing murder, but the abortionists deny this. In her Nobel Prize acceptance speech, Mother Teresa stated that abortion was the greatest obstacle to world peace. She was referring to the disfavor (and karmic reaction) that occurs as God's response to this heinous act. Abortion is a product of illicit sex. Sexual relations should only be engaged in for the purpose of producing children and raising them in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Nowadays, people engage in sex life and use contraceptives to avoid pregnancy. If pregnancy occurs, they do not want to be bothered by giving birth and raising a child, and so they kill the embryo at the first sign of pregnancy. Studies have shown that embryos have all the signs of life—heartbeat, etc.—even while within the mother's womb. Therefore, to kill them is no better than killing a living infant, which is still considered horrible in all civilized nations. If Mahārāja Parīkṣit had not survived and seen birth, the world would have been robbed of a great king, the last descendant of the Kuru dynasty.

Is it appropriate to ask the Lord for something specific for our service? When is it correct, and when is it not proper?

Ideally, we should always be working for the Lord and asking for His guidance from within. There is nothing objectionable in asking Him for help in carrying out His own mission.

Individually, we desire to become purified and develop love of God, and collectively, as a devotional community, we desire to push on the *saṅkīrtana* movement. Great devotees, demigods and *avatāras*, such as Lord Brahmā and Advaitācārya, have prayed for the Lord's personal descent just to alleviate the distress of the world. It is not appropriate to ask Kṛṣṇa for something which is not good for our devotional service. St. Teresa of Avila said that many persons pray to God for things which, when granted, leave the recipients crying tears.

This section leading up to verse seventeen can be taken as a dialogue between the surrendered devotees and Kṛṣṇa, in which the surrendered devotees ask Kṛṣṇa for His protection and Kṛṣṇa gives it. It's interesting that this pastime follows so closely the parallel pastime a chapter back where Arjuna is also threatened by a *brahmāstra* and takes shelter of Kṛṣṇa. Uttarā's response here is telling: The verse says she is running toward Kṛṣṇa "in fear." Her fear has driven her to His shelter. We are meant to read the *Bhāgavatam* and both honor the great devotees whose lives are displayed there and take the stories personally, almost allegorically, to learn how a soul is meant to act when faced with various circumstances. We can truly enter the pages of the *Bhāgavatam* and be present both in experiencing difficulties and in making the prayers these great devotees make along with them.

PERSONAL COMMENT

I fudged answering a few questions that were submitted to me. One devotee who gave me the long question about global warming and the predicted disappearance of the Ganges asked, "Will the Ganga leave sooner than predicted, as is already the case with the Sarasvatī River?" I didn't answer; I'm not Nostradamus.

Also, in my answer to the question, "Can you kindly explain how the Pāṇḍavas, who are eternal associates of the Lord, have a previous *sukṛti*?" I cited as evidence Śrī Kṛṣṇa's statement that Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna had many lives together but Kṛṣṇa remembers

them, whereas Arjuna forgets. That reference, however, is not a direct answer to his question. Arjuna was always liberated and with Kṛṣṇa, but Arjuna forgot; it doesn't state that he became Kṛṣṇa's friend at Kurukṣetra as a result of past pious activity. The statement that a section of cowherd friends of Gopāla did accrue pious activities in past lives implies that these souls were *not* always liberated. Maybe they were demigods. In other words, I am not always razor sharp or always have a mind "like a steel trap" in my arguments and reasoning. At least in this past pious life's answer, I did some bluffing. And sometimes I don't know the answer but just accept their question as an unanswered, interesting comment. So it's "poor man's."

And how to deal with a question like this: "I have read that all living entities are generated from *tatastha-śakti.*" (*Cc. Madhya* 20.108–109) Living entities can be influenced by the internal or external potency of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Please explain how living entities behave while under the influence of *tatastha-śakti.* Is the marginal potency an intermediate state between *prādhāna* and *prakṛti*? How long do they belong to this region of marginal energy of the Lord? What is the characteristic of marginal potency with regards to internal and external potencies? If the Supreme Lord can expand Himself into the tiny souls with separate individualities for His enjoyment, why do they have to be covered by the illusory energy? Does the covering not create a virtual entity within the particle of spirit being forgetful of its oneness with the Supreme in order for the living entity to display a separate individuality? It is said that even the soul does not belong to us, as the only thing we have is our relationship with Kṛṣṇa. Are we just a temporary instance in time with no factual existence?"

Also, I was poor in answering the question, "How can we apply Śrīla Prabhupāda's purport to protect the *brāhmaṇas*, cows, children, women and old people?"

It's a relief to come here and be myself. Sitting at the dinner table, I become a little crazy by the talk. None of it is about Kṛṣṇa.

I would like to talk about Him as I do in my book. If people would ask me questions, it would help.

You want to talk about Him?
There's nothing stopping you.
But you sit silently while
chit-chat fills the air.

You feel frustration that
there's no *kṛṣṇa-kathā*
only small talk
about the enchiladas,
a film on Iwo Jima,
the habits of young teenagers.

I have plenty to say from *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*
and write it here in my
śāstric section. But off the page,
I can find no one
to talk with on the
Bhaktivedanta purports and
I won't instigate it myself.

The hours and days go by.

If we don't talk more about Kṛṣṇa, it's my fault. No one is gagging me. I just have to make the effort.

But you profess you like a mix in your writing and in your life. A Westerner who adds Kṛṣṇa to his life.

Get me out of here (I mean out of this material world). To do so you have to be a hundred percent dedicated to Kṛṣṇa, transcendental.

Every day we spend about a half hour sitting in a gazebo on the boardwalk, people-watching. Is that okay? Mix. Walk a half mile despite your bad ankle. Eat Thrasher's all-vegetarian French fries.

VERSE 11

sūta uvāca
upadhārya vacas tasyā bhagavān bhakta-vatsalaḥ
apāṇḍavam idaṁ kartuṁ drauṇer astram abudhyata

"Sūta Gosvāmī said: Having patiently heard her words, Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who is always very affectionate to His devotees, could at once understand that Aśvatthāmā, the son of Droṇācārya, had thrown the brahmāstra to finish the last life in the Pāṇḍava family.'"

COMMENT

The Lord wanted the Pāṇḍava family to rule the world because they were all pure devotees. For this reason, He vanquished the rule of the company of Duryodhana and established the rule of Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira. He also wanted to protect Mahārāja Parīkṣit. Does Kṛṣṇa's protection extend to our material family?

The members of a pure devotee's family receive the protection (liberation) of Kṛṣṇa for fourteen generations forward and back.

What are ways for us to attract Kṛṣṇa's protection?

We attract Kṛṣṇa's protection by believing that we have no other protector than Him. This is one of the symptoms of *śaraṇāgati*, or surrender. The belief is not just theoretical but carried out in the field of practical action.

Should we understand the mercy which descends from Śrī guru as Kṛṣṇa's protection? How do we recognize such mercy? How much must we endeavor to receive such mercy?

In the *Śrī Gurvaṣṭakam*, a verse describes *śrī guru* as a direct representative of Kṛṣṇa and therefore he deserves to be treated as good as Kṛṣṇa (*sākṣād-dharitvena samasta-śāstrair/ uktas tathā bhāvyata eva sadbhiḥ/ kinto prabhor yaḥ priya eva tasya/ vande guroḥ śrī-caraṇāravindam*). The first verse of *Śrī Gurvaṣṭakam* also describes the spiritual master as the raincloud of mercy who

puts out the fire of material life, repeated birth and death. So this is Kṛṣṇa's protection. One who has been initiated by a bona fide spiritual master should endeavor by all means to please him, because in this way, he pleases Kṛṣṇa. And if he does not please the spiritual master, then his whereabouts are unknown (*yasya prasādād bhagavat-prasādo/ yasyāprasādān na gatiḥ kuto 'pi/ dhyāyan stuvaṁs tasya yaśas tri-sandhyaṁ/ vande guroḥ śrī-caraṇāravindam*).

Does the principle of Kṛṣṇa's partiality toward His devotees apply in all cases or only with very advanced devotees?

In the *Bhagavad-gītā*, Kṛṣṇa says, *ye yathā māṁ prapadyante tāṁs tathaiva bhajāmy ahaṁ*. He reciprocates with all living beings according to their surrender unto Him. There are different classes of devotees, and Kṛṣṇa reciprocates with them according to their surrender. The materialistic devotee known as *kaniṣṭha-adhikārī* sees Kṛṣṇa in the Deity form but does not see Him in other devotees or other spirit souls. The more advanced devotee is known as *madhyama-adhikārī*, and he sees Kṛṣṇa in four types of people: in devotees more advanced than he (whom he serves); in devotees on the same level as he (with whom he is friendly); in innocent persons (whom he assists in coming to Kṛṣṇa consciousness); and in atheistic people (whom he avoids). Then there is the most advanced devotee, the *uttama-adhikārī*, who sees all living beings as worthy of his service. He does not make distinctions among them. (In order to preach, one must come to the platform of *madhyama-adhikārī*, so that he can make distinctions and preach to those who are less advanced and avoid the atheists. Śrīla Prabhupāda was an *uttama-adhikārī*. He made distinctions and preached the glories of the Lord to all classes of people.) Kṛṣṇa's partiality is more bestowed upon the advanced devotees than on the less advanced.



VERSE 12

tarhy evātha muni-śreṣṭha pāṇḍavāḥ pañca sāyakān
ātmano 'bhimukhān dīptān ālakṣyāstrāṇy upādaduḥ

"O foremost among the great thinkers [munis] [Śaunaka], seeing the glaring brahmāstra proceeding towards them, the Pāṇḍavas took up their five respective weapons."

COMMENT

Kṛṣṇa is the cause of all causes. Therefore is He the one behind the throwing of the *brahmāstra*?

Not a blade of grass moves without the will of the Lord. So He allows Aśvatthāmā to discharge the *brahmāstra* and throw it at Uttarā. At the same time, He is the protector of the devotee, and so He gives protection to the embryo in the womb of Uttarā.

Aśvatthāmā is attacking the Pāṇḍavas, a mother (Uttarā), and her unborn child, Mahārāja Parīkṣit. He is using a fierce and precise weapon, so there is no question of his targets and his intent to destroy them. It is more than an act of war. Is this a case of a demoniac person attacking a devotee in order to fulfill both the desire of the devotees being attacked, to take shelter of Kṛṣṇa, and the desire of Kṛṣṇa to protect His devotees?

Kṛṣṇa is orchestrating all the roles. He does this in order to enjoy His position as *bhakta-vatsala*, the one who is inclined toward His devotees.

The Pāṇḍavas took up their weapons, although they are being described as being fully dependent on Kṛṣṇa. Why would they defend themselves or fight back?

Being dependent on Kṛṣṇa does not mean that one sits back and expects Kṛṣṇa to do everything. "God helps those who help themselves." Arjuna surrendered to Kṛṣṇa on the battlefield of Kurukṣetra, and the Lord asked Arjuna to take up his weapons and fight.

VERSE 13

vyasanaṁ vīkṣya tat teṣām ananya-viṣayātmanām
sudarśanena svāstreṇa svānāṁ rakṣāṁ vyadhād vibhuḥ

"The almighty Personality of Godhead, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, having observed that a great danger was befalling His unalloyed devotees, who were fully surrendered souls, at once took up His Sudarśana disc to protect them."

COMMENT

Lord Kṛṣṇa had taken a vow not to take part in the fighting at the Battle of Kurukṣetra. But He also has a longstanding vow, as recorded in *Bhagavad-gītā*, that His devotees are never to be vanquished. "And He behaves according to the quality or the degree of devotional service rendered by the devotees... The Pāṇḍavas were cent percent dependent on the protection of the Lord, although they were all great warriors themselves." When Kṛṣṇa saw that the Pāṇḍavas were about to be vanquished by Aśvatthāmā's *brahmāstra*, He took up His personal weapon, the Sudarśana disk, to protect them. Thus He broke His vow not to fight. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "But the emergency was more important than the vow. He is better known as the *bhakta-vatsala*, or the lover of His devotees, and thus He'd prefer to continue as *bhakta-vatsala* than to be a worldly moralist who never breaks his solemn vow."

Is there a level to be reached in our devotion that we can always expect the Lord's protection?

A devotee expects the Lord's protection, but he does not demand the form in which it comes. He may give us protection by leaving us materially bereft. He may thrust us into dangerous situations. But He never fails us as long as we remember Him and call out to Him. We must have full faith in Kṛṣṇa's statement in the *Bhagavad-gītā*, "Declare it boldly, Arjuna, My devotee will

never be vanquished." Even if everything is taken away from a devotee, he goes on serving Kṛṣṇa in great humility and feels Kṛṣṇa's protection. Kṛṣṇa does not guarantee to protect all the devotees' material assets, or even a devotee's reputation. But as long as one is a hundred percent sold out to Kṛṣṇa, the Lord will reciprocate and protect the devotee's devotional service.

Is it acceptable to desire recognition from the spiritual master, or is it inappropriate and a version of materially seeking a distinction?

One should always desire to please the spiritual master. One should serve with complete surrender but not hanker for recognition. This is the meaning of working with great humility. The devotee thinks that he is not worthy to be recognized. He thinks that if the spiritual master looks into his soul, he will find dirty things, and he will find the disciple to be unworthy of recognition. On the other hand, the spiritual master recognizes every sincere disciple and bestows his blessings upon them. The well-known saying "one should deserve then desire" applies here.

It's interesting to note that the Pāṇḍavas take up their weapons even in Kṛṣṇa's presence, even with assurance that He will protect them. They are dependent on His will but are still prepared to act. But there is a contrast here with the pastime where Draupadī is about to be disrobed in the assembly. There, Kṛṣṇa waited until she had exhausted all her own resources and turned to Him exclusively. It's also interesting to note the parallel between this pastime and the one in which Aśvatthāmā threw the *brahmāstra* at Arjuna. In that other incident, Kṛṣṇa did not take up weapons (Prabhupāda mentions His vow while the battle of Kurukṣetra was going on) but instructed Arjuna to shoot his own *brahmāstra* and then withdraw both. The Lord acts differently in different situations with different devotees according to His sweet will.

In the purport, Prabhupāda says that Kṛṣṇa protects His devotees in relation to their surrender to Him. Why is that? If Kṛṣṇa's goal was to increase His aspiring devotees' surrender, showing them His full protection openly would serve to increase

their affection and surrender, would it not?

Kṛṣṇa protects the devotees who are most advanced and surrendered to Him. They have no other protection than Kṛṣṇa. The less advanced devotees still maintain some attachment to something other than Kṛṣṇa and don't fully surrender. To them, Kṛṣṇa only reveals His partial protection. He protects all devotees, but He reserves the right to give fuller protection to the devotees who are more surrendered. This is the meaning of *bhakta-vatsala*: Kṛṣṇa being inclined toward His pure devotees.

What is the best way to develop a sense of dependence on the protection of the Lord instead of relying on our own talents and strength?

It is not that we have to live like complete external renunciates without any means of support or without any social relations. One can be a householder with wife and children and still live in dependence on Kṛṣṇa. One earns a living at a job and spends much of his money on family maintenance, but always knows that whatever he does, his material and spiritual success is dependent on Kṛṣṇa. The fact is, we are all dependent on the protection of the Lord and can do nothing on our own. Awareness of this fact can constitute the sense of dependence in a devotee. As Kṛṣṇa says in *Bhagavad-gītā*, "Whatever you do, do it for Me." The devotee living in the world acts according to his proclivity but as far as possible offers the results to Kṛṣṇa. He gives thanks to the Lord for protection, and by personal experience becomes more and more aware that Kṛṣṇa is acting in his life and that he is not succeeding by his own talents and strength.

PERSONAL COMMENT

My life has taken a distressing turn. Something from my past has been exposed again. It is too private to mention here, but I'm in for big trouble, and it's going to be an ordeal.

Feeling depressed
even after manning the Questions and Answers

booth with Jayādvaita Mahārāja
at the Philly Ratha-yātrā.

Wrote a letter in my defense,
humble yet assertive—
but will it fly?

Fallen *sannyāsī*
who stabilized himself;
give him a break—
Prabhupāda would.

VERSE 14

antaḥsthaḥ sarva-bhūtānām ātmā yogeśvaro hariḥ
sva-māyayāvṛṇod garbhaṁ vairāṭyāḥ kuru-tantave

"The Lord of supreme mysticism, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, resides within everyone's heart as the Paramātmā. As such, just to protect the progeny of the Kuru dynasty, He covered the embryo of Uttarā by His personal energy."

COMMENT

According to *Bhagavad-gītā* 18.61, the Supreme Lord is situated in everyone's heart. But then according to *Brahmā-saṁhitā*, Paramātmā is also situated within every atom. *Aṇḍāntara-stha-paramāṇu-cayāntara-sthaṁ* (*Bs* 5.35). Now if I say He is situated in my heart, is He not in my hand, as He is already present within every atom? What does it mean when it is said that He is present within every atom?

Kṛṣṇa is everywhere, and therefore He is called Vāsudeva. He

is present in a gigantic universal form, as He displayed to Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukṣetra. He is also present in a minute form of Paramātmā within every atom. It is not a mechanistic universe without God, even on a molecular level. God operates even there. In His four-armed Viṣṇu form He is present within every atom.

We may wonder whether it is actually Paramātmā prompting someone when a person says his conscience tells him that something is right or wrong. Is it correct to say that what one calls conscience is actually Paramātmā?

The conscience of a pure devotee is certainly the prompting of Paramātmā because he is always in tune with Kṛṣṇa. Even a thief is sometimes nagged in his conscience because he knows that he is doing wrong, yet he goes ahead anyway and does it because of his greed and bad association. When one falls to a very low state of behavior, he does not have much touch with his moral conscience or with Paramātmā. In this case, Paramātmā leniently gives the evil-minded person intelligence to do his nefarious deeds. The sense of right and wrong is covered. In a good man, Paramātmā and conscience are almost the same thing.

What is the correlation between desires and thoughts? How are one's desires manifest into thoughts?

There is a progression from thinking to feeling to willing. At first a person gets an idea of something he might want to do, but it has not yet stirred him into action. The more he thinks about it, however, he starts to feel desires to carry it out. Finally, he enters the willing stage and does the good or evil deed.

Do we have control over our desires and thoughts?

A yogi does. He is called *gosvāmī*, or one who controls the mind and senses. One who is controlled by his own senses and desires is called *godāsa*.

According to the *Monier-Williams Dictionary*, *parīkṣit* means to look around, inspect, try, find out, observe, perceive; *parikṣayate* means to cause to examine or investigate. Another root, *parikṣana*, means testing, experiment, investigation. Mahārāja Parīkṣit was

personally saved in the womb by the beautiful form of Paramātmā. When he was finally born safely, he looked around, seeking the beautiful form he saw in the womb. Thus his name means "examiner." All his life he tried to see again the beautiful form which appeared to him in the womb of his mother, but he was never able to duplicate that vision.

Kṛṣṇa did not attack Aśvatthāmā. He only neutralized and protected against his weapon. He protected Uttarā's womb and the child Mahārāja Parīkṣit with His Supersoul manifestation. He protected the Pāṇḍavas with His Sudarśana disk. There is no distinction between Kṛṣṇa's protecting the devotees as Paramātmā or as Bhagavān.



VERSE 15

yadyapy astraṁ brahma-śiras tv amoghaṁ cāpratikriyam
vaiṣṇavaṁ teja āsādya samaśāmyad bhṛgūdvaha

"O Śaunaka, although the supreme brahmāstra weapon released by Aśvatthāmā was irresistible and without check or counteraction, it was neutralized and foiled when confronted by the strength of Viṣṇu [Lord Kṛṣṇa]."

COMMENT

In his purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda describes the Lord's energy as the *brahmajyoti*. This effulgence is the rays of the Lord, just as the sun rays are rays of the sun disk. Although the *brahmāstra* weapon is irresistible, it could not surpass the strength of the Lord. Another significant point is that Lord Kṛṣṇa counteracted the weapon by Himself, with no outside help. "He did not wait for any other's help because He is absolute." Absolute means

one without a second. The *Webster's International Encyclopedic Dictionary* defines "absolute" as follows: "Free from restriction and relation; unlimited; independent; complete; perfect; pure. Total; unquestionable." These definitions may all be applied to Kṛṣṇa.

As far as *Bhāgavatam* readers are concerned, Aśvatthāmā might as well be considered the face of the enemy. In the First Canto, Chapters Seven and Eight, he's the only one seen wielding *brahmāstras* intending to wipe out the Pāṇḍavas. He is a would-be instrument trying insanely to please his guru, yet is defeated both in his fighting activities and understanding the desire of his guru. This time, Aśvatthāmā's *brahmāstra* is neutralized by Kṛṣṇa; in Chapter Seven, it is stopped by Arjuna. It is certainly strange and wonderful by modern standards that even after this string of inexcusable crimes, Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa have to "settle" for cutting off his hair and jewel. It seems profoundly inequitable. Nevertheless, they followed the desires of Draupadī and spared the *brahma-bandhu* his life.

In *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, First Canto, Chapter Five, Śrīla Prabhupāda says that the *Vedānta-sūtra* is a deliberation on the impersonal Brahman. How is this to be understood in light of the fact that the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* is personal?

The *Vedānta-sūtra* is ultimately a description of the Personality of Godhead, although given in philosophical "sutras" or codes that need further explanation. Or rather, they need no explanation if understood as they are. Since the Māyāvādī interpretation of *Vedānta-sūtra* by Śaṅkarācārya, his followers have taken *Vedānta-sūtra* to be an impersonalistic text. Lord Caitanya listened to the impersonal understanding of *Vedānta-sūtra* from Sārvabhauma Bhattācārya for seven days without making any comments. When Sārvabhauma asked the Lord why He did not speak anything or whether He understood, Lord Caitanya said that He understood Vedānta perfectly, but not the interpretations of the Bhattācārya. At the Bhattācārya's request, Lord Caitanya then described the real meaning of *Vedānta-sūtra*. In *Bhagavad-gītā*, Lord Kṛṣṇa says that He is the Vedānta and that He is the originator of Vedānta

and the object of Vedānta (*vedānta-kṛd veda-vid eva cāham*). (*Bg.* 15.15)



VERSE 16

mā maṁsthā hy etad āścaryaṁ sarvāścaryamaye 'cyute
ya idaṁ māyayā devyā sṛjaty avati hanty ajaḥ

"O brāhmaṇas, do not think this to be especially wonderful in the activities of the mysterious and infallible Personality of Godhead. By His own transcendental energy, He maintains and annihilates all material things, although He Himself is unborn."

COMMENT

It is not wonderful that Śrī Kṛṣṇa was able to neutralize the weapon thrown by Aśvatthāmā. Just consider: "He maintains and annihilates all material things." The devotees fully appreciate and worship the Lord of inconceivable energies, whereas the nondevotees are baffled by Him and do not accept His greatness. Even the demigods like Śiva, Brahmā, and even Lord Nārāyaṇa "possess only different percentages of such perfection. . . He is unrivaled." (*Bhāg.* 1.8.16, purport)

It is said that what we think of ourselves (*aham*) is a measure of how humble we are. We can extrapolate it a little by thinking, "How much we know about Kṛṣṇa's greatness and His transcendental qualities determines our humbleness." The more we know and feel the all-merciful, all-loving, all-attractive, all-beautiful and compassionate nature of Kṛṣṇa, the more we are humbled. In this way, all the great souls like Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura and Śrīla Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura know and feel so much about Kṛṣṇa, and hence they are so humbled.

How do we clear the mind and bring it back to focus on Kṛṣṇa?

We have to be more conscious in daily activities and thoughts so that they are centered on Kṛṣṇa, but it is not easy. We find ourselves thinking or daydreaming about how we can enjoy separately from Kṛṣṇa. When we bring our thoughts back to Kṛṣṇa, the mind feels so much clearer. We must keep our thoughts on the right track. We really want to clean out our minds. We feel there is so much garbage cluttered there from the past few years. Sometimes it is overwhelming. We want to focus on Kṛṣṇa and not sense gratification, but that desire for sense gratification keeps creeping back! The practical way to control the mind and become a better devotee is to engage in *kīrtana* and reading *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. When devotees gather for *kīrtana* and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* class, they gain the greatest opportunity for mental control and pacifying their troubled minds in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Kṛṣṇa is comprehensible and yet simultaneously incomprehensible; we are given some tiny insight by the grace of the *Bhāgavatam* and the Lord in the heart. But we should stop the tendency of the mind to *always* want to know the Lord's purpose or plan before we act. It sometimes comes down to "You want me to act, but I cannot make sense of what You want me to do. So (the mind says) I will not act until *I* can make sense of it." This is a subtle form of *māyā*, demanding that we always understand something before we act.

PERSONAL COMMENT

"I am content that these journal pages show me to be what I am: noisy, full of the racket of imperfections and passions and the wide open wounds left by sin, full of faults and envies and miseries, full of my own intolerable emptiness. *Lord, my God, in You I trust. Let me not be put to shame forever.*" (Thomas Merton, *Dialogues with Silence*, p. 35)

I am in a state of traumatic fixation over what may happen.

We are having *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* classes every morning here. I love getting into the purports. Sometimes five or more people attend, sometimes only two. It helps me get my mind off my troubles. They can't take that away from me. ("The way you hold your knife/ the way you sip your tea/ the way you sing off-key/ —they can't take that away from me./ Oh no, they can't take that away from me.") (George and Ira Gershwin, *Shall We Dance*)

It occurs to me that I may be on the verge of rebound headache syndrome. Headaches are occurring at least every twenty-four hours, and I'm treating them with an over-the-counter medicine. All the medical literature describes rebound headache as coming from taking regular medicines to treat headaches. What happens is the medicines start causing the headaches. Your lack of medicine creates a "need" that triggers off another headache, and to relieve it, you take another med. It's a vicious cycle. The literature says there's no way out of it except to stop taking the medicines altogether for a long period of time. But they don't give the answer how to tolerate the pain.

Free writing means to improvise. In the Ken Burns documentary *The War*, they tell how the U.S. forces improvised in the D-Day attack. At first, the ground troops were slaughtered as they invaded onto the beach. They were cut down by machine-gun fire from the Germans in pillboxes. The U.S. Navy ships at sea were ineffective as they pounded shells at the Germans. The narrator said, "But then the Americans began to improvise." Against their original plan, the Navy pulled in within one thousand yards of the shore and began shelling the German gun placements more accurately. The soldiers on the beachhead began to creep forward (at great risk and loss of lives) instead of staying pinned down. They went around and behind the German pillboxes and routed out the machinegunners. This is the power of improvisation, doing what occurs to you at the moment instead of sticking to preconceived notions. But it involves risk.

Humid day
sitting by open window
in the midst of my troubles
awaiting letter from the government
like a letter from the draft board:
"Greetings. . ."

Nursing down last remnants
of a headache, hungering for
relief lunch
in an hour and a half.

This report is not all true,
I tell partial view to
protect myself.

But they cannot force
me to change my dress.
She said, "I have not heard
that anyone wishes to
excommunicate you."

Kerouac's Sketches:
"A 'tic' is a sudden thought
that enflames & immediately
disappears—"

My heart constricts
with pain. I have to force
myself to eat.
White butterfly flutters
in next-door neighbor's yard.

He says it has to haunt
you for it to be your true-poem.
I am haunted by
the early years before my infamy:

"Everyone loves Satsvarūpa,
he is a *sannyāsī's sannyāsī;*
ISKCON needs *sādhus* like him."

Haunted by the scepter
over me now.
Can you show your face?
Stand tall yet humbled?
The will judge me a
fallen.

"You have always been
accepted as a person of
integrity (you presented
yourself as such, demanded
it of others) so 'fess
up now and admit
your full guilt."

Prayers of Queen Kuntī:
"I wish that all those calamities would happen
again and again so that we could see You
again and again, for seeing You
means that we will no longer
see repeated births and deaths." (*Bhāg.* 1.8.25)

But how can *we* think like that?

He came into the room
to tell me lunch will be
twenty minutes late.
The eggplant parmesan
did not bake in the oven.
I told him of my heart pain.
He said, "There's an herbal tincture.
But you should have told us
when it began."

VERSE 17

brahma-tejo-vinirmuktair ātmajaiḥ saha kṛṣṇayā
prayāṇābhimukhaṁ kṛṣṇam idam āha pṛthā satī

"Thus saved from the radiation of the brahmāstra, Kuntī, the chaste devotee of the Lord, and her five sons and Draupadī addressed Lord Kṛṣṇa as He started for home."

COMMENT

This is the prelude to the prayers of Queen Kuntī. The purpose of her prayers is to glorify the Lord and to plead with Him not to leave but to stay with them. It is reminiscent of the scene when Kṛṣṇa left Vṛndāvana on a chariot of Akrūra. In both scenes, Kṛṣṇa's pure devotees request Him not to leave, and they are brokenhearted at the thought of His departure. They are dependent on Him for life and love. But the two scenes are entirely different in mood. In the case of Kṛṣṇa leaving Vṛndāvana, the *gopīs* did not compose philosophical and devotional prayers but acted in extreme distress beyond words. Some of them turned black, some of them threw themselves before the wheels of the chariot, and some of them grabbed the reins of the horses in an attempt to stop Kṛṣṇa's progress. They screamed and wailed. They were in the *rasa* of *mādhurya*, or conjugal love. By contrast, Queen Kuntī is in the parental *rasa*, since she is acting as Kṛṣṇa's aunt. She is more restrained, although in the absolute sense she is just as pure a devotee as the *gopīs*. As we will hear, she speaks composed and philosophical praises of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, which reveal a profound understanding of the Supreme Personality of Godhead and the intense surrender of a pure devotee.

In the Sanskrit to the verse, Kuntīdevī is described as *sati*, or chaste because of her unalloyed devotion to Lord Kṛṣṇa. A pure devotee doesn't look to any other living being or demigod, even when in great distress or danger. All of the Pāṇḍavas were

like that, and Kṛṣṇa helped them in all circumstances. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "Such a chaste devotee also never asks the Lord for help, but the Lord, out of His own accord, is always anxious to render it."

What are some good ways of cultivating in a practical way the quality of *sati*, chastity to the Lord?

One should only chant Kṛṣṇa's mantra, only worship Kṛṣṇa's Deity, and only honor Kṛṣṇa's *prasādam*. One may associate with all kinds of people, but one should reveal one's inner mind only to Kṛṣṇa's devotees. One should be chaste to one's own spiritual master. One meaning of this is that one may accept many *śikṣā* gurus, but only one *dīkṣā* guru. The followers of the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement are loyal followers of His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda. They read his books, listen to his lectures, follow his instructions, and hold him as the preeminent spiritual master in their lives.

In the purport, there is no mention of the spiritual master, only the exclusion of any other living beings and demigods. Should a devotee expect or hope for a direct relationship and reciprocation with Kṛṣṇa? If so, how do the spiritual master and other devotees fit into that relationship?

One can have a direct relationship with Kṛṣṇa only through the spiritual master. *Yasya prasādād bhagavat-prasādo. . .* Only if the spiritual master is pleased with you will Kṛṣṇa be pleased with you. Those who claim to be devotees of the Lord and not devotees of His devotees are pseudo-devotees.

Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "Such a chaste devotee also never asks the Lord for help, but the Lord, out of His own accord, is always anxious to render it." This is the sweet relationship of the Supreme Lord and His pure devotees. Immature, pious religionists cry out to God to rescue them from perilous situations. Advanced devotees take it that everything is always happening under the will of the Lord for their own good. They do not want to disturb Him with their special petitions of self-interest. As Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura says, *mānasa, deho, geho, yo kicho mora/ arpilūn tuyā pade, nanda-kiśora*, "My dear Lord, whatever I have

in my possession I surrender unto You. And what do I have? I have this body and mind, I have a little home and my wife and children, but whatever I have, I surrender everything unto You." (*Teachings of Queen Kuntī*, p. 38)

In response, the Lord desires to come to the rescue of His surrendered servants. As He states in *Bhagavad-gītā*, "Tell it boldly, Arjuna, My devotee will never perish."

VERSE 18

kunty uvāca
namasye puruṣaṁ tvādyam īśvaraṁ prakṛteḥ param
alakṣyaṁ sarva-bhūtānām antar bahir avasthitam

"Śrīmatī Kuntī said: 'O Kṛṣṇa, I offer my obeisances unto You because You are the original personality and are unaffected by the qualities of the material world. You are existing both within and without everything, yet You are invisible to all."

COMMENT

Now Queen Kuntī begins her prayers. Although Kṛṣṇa is her nephew, she addresses Him as the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Queen Kuntī asserts that the Lord is both within and without everything, and yet He is invisible to all. Kṛṣṇa reserves the right of not being exposed to persons who are not surrendered. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "This checking curtain is called the *māyā* energy of the Supreme Lord, and it controls the limited vision of the rebellious soul."

To devotees like Queen Kuntī who know Kṛṣṇa as their

relative and also as the Supreme Lord, their bewilderment is not ordinary. She has accepted the Lord's *yogamāyā* energy to take part in His pastimes, yet maintains full awareness: "Here is my Lord, Kṛṣṇa, who is within and without." Devotees in *yogamāyā* forget Kṛṣṇa's position as the Supreme Lord. Yet here is Queen Kuntī in relationship with Kṛṣṇa as her nephew and glorifying Him as the Supreme. *Yogamāyā* grants such devotees a kind of special *śakti* to understand these truths about the absolute and yet simultaneously maintain their relationship-mellow.

A devotee such as Queen Kuntī knows and accepts the truth about the Supreme Lord, yet she is described by Śrīla Prabhupāda as "puzzled": "Kuntī herself was puzzled about whether Śrī Kṛṣṇa is all-pervasive or localized." Śrī Kṛṣṇa's wonderful feats, such as the universal form or lifting of Govardhana Hill, amazed even His dearmost devotees, like Arjuna or His associates in Vraja.

It can be said of Śrī Kṛṣṇa that one of His wonderful qualities is that He delights in amazing even His friends and associates. And as to His devotees, they are not reacting with shock, as in, "How could the Lord possibly do this?" Because they *know* that He can. Actually witnessing His glorious activities (or taking part in them) permanently affects a devotee's consciousness, even if he already knows Kṛṣṇa has the capacity to do this.

Queen Kuntī is addressed here as an "enlightened lady," since she understands Kṛṣṇa is the original *puruṣa* beyond the material cosmos and is within and without all living beings. Then why does Kṛṣṇa still remain invisible? Is there any hope that someone in this age could come to Queen Kuntī's stature?

Śrī Kṛṣṇa does not remain invisible to Queen Kuntī. He is invisible to the rebellious persons who are under the material covering. It is not possible to come to Queen Kuntī's stature, since she is an eternal associate of Kṛṣṇa. But we can become "as good as" Queen Kuntī by our faith. If we enter her prayers and pray with her, then Queen Kuntī can become one with us. Accepting her transcendental knowledge in *parampara*, hearing her statements with great *śraddhā* qualifies us to become intimate

with the great lady's surrender. Queen Kuntī's prayers are not only offered in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* as expressions of her own elevated state, but are meant to inspire all devotees to rise to the highest level.

Śrīla Prabhupāda mentions that even Queen Kuntī was perplexed by Kṛṣṇa being present both within and without, and that Kṛṣṇa reserves the right of "not being exposed to persons who are not surrendered souls." In our attempt to share Kṛṣṇa consciousness with others, discerning who is "qualified" is sometimes puzzling too. How can we joyfully and liberally give Kṛṣṇa to others and yet not incur offenses to the holy name by giving Kṛṣṇa to "unsurrendered" souls?

We can follow the standard behavior for *madhyama-adhikārī*. They see people in four different categories. To superior persons, they offer their respect and service; to equals, they exchange in friendly, intimate ways. To innocent and not so advanced persons, they distribute Kṛṣṇa consciousness. But to the atheists and aggressively offensive persons, they do not share; they avoid them.

In his purport to this verse, Prabhupāda points out that Kṛṣṇa was playing the part of Kuntīdevī's nephew, and that Kuntīdevī could not make a mistake by offering obeisances unto her nephew. Therefore, she addressed Him as the original *puruṣa* beyond the material cosmos. In this situation, Kuntīdevī had to step out of her role as Kṛṣṇa's aunt and assume a mood of awe and reverence. In the guru/disciple relationship, the disciple worships the guru as good as God. Are there occasions when a disciple, in serving the guru, should assume a more intimate or personal mood toward the guru than the mood of awe and reverence appropriate to a worshiper of the servitor of Godhead? What might a disciple do to cultivate a relationship with the guru that is more deeply individualistic and responsive to the guru in his individuality?

The guru is not just a sage but the best friend of his disciples. All spiritual masters offer friendly exchanges with their disciples, especially those who are most active in service. While serving the spiritual master's mission, they will engage in intimate moments

where the spiritual master will tell stories and incidents from his life. The disciple can also reveal his mind in confidence. These icebreakers enliven both of them, introduce the human element into the relationship and help the disciple to serve the guru with all his soul.

Śrīla Prabhupāda states that the Lord's *māyā* "controls the limited vision of the rebellious soul." Can a soul see Kṛṣṇa while being situated in a material body? Can we see Kṛṣṇa face to face before becoming liberated from the cycle of birth and death?

Brahmā-saṁhitā says, *premāñjana-cchurita-bhakti-vilocane-na*. . . A pure devotee has eyes anointed with the salve of love for God, and he can see Kṛṣṇa. Without that pure love, one cannot see the Lord. Certainly one under the coverage of material *māyā* cannot see Him.

Great souls such as Queen Kuntī express puzzlement about their understanding of Lord Kṛṣṇa, which a typical member of ISKCON accepts as a very basic, simple point (Kṛṣṇa being all-pervasive and simultaneously localized). Is this because Śrīla Prabhupāda has explained everything so clearly that it leaves us little room to misunderstand these deep issues, or does it expose a tendency toward superficial acceptance of these matters?

Queen Kuntī's puzzlement is under the influence of spiritual *yogamāyā*. She is not actually puzzled by Kṛṣṇa's position but knows His identity very well. Certainly Śrīla Prabhupāda has made the philosophy very clear to us, so we understand Kṛṣṇa's position. But we cannot compare ourselves to Queen Kuntī in her depth of knowledge of Kṛṣṇa. To some degree our knowledge is theoretical, even though we receive it from a realized source. We have to admit that we are puzzled until we actually reach complete Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "Living entities are apt to fall down under the clutches of material nature, but the Lord is never like that." Kṛṣṇa is original. Everything that comes after, that emanates from Him, is by His invention, by His design. Why did He design the *jīvas* to be "apt to fall down" instead of apt to return home or inclined to rapidly learn not to lord it over?

The living entities are marginal energy. They were designed by the Lord to possess free will in a minute quantity, just as He has free will unlimitedly. Like the seashore, the *jīvas* may sometimes be overflooded by the ocean or sometimes dry at ebb tide. By misuse of free will, they become "apt to fall down." But by proper use of free will, they become inclined to quickly return back to Godhead. It is not Kṛṣṇa's fault; there is nothing wrong in His design or creation of the living entities. Their original nature is pure, but by bad association, wrong inclinations develop, and they remain stuck in this material world for repeated births and deaths.

PERSONAL COMMENT

Do these events bring me closer to Prabhupāda? Revisiting my shame before him and his disappointment in me. Revisiting my conviction that he forgives me and allows me to continue as *sannyāsī*. Bow low. You must be *akiñcana*, materially exhausted. No pride of intoxication over high office.

Hot puffed rice *prasadam*
act like a straight *sādhu*
in *sannyāsī* garb.

He doesn't watch movies
he tells the truth to
committees and ministers
who doubt his word now,
author of *Truthfulness,*
the Last Leg of Religion.

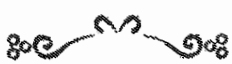
"If you're on a roll
don't let me disturb you."
Collie dogs barking next door.

Queen Kuntī said if you are
on the path of material
opulence and trying for
high education, good looks,
then you can't cry feelingly
to the Lord.

Prabhupāda said it's okay
to have riches like Americans
do. If you use it for Kṛṣṇa
it's a one before zeros.

Nonlinear avant-garde
books confusing to many.
He insists: explore human
dimension of devotional life.

Someone says nowadays
the GBC's mood is different:
They will allow me
to enter the *audārya dhama*
where I have not visited
for over ten years.
See the Pañca-tattva,
the beautiful city
rising from the rice fields.



VERSE 19

māyā-javanikācchannam ajñādhokṣajam avyayam
na lakṣyase mūḍha-dṛśā naṭo nāṭyadharo yathā

"Being beyond the range of limited sense perception, You are the eternally irreproachable factor covered by the curtain of deluding energy. You are invisible to the foolish observer, exactly as an actor dressed as a player is not recognized."

COMMENT

In the purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda describes some of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's pastimes when He appears in this world, acts which are humanly impossible. He mentions Lord Kṛṣṇa's killing the Pūtanā witch even when He was only a baby in His mother's lap. Similarly, Kṛṣṇa lifted Govardhana Hill when He was only about seven years old just to give protection to the residents of Vṛndāvana. All great *ācāryas* in the Vedic history accept Lord Kṛṣṇa as the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Kṛṣṇa also delivered the very best instructions in the shape of *Bhagavad-gītā*. He's accepted by great authoritative *ācāryas* from ancient times up until the present. "And yet there is a class of men with demoniac mentality who are always reluctant to accept the Lord as the Supreme Absolute Truth. This is partially due to their poor fund of knowledge and partially due to their stubborn obstinacy, which results from various misdeeds in the past and present." These are the reasons why *asuras* cannot accept Kṛṣṇa, even if He is present before them. Similarly, persons like the material scientists, who adjust everything by experimental knowledge, are not able to know the Supreme Person. He is *adhokṣaja*, or beyond the range of experimental knowledge.

In his commentary to this verse, Śrīdhara Svāmī expands on the two words *mūḍha-dṛśā* and *nalakṣyase*, the first meaning

"foolish observer,' explained as a person covered by body and mind, and the second meaning "not recognized," for which he adds the word *tvam*, indicating a personalist view. Yet He is the actor on the stage. So who is covered, the actor on the stage, by his dress and makeup, or the soul, who is covered by body and senses and because of blindness? Or are both covered? In other words, is the curtain of *māyā* around Kṛṣṇa or around the conditioned soul's vision?

Māyā is covering both the Lord and the individual soul. The Lord comes into this world covered by His deluding energy, and therefore the example is given that He is like an actor on a stage. The bewildered audience does not see the actor Sir Laurence Olivier on the stage, but they see the character Hamlet in Shakespeare's play. That is because the actor is so covered up by his dress and makeup. This is analogous to the Lord's coming, surrounded by His *māyā*. But the pure devotees of the Lord penetrate that curtain and can see the actual "actor" on the stage, just as the friends of Sir Laurence Olivier see him despite his covering as Hamlet. Devotees who are not covered see the actual Lord. Material *māyā* is only for the nondevotees. Pure devotees like the *Vrajavāsīs* do not even see the Lord as "Hamlet," but only as their dear friend.

Queen Kuntī accepts this inability of a conditioned soul to see Kṛṣṇa. For such neophytes, there must be temples, mosques or churches so that they can recognize the authority of the Lord and hear about Him from authorities in the holy temples. In the case of Vedic temples, the *arcā-vigraha* is present, and one can actually take *darśana* of the forms of Lord Kṛṣṇa, Śrīmatī Rādhārani, Gaura-Nitai, and so on. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "For less intelligent persons, bowing down before the authority of the Lord, as generally done in the temples, mosques or churches, is as beneficial as it is for the advanced devotees to meditate upon Him by active service." In other words, advanced devotional service is equated with temple worship. Yet it's a fact that most *kaniṣṭha-adhikārīs* go to church ceremonially, almost like ritual, or to attend some social function. Such persons' *anarthas* remain

intact, because there is very little attempt to change. So is the *ācārya* compassionately seeing the benefit in an absolute way, such as how we understand the concept of *ajñāta-sukṛti*? Is he mainly referring to the small but sincere number of individuals who go to the church or mosque actually to worship?

Prabhupāda is referring to both, to those who understand the deep meaning of attending the temple *darśana*, and those who go with little understanding. The temple is there for everyone in all levels of spiritual advancement. The benefit depends on the receptive power of the worshiper.

This verse speaks about two main points: that Kṛṣṇa is beyond the range of limited sense perception (He is *adhokṣaja*), and He is irreproachable. Those who are attached to their senses as means of knowledge, or who are foolish, cannot see Kṛṣṇa. Prabhupāda does not use the word "foolish" to mean the innocent. Rather, in his purport he writes about various types of *asuras* who actually deride Kṛṣṇa because they are unable to appreciate who He is, and they rebel against His authority. He says that the demoniac mentality is partly caused by ignorance and partly by the misfortunate results of past misdeeds. It is very difficult to help these persons overcome their handicaps, but the preachers take on the thankless task of trying to change their minds.

It can be said that the reason we can't see Kṛṣṇa, even though we have left the *asuric* world, is because we too rebel against Kṛṣṇa's authority. We can help ourselves by surrendering to the order of the spiritual master and engaging in the ninefold process of devotional service. Our rebellion has occurred since time immemorial, but a sincere reformation in one lifetime, by the grace of guru and Kṛṣṇa, can turn us from rebels to surrendered servants.

Kuntīdevī humbly accepts the natural defects of the conditioned soul as her own, yet she is able to see Kṛṣṇa standing before her and is able to converse with Him. Prabhupāda states that and then speaks about the importance of temples to teach people how to accept the Lord's authority. He is saying that if we bow down in the temple, accepting Kṛṣṇa's authority, then we

too will be able to see the Lord.

Many devotees say that when they look at the Deity in the temple, they don't actually see the Deity. It takes time for them to calm the mind in order to remove the focus from themselves and place it on Kṛṣṇa. We must approach the Deity with a calm mind in a sanctified atmosphere, with incense and flowers decorating the altar. The more the *pūjārīs* make the Deities beautiful by dress and arrangement, the easier it will be for us to enter the devotional atmosphere during *darśana*. And for ourselves, we should not rush into the temple with hasty *daṇḍavats* and a mind full of sense gratification. One should compose oneself before entering the holy place. One should think, "I am now going to see my beloved Kṛṣṇa in the *arcā-vigraha*. Let me do so with all reverence and take my mind off my own concerns." We can take full advantage of the devotional facility that seeing the Deity offers by regularly going before them, offering prostrated obeisances and prayers. It is best to worship one's own Deities in a *prabhu-datta deśa* and see the daily changes of clothes, smell the incense, take part in *bhajanas* with other devotees, and in this way calm the mind for auspicious reception of Deity worship.

Śrīla Prabhupāda gave a few lectures on this verse. In one, given in New York on April 10, 1973, he said the following: "*Aṇor aṇīyān mahato mahīyān* (*Kaṭha* 1.2.20). He is greater than the greatest. We generally say, 'God is great,' but we do not know how great He is. People say, 'God is great,' but we have no conception how great He is. He is so great that He can swallow innumerable universes within His belly.

"Just like when Kṛṣṇa was challenged by His mother that, 'Show me Your face. You say that You have not eaten the earth. Your friends complained, and You say that You have not eaten. So I want to see. Open Your mouth.' So when He opened, she saw all the universes within the mouth. All the universes. He proved, 'My dear mother, not only a little earth, but the whole universe is within My mouth.' (Laughter.) So when Mother Yaśodā was astonished, she thought something illusory, 'All right, don't do it again. That's all.' (Laughter.) She does not know that, 'Here is the

Supreme Personality of Godhead. To show me His mercy, He has become my child.' She does not know. She always thinks, 'Here is my child. He's under my control.'

"This is the relationship of the Supreme Personlity of Godhead with His devotees. This is wanted. Simply to understand, 'God is great,' that is not sufficient knowledge. When you deal with the great, exchange your relationship with the great, that is perfect. That is perfect. Suppose your president is very great. That's all right. Everyone knows, 'President is very great.' But what shall I derive out of that? When I actually deal with him, I become his friend, I become his servant, I become his secretary, I become. . . Some way or other, if I am related with that great personality, that is my benefit. Otherwise, what is the use knowing, 'Oh, President Nixon is very great'? What I am deriving from that great? This is Kṛṣṇa consciousness. The Māyāvādī philosophers, they simply remain silent, 'Oh, God is very great,' and they cannot imagine how great He is. But a devotee can understand how great He is. He can see that innumerable universes are within the mouth of God. This is the position of devotee. This is not sufficient knowledge: 'God is great. God must be great.' That's all right. But unless you come in dealing with that great, you cannot relish actually what is God and how great He is."

Prabhupāda writes in his purport, "Although all living entities are also transcendental, they are neither original nor infallible. The living entities are apt to fall down under the clutches of material nature, but the Lord is never like that." In another lecture on this verse, given in Chicago on July 4, 1974, Prabhupāda said something incidental but remarkable. He was asked, "Śrīla Prabhupāda, what do you consider is Gaurasundara's position presently?" Prabhupāda answered, "That you can, everyone can understand. (Slight laughter.) There is no explanation required."

What is the position of a devotee who is not in touch with other devotees? In *The Nectar of Instruction*, Prabhupāda defined ISKCON as a society for all forms of devotional exchanges. If someone leaves all these exchanges with devotees, what is his position? Prabhupāda seemed to avoid answering this question

after his lecture. But how did he deal in his actual practice with devotees who followed only one, two, or three regulative principles? Did he welcome them anyway, or did he turn his back on them?

Prabhupāda never turned his back on his disciples. Sometimes *sannyāsīs* fell down and left ISKCON. But Prabhupāda always welcomed them back. Sometimes devotees were gone for years at a time, but he always kept them in his heart, and whenever they showed up again, he showed his loving nature to them and softly welcomed them back. Even if they did not follow all the regulative principles, he was still kind to them and encouraged them.

In the question-and-answer session to the lecture in Chicago, Śrīla Prabhupāda was asked a seemingly unrelated question by a disciple: "In your *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* comments, and in the Seventh Chapter and Eighth Chapter (of *Ādi līlā*), you have been very much emphasizing this mantra, *śrī-kṛṣṇa-caitanya prabhu-nityānanda/ śrī-advaita gadādhara śrīvāsādi-gaura-bhakta-vṛnda.* You have asked your disciples to chant Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra at least sixteen times round on the beads. Can this Pañca-tattva mantra also be chanted afterwards, in addition, also on the beads?"

Prabhupāda: "No. No. I have advised that *śrī-kṛṣṇa-caitanya,* this Pañca-tattva mantra, must be chanted, but that is *kīrtana,* and this is *japa.* Sixteen rounds. It is called *japa.*"

Despite this statement by Prabhupāda, the chanting of Pañca-tattva mantra on beads has become almost a theological norm now in ISKCON. Similarly, gurus are rejected because of minor or singular mistakes or institutional politics, based on an incorrect translation of Narahari Sarakāra Ṭhākura's Sanskrit text. According to him, there is never a basis to reject a Vaiṣṇava for whatever mistakes, unless he is an *asura.*

Śrīla Prabhupāda speaks strongly against democracy. However, in other places, he supported democracy, as in his discussion with Hayagrīva and devotees in New Vṛndāvana (June 9, 1969):

Hayagrīva: "If I don't want this tree to be cut down and he

says, 'Cut down the tree,' does the tree get cut down? That's what I want to know. I say, 'I want this tree to stay there.' He says, 'We want to burn it for firewood.' Now does the tree stay or does it go?"

Prabhupāda: "Well, if... this deposition is very difficult to solve. (Laughter.) You want to stay, and he wants to burn it. (Laughter.)"

Hayagrīva: "Yes. I mean it will come down to something very basic like this, something very simple. Now you said that according to you, it should be burned. According to you... If the President is in charge, then if he says to cut it down, it gets cut down."

Prabhupāda: "No. The committee, the majority decision will be..."

Hayagrīva: "That's democracy. That's democracy. That's no good."

Prabhupāda: "Democracy? This is the age of..."

Hayagrīva: "I thought you said we should have enlightened monarchy."

Prabhupāda: "No. Monarchy is out of date now. When you form a committee..."

So for ISKCON, Prabhupāda apparently updated the Vedic standard of monarchy. In his Society, he formed the GBC, which would rule by a system of voting. Majority rules.

Śrīla Prabhupāda refers to "less intelligent" persons many times in this purport. While trying to be humble, I can think of myself as one of these less intelligent people. But then I don't seem to be guilty of the ways in which Śrīla Prabhupāda identifies these less intelligent people. How can I sincerely acknowledge that I am certainly a less intelligent person?

You are less intelligent because you have not fully surrendered to Kṛṣṇa. You may believe in Kṛṣṇa's superhuman activities, at least theoretically, and yet not be fully realized about the reality. You may not be an *asuric* scientist or empirical philosopher, and yet have figments of attachment to the empirical view of reality.

If we are in any way less than fully engaged in devotional service, we are less intelligent.

In his word-for-word transliteration, Śrīla Prabhupāda translates *adhokṣaja* as "beyond the material conception." Previously, we pondered that realization depends on the receptivity of the soul, but even after the highest stages of *bhāva*, does the Lord remain *acintya* to all souls, or is He ever fully accessed by any souls?

The Lord is accessible to all devotees in spontaneous devotion, *premā*, who realize their *siddha-svarūpa*, or eternal relationship with Him. Either in Vaikuṇṭha or Kṛṣṇa Loka, the devotees have a direct relationship with Kṛṣṇa and worship Him and play with Him. He is no longer beyond the range of their conception. They have attained the Kṛṣṇa conception, and Kṛṣṇa has become their all-in-all. The word *mamatā*, meaning "Kṛṣṇa is mine" is applicable here. Out of all of Kṛṣṇa's pure devotees, Śrīmatī Rādhārani is the most intimate with Kṛṣṇa and has the most direct access to Him.

PERSONAL COMMENT

"Wonderful that you can
relieve your H.A. with O.T.C.
with all this heavy stuff
hanging over your head."
"You're an individual, it's hard
for them to make you out. But
when they see you and see you're
sane, that will be good."
Conciliatory. Healing. Worth
aiming for. Don't go in
with adversarial mood. But you
know who you are. Everyone
wears *tilaka* and *dhotīs*.
Chase away the blues
with an afternoon walk
by the seaside.

Sit in a gazebo:
Nonsleepy *japa*.
Or don't go at all.
They have their preconceived
agenda to push:
"We talked to him in a gentlemanly
way but he wouldn't listen."
Then blast him on the internet.



VERSE 20

tathā paramahaṁsānāṁ munīnām amalātmanām
bhakti-yoga-vidhānārthaṁ kathāṁ paśyema hi striyaḥ

"You Yourself descend to propagate the transcendental science of devotional service unto the hearts of the advanced transcendentalists and mental speculators, who are purified by being able to discriminate between matter and spirit. How, then, can we women know You perfectly?"

COMMENT

In his purport to this verse, Śrīla Prabhupāda praises the simple spirituality of women as superior to mental speculators or those who display "showy insincere religious fervor." He writes, "Women... are blessed by the Lord because they believe at once in the superiority and almightiness of the Lord, and thus they offer obeisances without reservation... For this reason only, women generally assemble in great number in any sort of religious function. In every country and in every sect of religion, it appears that the women are more interested than the men." These statements contrast favorably to Prabhupāda's repeated

references to women as "less intelligent." Therefore it is a purport of singular importance, a kind of *mahā-vākya* statement that we may refer to when discussing Śrīla Prabhupāda's opinion of women.

It is interesting that the verse uses the word *amalātmanām* to describe those who are able to discern the difference between matter and spirit. This indicates that such persons are also pure in heart. Kṛṣṇa Himself has to reveal Himself to such persons; He is not discernible through the scholarship of the *munis* or anyone who is not searching purely for Him. So when Kuntīdevī asks, "How can we women (referring humbly to herself and all women, as well as all those who are less intelligent and less qualified for whatever reason) know the Lord?" We realize it is not by material qualifications that one receives Kṛṣṇa's mercy. Kṛṣṇa is attracted by the pure love of His devotees, and He reveals Himself to them. The quintessential line in the purport is Prabhupāda's statement that Kṛṣṇa knows the sincerity of purpose. "Sincerity is enough to override all our mistakes in service. Prabhupāda's last line is especially nice, particularly the praise, "this simplicity of acceptance," It seems to tie in well with Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's six symptoms of surrender, because accepting Kṛṣṇa's authority means accepting His protection, as well as whatever way He chooses to maintain us.

Queen Kuntī is extraordinarily pure and realized, and like all great souls, takes the humble position. Prabhupāda observes that she "accepts the deficiency of the conditioned soul, especially of the woman class, who are less intelligent." Yet her unique realizations separate her from being in the same class or category as most other women. This part of Queen Kuntī's wonderful prayer glorifies Lord Kṛṣṇa's position as being far out of the reach of mental speculators and places Queen Kuntī way above the level of these practitioners. She exemplifies how a woman should approach the Supreme Lord; she is an *ācārya* for all women. Śrīmatī Kuntīdevī is not exhibiting mundane humility or false modesty; therefore, in the face of her deep realizations, how could anyone accept her (or the woman class) as less intelligent? How can we know that we have sincerity of purpose?

We can know by acting sincerely. We take vows at the time of initiation, and if we actually carry them out, then we are sincere. Sincerity is not just lip service but action in the field of duty. A Vaiṣṇava is kind to all living entities, and as far as possible, he has to carry out that mission. He must be introspective and self-honest. He should sincerely hear the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and chant Hare Kṛṣṇa in the company of devotees. To claim that you are a devotee but not carry out the activities of a devotee, of a disciple, is to be insincere.

Sometimes neophyte devotees have the tendency to act or even speak humbly and yet speak and transmit a sense of being superior to others. True humility is expressed in this verse by Queen Kuntī.

In *Bhagavad-gītā* 3.42, Kṛṣṇa teaches *buddhi-yoga* and the role of intelligence in spiritual life. Prabhupāda writes, "With intelligence one has to seek out the constitutional position of the soul and then engage the mind always in Kṛṣṇa consciousness." This is *buddhi-yoga*. Again, in this *Bhāgavatam* verse (*Bhāg.* 1.8.19), the role of intelligence in spiritual life is mentioned, but in a context of women being "less intelligent" (in Kuntīdevī's humility). We may take the issue about women being less intelligent to mean that women may strongly identify with the body if they do not apply the principle of *buddhi-yoga*. But those who apply *buddhi-yoga*—Vaiṣṇavas—are the most intelligent (as Prabhupāda explains in *Teachings of Queen Kuntī*).

VERSE 21

kṛṣṇāya vāsudevāya devakī-nandanāya ca
Nanda-gopa-kumārāya govindāya namo namaḥ

"Let me therefore offer my respectful obeisances unto the Lord, who has become the son of Vasudeva, the pleasure of Devakī, the boy of Nanda and the other cowherd men of Vṛndāvana, and the enlivener of the cows and the senses."

COMMENT

Lord Kṛṣṇa descends to the earth in order to show His special mercy to His devotees and to diminish the influence of the demons. Queen Kuntī especially adores the descent of Lord Kṛṣṇa above all other incarnations because He is more approachable. Mahārāja Nanda and Yaśodāmayī are even more exalted than Queen Kuntī because they could relish the Lord's childhood pastimes, which are the most attractive. Prabhupāda writes, "Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu therefore confirmed that no one is as fortunate as the residents of Vrajabhūmi, and specifically the cowherd girls, who dedicated their everything for the satisfaction of the Lord."

In this verse, Kuntīdevī offers her obeisances to Kṛṣṇa while calling out His names in relation to His devotees. Prabhupāda says she chooses these particular names because she "adores" His incarnation as Kṛṣṇa above all other incarnations, because as Kṛṣṇa He is more approachable. Prabhupāda lists the reasons for Kṛṣṇa's accessibility in his description and praise of Kṛṣṇa's Vṛndāvana pastimes. But Kuntīdevī did not personally witness these pastimes. She didn't even meet Kṛṣṇa until at least His *mādhurya-līlā*. What, then, is it about Him that makes Him approachable to Her?

Kuntīdevī has her intimate relationship with Kṛṣṇa as His aunt. She was dependent on Him because of all the calamities that befell her and her sons the Pāṇḍavas at the hands of Duryodhana and Dhṛtarāṣṭra. So He became very approachable to her as her protector.

Prabhupāda's purport to this text strikes us as a challenge to those who do not agree with Kuntīdevī's statement that Kṛṣṇa is irreproachable (verse 19), as in his comparison between Kṛṣṇa and Rāma, for example. As Rāma, the Lord "remained a king's son from His very childhood." He also upheld the *kṣatriya's dharma*—we think of His honesty and integrity when He accepted His father's order that He be banished, His protection of Sītā, and His rulership when he returned. He was an absolutely moral authority. As Kṛṣṇa, however, He leaves the palace and goes to

play on the "lap of Yaśodāmayī" as an ordinary cowherd boy. In Vṛndāvana He engages in all kinds of pastimes, including dancing with the *gopīs*, etc.—pastimes in which He could be reproachable. But as Kṛṣṇa, He is entirely transcendental and beyond worldly dharma. He engages the prerogative of the independent Supreme Personality of Godhead but is never tainted with the slightest tinge of corruption.

Prabhupāda writes in the purport, "The Lord, being thus unapproachable by any material assets, only out of unbounded and causeless mercy descends as He is in order to show His special mercy on His unalloyed devotees. . ." A devotee was talking to a Godbrother who was scheduled to take *sannyāsa*, and he asked him, "How can you be so detached and happy?" The *sannyāsa* candidate smiled and said that he met devotees when he was very young—"I'm a mercy case of the devotees." The other devotee thought that he also had met devotees when he was young but that he was not feeling that way. He hankered for the mercy, but always thought that somehow or other it escaped him and that he was a hopeless case. He said he thought like that not because he wanted more mercy but because he needed it. He asked, "What is better, to be a pure *paramahaṁsa* devotee, *naistika*, in all respects, or a poor fallen soul longing for mercy despite all tribulations of an existence that is hardly devotional and is full of stress and anxiety?"

It is certainly better if one can be situated as a *naistika brahmacārī*, as a pure devotee. But one has to be honest. If one is actually struggling and feeling that he is not receiving mercy, he has to call out for it and do his best to keep his head above the material ocean.

Here is another reference to the theme of "Poor Man versus Pure Man" (from Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's *Baul Samgit*, 1.3–4):

"By chanting the holy name, all your sinful reactions and material miseries will be cast far away. This world will become full of wonderful meaning for you, there will be no more fear, and you will be immersed in the ocean of pure joy.

"I myself am now quite wretched and indeed destitute, for by

arranging to bring the Lord's holy name here I have fallen into great debt. Seeing me as a soul stricken with extreme poverty, please hand over to me the price of your faith."

Prabhupāda commented on this verse in Māyāpura on October 1, 1974. He said, "Therefore *brāhmaṇa* is given the title Paṇḍita. Still in India they say *brāhmaṇa-paṇḍita. Brāhmaṇa* must be a Paṇḍita, a learned. A *brāhmaṇa* rascal is not *brāhmaṇa.* 'You are. . . what you are?' 'I am *brāhmaṇa.*' 'What do you do?' 'Now, I pull *thela.*' So that is not *brāhmaṇa. Brāhmaṇa* means *paṇḍita.* He must be a learned man. *Paṭhana-pāṭhana-yajana-yājana-dāna-pratigrahaḥ.* These are the *brāhmaṇa's* occupational duty. He must be a learned scholar himself, and he would try to make others also learned scholars, *paṭhana-pāṭhana,* not that, 'I know.' If you know something better, means very valuable, you must distribute it. Otherwise, in Sanskrit language they are called *jñāna-khala*: 'miser in knowledge.'"

A devotee once asked Prabhupāda, "How can we deliver others if we are not perfect?" He replied that we must not be expert only in exporting the knowledge. We have to be truly expert ourselves. The question still remains: how can a person who is not as great as a *brāhmaṇa* in the Vedic society give away this beautiful, most perfect mantra? How can the imperfect deliver the perfect? Prabhupāda would say, "I may be imperfect, but if I speak what Kṛṣṇa says, then that is also perfect." The Prabhupādānuga is in touch with the same *śakti.*

At the end of a lecture in New York City, Prabhupāda said, "So by following in the footprints of devotees like Kuntī, we shall be able to understand as she's pointing out: *kṛṣṇāya vāsudevāya devakī-nandanāya ca, nanda-gopa-kumārāya.* This is Kṛṣṇa's identification. Just like we take identification of a person: 'What is your father's name?' So here we're giving, presenting God with His father's name, with His mother's name, with His address." (Lecture on *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam,* New York, April 10, 1973)

Speaking about Kṛṣṇa's address, Viśvanātha Cakravartī points out that the two names of Nanda Kumāra and Govinda refer to different ages and *līlās,* one to His *kumara-līlā* and another to

kiśora-līlā in the mood of *mādhurya*.

When writing, reading, or commenting on the *Bhāgavatam*, should one strive to achieve this ability to see deep into the meaning, into the *rasa*, or would that be an extra endeavor that is not essential for understanding the *Bhāgavatam*? One may say that to see everything through the eyes of the Tenth Canto is not right, but then we may get confused because of Prabhupāda's statement here because we are "presenting God with His address," i.e., we shall understand we are presenting Him in Vṛndāvana, His abode of sweetness, His home. Kuntī, after all, was not a Vraja *gopī*, but still she presented Him as Nanda-gopa-Kumāra, did she not?

It is not necessary to inject Tenth Canto purports into every verse of the early cantos of the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. Yet Prabhupāda often did that in his purports. So it is best to simply study the enriched Bhaktivedanta purports and take the *vraja-līlā* as it is given by him.

Queen Kuntī is appreciating Kṛṣṇa as Govinda because in this form He is most approachable. And yet we hear many times that of all the Lord's forms, Kṛṣṇa is the most intimate and difficult to know. For example, in the *Bhagavad-gītā*, we read, "O Arjuna, as the Supreme Personality of Godhead, I know everything that has happened in the past, all that is happening in the present, and all things that are yet to come. I also know all living entities, but Me no one knows."(*Bg.* 7.26) In his purport to this *Bhagavad-gītā* verse, Prabhupāda writes, "As it is stated in the third verse of this chapter, out of millions and millions of men, some try to become perfect in this human form of life, and out of thousands and thousands of such perfected men, hardly one can understand what Lord Kṛṣṇa is. Even if one is perfected by realization of impersonal Brahman or localized Paramātmā, he cannot possibly understand the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, *without being in Kṛṣṇa consciousness*." (Emphasis added.) The key to understanding the inconceivable Lord is to be His submissive devotee. Then approaching Him becomes very easy. Without accepting the line of Kṛṣṇa consciousness in *parampara*, if one

remains a speculator, Kṛṣṇa will be very unapproachable. Even if one travels on a ship that goes at the speed of mind, one cannot arrive at an understanding of Kṛṣṇa. But if one chants Hare Kṛṣṇa in a humble state of mind, He will dance on your tongue. If one honors the food offered to Kṛṣṇa, *prasādam,* He can be tasted on the tongue. And as stated by Kṛṣṇadasa Kavirāja in *Caitanya-caritāmṛta,* if one understands Lord Caitanya, then difficult things become easy to understand.

PERSONAL COMMENT

In the purport to verse 21, Prabhupāda states, "Lord Kṛṣṇa as Govinda is more inclined to the *brāhmaṇas* and the cows, indicating thereby that human prosperity depends more on these two items, namely brahminical culture and cow protection. Lord Kṛṣṇa is never satisfied where these are lacking." Several devotees sent me questions on this subject. One asked, "Is it compulsory to have a cow protection program in a farm community? Can we say we are protecting cows even without having them?" Another asked, "In what ways do brahminical culture and cow protection bring human prosperity?" Another asked, "How can ISKCON ever really work without these two nearly impossible feats coming to pass? Especially cow protection. But have we really established a class of genuine *brāhmaṇas*? Goodness seems sorely lacking." Another asked, "What does cow protection mean? In the brahminical culture, the *vaiśyas* take care of the cows. Nowadays, the so-called *vaiśyas,* the farmers, raise the cows with ulterior motives only. Who is going to protect the cows then? Does an ISKCON member have to merely be a vegetarian to protect the cows, or does he also have to actively set up a cowshed in his house or community or join some organization for cow welfare? How about supporting such organizations with proactive involvement?"

I chose not to answer any of these questions. ISKCON has such a measly cow protection program, and I felt embarrassed to discuss it. We are not saving the cows from the slaughterhouse, nor does it seem possible. We can make propaganda against the

killing of cows, and we can promote vegetarianism as an alternate diet to meat eating. These are ways to protect cows directly. To actually "adopt" cows is being done on a very small scale in several farm communities. So many complications come when you try to raise a large herd of cows, as I have seen personally at Gītā-nagarī. More and more land is needed. The oxen have to be worked at the plough or they become "useless pets." Practically speaking, not many devotees are willing to actually work with the cows and oxen. But at least some token efforts are being done in various parts of the world.

Kṛṣṇa is not satisfied unless the cows are being taken care of—and the *brāhmaṇas*. At least there are many *brāhmaṇas* in the International Society for Krishna consciousness. Some years after first initiation, devotees receive second initiation from their spiritual masters and officially become *brāhmaṇas*. Prabhupāda said, "But don't be *brāhmaṇas* in name only." The *brāhmaṇa* has to perform the prescribed duties of his *varṇa*: worshiping, teaching others to worship, studying the *śāstras* and teaching others the *śāstras*, and receiving and giving charity. Prabhupāda gave brahminical initiation to women also, a revolutionary step. The *brāhmaṇa* is expected to be *śuci*, clean, both within and without. And the *brāhmaṇas* are supposed to be respected in the larger society, or else Kṛṣṇa is dissatisfied. So there. I guess I answered the questions after all.

I had a dream I was visiting the old Henry Street temple in Brooklyn, in my defamed status. At least they allowed me to visit, but everyone knew of my new infamy. They all saw me awkwardly. I had mud on my devotional clothes. I was frantically hurrying to get ready for the 6:00 A.M. greeting of the deities. One or two kind souls tried to help me. At one point, I walked into the unprepared temple room with my sneakers on. They took them off. I wanted to make a good show of myself (they might even let me give the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* class), but it seemed impossible for me to get ready on time. I woke, afraid this might be prophetic.

Good that I caught the dream before it faded. This is the first dream on these issues. It shows my problems have entered the subconscious. Never a dull moment. "They don't know who you are."

Music soothes the savage beast
the worrywart
helps him soar to a realm
beyond the punitive.

But is it with Kṛṣṇa?
Walkin'. Peaceable kingdom
grooving step with the Lord.
I wanted my disciples to sit
down and hear it with me
but better I go alone

as I did in my early years
into jazz clubs improvisation
paying close attention to
their artistry.

You can't even talk about
that now, it was your
life of *māyā*, unbecoming
of a guru or *sannyāsī*.

Don't even mention the past
life, as if it didn't exist, and
it certainly shouldn't exist now
that you're dressed in saffron.

It's good that you're planning
to go to India to be with
Godbrothers; that's the kind of
thing they want to see.

VERSE 22

namaḥ paṅkaja-nābhāya namaḥ paṅkaja-māline
namaḥ paṅkaja-netrāya namas te paṅkajāṅghraye

My respectful obeisances are unto You, O Lord, whose abdomen is marked with a depression like a lotus flower, who are always decorated with garlands of lotus flowers, whose glance is as cool as the lotus and whose feet are engraved with lotuses."

COMMENT

In his purport, Prabhupāda writes, "All the great *ācāryas* established such temples of worship in all places just to favor the less intelligent, and one should not pose himself as transcending the stage of temple worship while one is actually in the category of the *śūdras* and the women or less."

In this verse, Kuntīdevī is again offering obeisances. The scriptures are full of comparisons between Kṛṣṇa (and many great devotees) and lotus flowers. What is so special about lotus flowers? Is it just a case of cultural iconography, or is there something more to it?

The lotus flower is considered the most beautiful flower in the world, so it is used as a poetic metaphor. The fully opened lotuses are also used in Buddhism and other religions as symbols of enlightenment.

Prabhupāda writes that the Deity can be made from wood, stone, earth, metal, jewels, etc., or can appear in the mind. Kṛṣṇa appears in His Deity form to "attract the burning attention of the nondevotees always engaged in material wranglings." The Lord shows such persons mercy "provided they agree to visit the temples." From this it seems that our endeavor is required to invoke the Lord's mercy. But because we "cannot see. . . beyond matter," we fail to understand the Deity properly or the incredible

potency visiting a temple offers. Repeated visiting as a practice of *vaidhī-bhakti* will help to deliver us.

And aside from our obvious neophyte status in this regard, a number of devotees have also been exposed to the idea that Deity worship is only for *vaidhī bhaktas;* those aspiring for a higher, spontaneous practice do not take shelter in temple Deities but fix their minds in meditation. Yet Prabhupāda offers proof of the power of Deity worship to elevate the soul by saying that all the great *ācāryas* established temples. He then says that we should not pose ourselves as being transcendental to Deity worship while we are still actually less than women or *śūdras*. Don't think you are more advanced than you actually are.

The lecture Prabhupāda gave on this verse in Los Angeles on April 14, 1973, contains a favorite "liberal Prabhupāda" statement that gives us hope: "Here Kuntīdevī describes *paṅkaja* with reference to (the) lotus flower. And Kṛṣṇa describes Himself in the *Bhagavad-gītā, raso 'ham apsu kaunteya*: 'I am the taste of the liquid.' So Kṛṣṇa can be remembered by tasting water. Even those who are drinking. . . If he thinks that, 'This taste of drinking is Kṛṣṇa,' he will one day come out a great saintly person."

It is interesting to note that this *śloka, namaḥ paṅkaja-nābhāya,* is a duplicate: It is so important that it is repeated exactly in the Tenth Canto (*Bhāg.* 10.59.26). In a similar way, the words *man-manā bhava mad-bhakto/ mad-yājī māṁ namaskuru* are repeated in the *Bhagavad-gītā* because of their importance. In the commentary to this verse as it appears in the Tenth Canto, Śrīdhara Svāmī writes, "Offering obeisances with the same prayer with which Kuntī satisfied Him, she (Bhumidevi) speaks the verse beginning *namaḥ paṅkaja-nābhāya*, 'To Him whose navel is a lotus,' that is to say, to the origin of the universe. Thus, to Him who has a lotus garland comprising His pure fame. To Him whose eyes for those who meditate upon Him thus are like lotuses, showing perfect satisfaction and dispelling distress. Obeisances to Him, whose feet, most worthy of being served, are like lotuses, or else are marked with the sign of the lotus."

Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura, in his comments on the same

verse in the Tenth Canto, explains the confidential feeling of Bhumidevi: "You have come to fulfill the purpose of my eyes and all my other senses." Thus describing His charm (*mādhuryam*), Bhumidevi speaks this verse. Is this the same sweet meditation as Kuntīdevī has, being fully absorbed in the revealed form of Kṛṣṇa's sweetness, which is in front of her own eyes? *Paṅkaja-netrāya*—one whose glance is as soothing as the lotus flower. What is sweeter, Kṛṣṇa's foot or Kṛṣṇa's cooling glances, both lotus-like? In *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 3.28.22–23, Lord Kapila says, "The yogis should contemplate with full devotion the compassionate glances frequently cast by the Lord's eyes, for they soothe the most fearful threefold agonies of His devotees."

It is recommended that the less intelligent worship the Deity, and simultaneously, we know by the grace of guru that those who do are the most intelligent. Doubting Thomasina: "I'm a woman, and how are you calling me less intelligent? I cannot help but be insulted. I have a Master's from Columbia, a Ph.D. from Yale, with the highest honors; I successfully defended my thesis on globalization as it relates to the Third World (and by the way, I bring in a lot more money than my good-for-nothing husband, who can't find a job!)—you are calling *me* less intelligent? Because of my body? I didn't choose my body, and anyway, aren't you folks all about seeing the soul beyond the body?"

Yes, Ms. Thomasina, you are right. We Hare Kṛṣṇas cannot deny that women are intellectually equal to men, as proven by their performance in the material world. But as stated in the purport to verse 20 of this chapter, the most valuable qualification of women is their natural submissiveness to God. So if you are intellectually superior, with many college degrees, and earn more money than your husband, that doesn't make you intelligent by spiritual standards. In your expression of doubts, you did not mention anything about your attitude toward God. But that is the vital thing. That is where your intelligence will be tested. Do you believe in Him? Do you serve Him? Do you love Him? If not, you are foolish, and it has nothing to do with your gender.

There are different religious traditions that have problems

accepting Deity worship (e.g., Jews, Muslims, Protestant Christians). What arguments can we recommend in order to get them to accept, or at least not reject, Deity worship?

We can inform them that the material energy is nondifferent from God. It is His inferior energy. So if God chooses to appear in His own material elements, such as marble, brass, etc., and if He orders us in *śāstra* to worship these authorized forms, then they are as good as God. It is not idol worship. Idolatry is when someone concocts a form of God and worships it, such as those who worshiped the form of a golden calf in the Old Testament. The forms of Viṣṇu and Kṛṣṇa, as worshiped in the temples, are authorized exactly according to descriptions of the Lord in scriptures like *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. Śrīla Prabhupāda used to give an example about the many U.S. mailboxes located throughout a city. One can put one's letter in any one of those boxes, and it is as good as bringing the letter to the main post office. The *arcā-vigraha* incarnations are like that.

Prabhupāda states that temple worship is for neophytes. Yet we also have examples where great saints like Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī would engage in worship of the *arcā-vigraha*. How are we to understand these conflicting teachings?

The worship of the *arcā-vigraha* is for both the neophyte and the most advanced devotee. The neophyte is barely able to understand that the statue in the temple is Kṛṣṇa Himself. He may see it as a symbol of the Lord, yet offer his reverential prostrations and submit his petitions there. His attitude is different from the attitude of an intimate servitor of the Lord in Deity form. Sanātana Gosvāmī used to speak to his Deity of Kṛṣṇa, and the Deity would speak back to him! In the narration of Sākṣi-gopāla, the Deity walked thousands of miles just to bear witness for His devotee.

Some people living close to the temple do not consider it important to come to the temple and see the Deities. They say, "Gaura-Nitai are also in the heart," "I have my temple in my home," etc. By their behavior, it is almost sure that most of them are not above the stage of temple worship. Could you please give us some hint on how to help them?

If the devotees living in the temple create a warm and welcoming atmosphere, the devotees living outside will be more encouraged to attend. If they are treated coldly when they do come, they will be driven away. Householders have pressing duties raising their families and going to business and cannot always attend the early-morning programs held in the temple. But they should always be encouraged to come. Aside from this, it is not an excuse or false claim on their part if they say, "I have a temple in my home." Prabhupāda encouraged the worship of the Deity in the home. Certainly it is good if the outside householders come to see the Deities at least on Sundays, give donations, and when possible, on the weekday evenings, come to hear *Bhagavad-gītā* and receive *darśana*.

Prabhupāda makes a nice point at the end of the purport about how Queen Kuntī adjusted the standard procedure by first looking at Kṛṣṇa's navel, then His face, and finally His feet. She made her adjustment considering the Lord's feelings first. For the establishment of standards, we should always teach the prescribed method, but at the same time, we may make intelligent and sensible adjustments, keeping the actual goal in mind.

VERSE 23

yathā hṛṣīkeśa khalena devakī kaṁsena ruddhāticiraṁ śucārpitā
vimocitāhaṁ ca sahātmajā vibho tvayaiva nāthena muhur vipad-gaṇāt

"O Hṛṣīkeśa, master of the senses and Lord of lords, You have released Your mother, Devakī, who was long imprisoned and distressed by the envious King Kaṁsa, and me and my children from a series of constant dangers."

COMMENT

In his purport, Prabhupāda says that Kuntīdevī was shown more favor than Devakī because Lord Kṛṣṇa did not save the seven children of Devakī, whereas He saved the children of Kuntīdevī. The reason He did this was because Devakī's husband was still living, whereas Kuntīdevī was a widow with no one to help her but Kṛṣṇa. Prabhupāda writes, "The conclusion is that Kṛṣṇa endows more favor to a devotee who is in greater dangers. Sometimes He puts His pure devotees in such dangers because in that condition of helplessness, the devotee becomes more attached to the Lord. The more the attachment is there for the Lord, the more success is there for the devotee."

Kuntīdevī calls Kṛṣṇa "Hṛṣīkeśa" and "Lord of lords" in this verse. Hṛṣīkeśa means "master or ruler of the senses"; this name calls to mind the *Nārada-pañcarātra's* definition of *bhakti*: *hṛṣīkeṇa hṛṣīkeśa-sevanaṁ/ bhaktir ucyate*. This verse defines *bhakti* as engaging all our senses in the service of their master. "Master" means "owner."

It is interesting that Prabhupāda chose to order the translation so that *Hṛṣīkeśa* and *vibho*, or Lord of lords, come together, effectively underlying Kṛṣṇa's mastership. It makes us think of *Bhagavad-gītā*, verse 4.11: "Everyone follows My path in all respects, O son of Partha." It is not actually possible to engage the senses in something that is not following Kṛṣṇa's will.

It would also seem constitutionally impossible to engage the senses in serving ourselves. Prabhupāda often says that we are serving our *upadhis*, things we append to ourselves—the body, family, nation, an idea, etc. But if the soul's constitutional nature is actually servanthood, it means that the living entities are constitutionally unable to serve themselves. Service is always given to another. This idea helps us to understand the idea that Kṛṣṇa has both bestowed the senses on the living entities (in one place Prabhupāda says He gave them to the living entities because they wanted an instrument by which to enjoy matter), and that He owns them. They are not ours. Therefore, spiritual advancement

means not to stop sense activity but to offer service to the correct Master.

In this verse and the next, Kuntīdevī lists the many dangers she and her sons, as well as Devakī, went through. Her phrase is interesting: "a series of constant dangers." One would normally say either "constant danger" or "a series of dangers," but not both. But her suffering was extreme.

One has to wonder why these devotees had to suffer so much. For example, Kuntīdevī mentioned Kṛṣṇa's releasing Devakī from her long imprisonment. But why didn't Kṛṣṇa, who appeared in the four-armed form in the prison to show that He was supreme, simply kill Kaṁsa in the prison? Why did He choose to escape to Gokula and leave His parents under Kaṁsa's influence? What was the point of their suffering? And why so many calamities for Kuntīdevī?

Prabhupāda writes in the purport that Kṛṣṇa favored Kuntīdevī more because she didn't have a husband and needed Him more. He also writes, "Sometimes He puts his pure devotees in such dangers because in that condition of helplessness, the devotee becomes more attached to the Lord. The more attachment is there for the Lord, the more success is there for the devotee." But how attached does He want His devotees to be? Isn't Kuntīdevī already fully sold out to Him? Throughout the *Bhāgavatam*, He appears to be testing His devotees' attachment and purity—even Śrīmatī Rādhārani's. Is there a point where such testing stops? Is there a purpose to it that's not mentioned? And can't He think of another way to draw His devotees to Him other than causing them to suffer? Although Kuntīdevī has called Him "Lord of lords," which leads us to assume that He has orchestrated the events in her life, here Prabhupāda takes both sides—Kṛṣṇa endows more favor to a devotee who is in greater danger (Kuntī had it harder than Devakī). But didn't He put her in those greater dangers in the first place?

Once a devotee asked Śrīla Prabhupāda if Kṛṣṇa's testing of His devotees ever stops. Śrīla Prabhupāda replied, "Yes." He said, "Just as in school, when one passes all his exams, then he or

she is graduated and the testing stops, so when Kṛṣṇa is satisfied with His devotee's behavior, then there is no more testing. But sometimes just to show the world how glorious His devotees are, or to engage in pleasure pastimes with them (as in His separation from the *gopīs*), He continues the tests. In all circumstances, the pure devotees pass the tests and go on loving Him. He doesn't give them a test which they cannot pass.

Kuntīdevī was given extra mercy because she was a widow. This may be applied to ISKCON; single mothers may be given special social and spiritual support (either in the temple or in a separate *āśrama*). They should not be disbarred from the association of devotees by being considered "loose women."

In a lecture on this verse given in Māyāpura on October 3, 1974, Prabhupāda said, "Although we are *prakṛteḥ param*, but at the present moment we are under the clutches of *prakṛti*. *Prakṛteḥ kriyamāṇāni / guṇaiḥ karmāṇi sarvaśaḥ* (*Bg.* 3.27). We are just like a person in the prison. He is also a citizen. He is not meant for living in the prison; he is actually meant for living outside the prison. But some way or other, he has come in contact with the criminal department and is put into the prison. Similarly, usually, the citizens and the king of president, they are not inhabitants of the prison house. Similarly, we, along with Kṛṣṇa, as *prakṛteḥ param*, similarly we are also *prakṛteḥ param*, but we have got the aptitude to fall down in the *prakṛti*.

Kṛṣṇa hasn't got that aptitude. He's a master. Just like 'king can do no wrong.' This is the British constitution. You cannot accuse the king in any way, neither you can judge. That is the British constitution. Similarly, Kṛṣṇa, as it is stated in the *Īśopaniṣad*, *apāpa-viddham*. He cannot be criminal like us. He's above. He cannot be charged with any criminal charges. *Apāpa-viddham*. *Pāpa* does not touch Him. Although it appears that He is doing something which is *pāpa*, but that is not *pāpa*. We have to understand Kṛṣṇa's position. *Prakṛteḥ param*."

When some persons tried to equate Prabhupāda with God in the early years of ISKCON, Prabhupāda almost kicked them out of his institution for good. He was so furious with those

sannyāsīs in the early days. He never accepted that he was anything special, in a special *tattva*. But there may be a tendency among some of his disciples or granddisciples to do just that, put Prabhupāda in a special category or claim he is infallible, and imagine special references to him in the scriptures. When this first came up, Prabhupāda said that equating him with God was the subtle Māyāvāda pollution. In a somewhat similar way, the early Christians equated the messiah with God, and now in the world religion, Jesus of Nazareth is God: "Who is the Lord? Jesus is the Lord!"—rather than a humble servant of God, as he saw himself.

It is against our nature to pray for danger, so how can we better understand the life-transforming transcendental attachment that comes on utter dependence on the Lord in danger *without desiring to be in danger*?

We may desire the fervor and surrender expressed in Queen Kuntī's prayers and at the same time not desire to be put in danger soon. That is not hypocritical or weak-hearted. We have to act on our actual position of realization.

We learn from the life of our own Śrīla Prabhupāda, who put himself in danger to come to America: two life-threatening heart attacks, poverty, cold, loneliness in New York City, theft of his typewriter by the uptown janitor, etc. His dependence on Kṛṣṇa was meant to serve as an example to all of us. For Prabhupāda, "doing the needful" was unlimited and included taking all risk in Kṛṣṇa's service.

VERSE 24

viṣān mahāgneḥ puruṣāda-darśanād
asat-sabhāyā vana-vāsa-kṛcchrataḥ
mṛdhe mṛdhe 'neka-mahārathāstrato
drauṇy-astrataś cāsma hare 'bhirakṣitāḥ

"My dear Kṛṣṇa, Your Lordship has protected us from a poisoned cake, from a great fire, from cannibals, from the vicious assembly, from sufferings during our exile in the forest and from the battle where great generals fought. And now You have saved us from the weapon of Aśvatthāmā."

COMMENT

In a lecture on this verse given October 4, 1974, in Māyāpura (which did not appear in the text of *Teachings of Queen Kuntī*), Prabhupāda said as follows: "*Visat*: 'from poison.' The Dhṛtarāṣṭra group, Dhṛtarāṣṭra and his sons, they conspired to give them poison. They were transferred to a house. They were so obedient because Dhratrastra happened to be the superior in the house, and he took care of the Pāṇḍavas when they were small children, because their father died at an early age. So it was the duty of the elderly members of the family. After all, they were very respectable *kṣatriya* family. So the elderly members means Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Vidura and Bhīṣmadeva. Bhīṣmadeva was the grandfather of the family, and Dhṛtarāṣṭra was the elderly brother of Pāṇḍava, and Vidura was also brother, Vidura, also elder. Pāṇḍu was the youngest, the father of Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira and... So it is, after all, a *varṇāśrama* family, Vedic family. So the elderly people had the responsibility to raise the fatherless children.

"So Dhṛtarāṣṭra took charge as the eldest member. So *māyā* is very strong. He began to think that, 'Actually, this kingdom belongs to me. I am the eldest son, but because I am born blind,

therefore it was given to my younger brother. Now he is dead. Now he is dead, so the property belongs to me. Someway or other, it was transferred to my younger brother. Now the younger brother is dead. Then again I become proprietor. So at least I could not rule over the kingdom, why not my sons?' This was the beginning. Just like one of our Godbrothers, he's thinking that, 'This institution was started by me and Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī as partners. Now the senior partner is dead. Therefore I am the sole proprietor. Who are these Godbrothers? Let them go away.' So this is *māyā*, the same *māyā* Dhṛtarāṣṭra was thinking. And his brother-in-law, Śakuni, was very expert in conspiracy. So he was advising him, 'Yes, you are the proprietor. At least your sons should be.. . .' This is natural. Everyone has got some affection for the family. So this is the beginning of the conspiracy. Otherwise he was taking care of the children very nicely. But *māyā* was dictating that, 'You are taking care of the children of your brother. What about your own children?' 'Yes, why not my children?'

"So attempt was being made how to kill these boys. The first attempt was to administer poison. Dhṛtarāṣṭra constructed a house of shellac. So they were transferred: 'My dear boys, for some days you can live in that house. That is very nice.' So Vidura gave him hint, so, that 'you are being sent there. Be careful for being killed. The house will be set fire.' So Vidura was very favorable to the Pāṇḍavas. So they made a subway in that house, and when the house was set fire, they escaped through the subway. In this way, it is said, *viṣān mahāgneḥ*, set fire in shellac house. . . Just like nowadays, this, what is called, plastic. It gets set fire very soon. Then, *puruṣāda*, they took shelter in a house where there was a Rākṣasa, cannibal. He was disturbing the whole village. So the settlement was that every day one family should hand over one man to him for eating, then he will not create disturbance. So the Pāṇḍavas were taking shelter in a house after escaping from the fire. One day the turn came to that family that they would have to hand over one member of the family to that cannibal. So the Pāṇḍavas were present. They thought, 'We are guests here, and

they are in danger, so we must save them.' This is obligation. If you become guest in the house, he is receiving you well, he is supplying you your necessities, so you are considered to be very intimate friend. So when they are in danger, you must help. This consideration. . . Then it was decided that 'this man should be handed over. Bhīma shall go.' So when Bhīma was handed over to that cannibal, he was killed. But it was a great danger.

So in this way, danger after danger. Then *asat-sabhāyāḥ*: 'The assembly of crooked persons.' Draupadī was lost in bet, betting. So Karṇa, he had some attraction for Draupadī from the beginning, when there was *svayaṁvara*. So Karṇa also went to contest, and he had very much attraction for Draupadī, but Draupadī wanted to get Arjuna as her husband. So she pointed out. . . Because she knew that 'If Karṇa takes the contest, he will be victorious. Karṇa is more expert than Arjuna'; therefore she played a trick that 'This *svayaṁvara* ceremony is meant for the *kṣatriyas*, not for others. I cannot accept my husband, anyone else except the *kṣatriya*.

"So Karṇa is not a *kṣatriya*. Karṇa's history is that Karṇa is the pre-marriage son of Kuntī. Before her being married, he was born of Kuntī from the ear. Therefore his name is Karṇa. But still, out of social fear, Kuntī did not kill the child. Nowadays they kill. But she floated the child on a boat, and the boat was let loose, go anywhere. So one carpenter collected Karṇa and raised him. But he was *kṣatriya*. He was Kuntī's son, born by sun, sungod, Sūrya."

One could say that Kuntī is acknowledging Kṛṣṇa as her savior in several circumstances for her and her family. That is pious and correct. But what if no one shows up to save us in our tribulations? We may feel inclined to lament and complain, or at least not acknowledge Kṛṣṇa as our savior, since He did not show up.

The devotee does not expect Kṛṣṇa to become the order supplier to all His petitioners. He accepts whatever happens as fate, as Kṛṣṇa's direct handling, and remains faithful to the Lord. In any case, the soul is never destroyed, even for the nondevotee. And for the devotee, there is special handling. As Kṛṣṇa declares

in *Bhagavad-gītā*, "Declare it boldly, Arjuna: My devotee never perishes."

In his commentary on this verse in *Teachings of Queen Kuntī*, Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that (as Draupadī showed) it is not very good to try to save oneself. But in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 10.1.48, it is said that it is our duty to try our best to save ourselves when facing inevitable death.

These are two different situations in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. Kṛṣṇa wanted Draupadī to demonstrate the position of complete helplessness before Him, not even trying to protect herself with her one hand holding her sari. When she put both her hands up in the air and prayed to Kṛṣṇa, then He saved her by supplying unlimited cloth so that the demoniac assembly could not strip her. But in the case of Vasudeva trying to save his wife Devakī in the Tenth Canto, it was not wrong for Vasudeva to try his best to save his wife. It is said there that a pious man tries his best to save himself, but if despite his best efforts he fails, there is no harm. The two situations were different, but Vasudeva, as well as Draupadī, were completely dependent on Kṛṣṇa's mercy.



VERSE 25

vipadaḥ santu tāḥ śaśvat tatra tatra jagad-guro
bhavato darśanaṁ yat syād apunar bhāva-darśanam

"I wish that all those calamities would happen again and again so that we could see You again and again, for seeing You means that we will no longer see repeated births and deaths."

COMMENT

This is one of the most well-known and challenging verses in

the entire *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. Generally, a pious person will seek shelter of God in hope of relief of material calamities. But here Kuntīdevī is wishing that the calamities themselves will come repeatedly. How can she be so brave and radical in her surrender? This is the nature of the pure devotee. She has full knowledge that the very nature of the material world is to be full of dangers, which are sure to happen in all circumstances. She also realizes that these material calamities are not real in the absolute sense. The spirit soul is transcendental to material dangers. In his purport to this verse, Prabhupāda writes, "A man may see a tiger swallowing him in a dream, and he may cry for this calamity. Actually there is no tiger and there is no suffering; it is simply a case of dreams. In the same way, all calamities of life are said to be dreams." Kuntīdevī is aware of all these conclusions and feels herself lucky to be in contact with Kṛṣṇa in any way.

In his word-for-word synonyms, Prabhupāda translates the word *śaśvat* as "again and again." The dictionary defines the word as "perpetually, continually, repeatedly, always, ever." But some devotees say that they would never pray like that, to have sufferings at all times. What is the gap in realization there? In other words, does it mean that if we do want to avoid difficulties in spiritual life, we will have to face difficulties of repeated birth and death? Is there no middle ground?

There is middle ground. If a devotee is not as advanced as Queen Kuntī so as to welcome dangers, a devotee can at least tolerate them when they come and surrender to Kṛṣṇa. Be tolerant of the sufferings, even if at heart they are unwanted. Pray to Kṛṣṇa for realization and mercy and deliverance.

Speaking on this verse in a lecture in Vṛndāvana on October 5, 1974, Prabhupāda makes a tangential point about guru. He says that Kṛṣṇa is the *jagad-guru*, and a bona fide spiritual master is one who accepts Kṛṣṇa as such. The lecture goes as follows: "Kṛṣṇa is *jagad-guru*, and one who speaks speaks on behalf of Kṛṣṇa or one who speaks as Kṛṣṇa says, he is guru. Caitanya Mahāprabhu says *āmāra ājñāya guru hañā*: (*Cc. Madhya* 7.128) 'You just become guru on My order.' You cannot become guru automatically without

following the order of *jagad-guru*. The government servant... Who is government servant? Who is strictly following the government order, that is government servant. Anyone can say, 'I am government servant.' No. How you can be? Similarly, guru means who is following the principles given by the *jagad-guru*. He's guru.

"So the principle... What is that principle? *Sarva-dharmān parityajya mām ekaṁ śaraṇaṁ vraja* (*Bg.* 18.66). This is principle. 'You give up all these nonsense activities. Simply surrender.' So one who has surrendered to Kṛṣṇa fully, no other business, he is guru. This is the definition of guru. There is no difficult to understand who is guru. One who follows strictly the principles laid down by *jagad-guru*, he is guru."

VERSE 26

janmaiśvarya-śruta-śrībhir edhamāna-madaḥ pumān
naivārhaty abhidhātuṁ vai tvām akiñcana-gocaram

"My Lord, Your Lordship can easily be approached, but only by those who are materially exhausted. One who is on the path of [material] progress, trying to improve himself with respectable parentage, great opulence, high education and bodily beauty, cannot approach You with sincere feeling."

COMMENT

Both the verse and the purport speak about sincerity of feeling. There are a few words in Sanskrit for "sincere," but this verse uses *abhidhātuṁ*, which refers to the power of our word. We mean what we say. The prefix *abhi* heightens the meaning: we *really* mean what we say. Śrīla Prabhupāda said, "Spiritual strength means sincerity,

and sincerity means spiritual strength." Sometimes when we hear Prabhupāda say that developing Kṛṣṇa consciousness is a gradual process. We may conclude that what is gradual is development of sincerity. We will have to pass many tests before we become truly sincere.

The opposite of sincerity is hypocrisy; discovering that one is not sincere but a hypocrite is quite difficult to face. Personal hypocrisy may be the biggest source of a practicing devotee's disappointment in spiritual life. How can we live with the reality of who and what we are and still feel encouraged to advance in spiritual life?

Some persons blame this disappointment and the way that we define hypocrisy in our lives as the result of too much idealism. Perhaps we are following an impossible path, one that does not allow for the full expression of the human condition. The *śāstras* describe impossibly high standards, standards that are meant only for true saints. The majority of us will never attain such a state, at least not for millions of births, and certainly not in this one lifetime. Yet Prabhupāda promised us that we could go back to Godhead in this lifetime. This is the mercy of Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu.

Material advancement is intoxicating. Prabhupāda indicates that it is this intoxication of pride that stops us from uttering the holy name with feeling. But pride seems like a bottomless pit in us. To finally rid ourselves of it, we really have to step out of the center of our little universe, freeing ourselves from the mania of "I" and "mine," and see Truth in the center. We can then feel we belong to Kṛṣṇa and have no alternative but to serve Him in love. It seems we have to trust Kṛṣṇa to draw us toward Him, since all of this is quite inconceivable when one has no experience of what it really feels like to have an active and loving, direct relationship with Kṛṣṇa. Moving toward this goal without experience of its rewards is the meaning of faith.

Akiñcana gocarā—materially exhausted: We can't catapault ourselves to this state artificially because those who are materially exhausted realize that they have nothing worthy to offer, nothing

material upon which they can depend, yet no deep love for Kṛṣṇa. At the same time, they maintain the flame of intense spiritual aspiration to achieve devotional service. To a neophyte, that sounds like an existentially frightening place to be. We prefer to see ourselves in a rosier light and to see our goal as attainable. But the "negative pole" of the *akiñcana gocarā* attracts the positive pole of Kṛṣṇa just as a magnet's two poles are joined together. There is a statement in the *Bṛhad-bhāgavatāmṛta* that tells us how to proceed: "*Gopa Kumāra*. . . is now ready to dedicate himself exclusively to pure devotional service and has set as his goal the highest ideals of *bhakti*. For this purpose, the *bhakti śāstras* advise that he need only continue serving the mantra given him by his exalted spiritual master. That mantra will surely fulfill whatever desires he may have, including the desire for pure devotion." (*Bṛhad-bhāgavatāmṛta* 2.23–24, commentary)

The verse is not an attack on possessions. Having good birth and good education is all right if it is used in the service of Kṛṣṇa. But the concept of possession is illusion. Prabhupāda spoke on this in a lecture on this verse by Queen Kuntī in Māyāpura on October 6, 1974: "*Akiñcana. Akiñcana.* means *na kincana. Kiñcana* means 'something.' So *na kiñcana* means 'one who has nothing to possess.' He is called *na kiñcana*. Or one who is fully convinced that 'Nothing belongs to me,' he is *akiñcana*. Here, in the material world, it is just the opposite. Everyone is thinking that 'I have got something.' I have seen long, long ago, maybe fifty years ago in Howrah station. I was going somewhere. So one man, his luggage was the half-burned fuel wood and some rejected things. He was carrying as luggage half-burned fuel wood. He thought that 'This is my possession. I have saved this.' So he was taking to his home. That means everyone, even though it is very insignificant, still, everyone thinks that 'I have got something.' This is the material disease.

"So this is the illusion. Therefore *śāstra* says, *ato gṛha-kṣetra-sutāpta-vittair/ janasya moho 'yam aham mameti* (*Bhāg.* 5.5.8). How a man becomes entangled in this material world, everything is described in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. *Puṁsaḥ striyā mithunī-bhāvam etaṁ*. This material world means sex attraction, *mithunī-bhāva*.

"So *nirbandhaṁ kṛṣṇa-sambandhe*. Personally we should not possess anything, simply for Kṛṣṇa. So therefore Gaura-kisora dāsa Babaji, he remained *niskiñcana*. And his disciple, Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī, he also remained *niskiñcana*, although he possessed so many temples, because nothing was for his personal. . . but for Kṛṣṇa."

Śrīla Prabhupāda quotes Canaka Pandita, who said, "*avidyaṁ jīvanaṁ śūnyam*: "one who is not educated, his life is zero." It appears that Kṛṣṇa consciousness is meant for educated people with largely philosophical interests. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura spread the movement among the educated Bengali circle. So how can an uneducated person realize such advanced philosophy and even become a real devotee?

Material education is not necessary, but a spiritual education is required. Prabhupāda described how in village life, the people used to gather in the evening and hear stories told from the *Mahābhārata*, *Rāmāyaṇa*, and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and then go home thinking and talking of these topics, and they would also dream of them at night. One doesn't have to be educated in Sanskrit grammar or Sāṅkhya philosophy. But one has to have a basic education that "I am Kṛṣṇa's and Kṛṣṇa is mine." One has to develop love of Kṛṣṇa by chanting and hearing from authorized sources. That person is truly educated, not a person produced from the academic university.

A conversation with Śrīla Prabhupāda: "My Guru Mahārāja said. Personally he said that, 'When we were living in a rented house, if we could collect two hundred, three hundred rupees. . . We were living very nicely at Ultadanga. And since then, Jayavidatta has given us this marble palace, Gauḍīya Matha—there is friction between our men. 'Who will occupy this room? Who will occupy that room? Who will be proprietor of room?' Tīrtha Mahārāja. . . Kuñjabābā was giving one tablet, that 'This is. . .' Everyone is planning in different way. So Guru Mahārāja said. . . he was personally instructing me that, 'If I could sell this marble of this temple, and secure some money, and if I could print some books, that would have been better. That would have been better."

What is the feeling described by Prabhupāda in this purport? Is he referring to the feeling of the four types of persons who approach Kṛṣṇa with some ulterior motive (as described in *Bhagavad-gītā* 7.16), or is it the loving feeling of a pure devotee? Sometimes Prabhupāda mentions that we should chant the holy name with humility and respect. Is this the feeling he is referring to?

He is referring to the quality of feeling, which he says a materially intoxicated person is incapable of uttering. Sometimes we chant but do not feel for Kṛṣṇa. How do we change this? We try to feel, but we don't feel. What to do? It can be discouraging when we don't see a change. The answer is to go on chanting with determination, in ideal circumstances with ideal association. Chant like a child crying for its mother.

PERSONAL COMMENT

Should I be on a deeper level in this crisis? Why not experience fresh remorse before God and grieve for my sins? I dwell on a legalistic level, fear of public humiliation, and health. Nitai-Gaurāṅga told me that when Śacīnandana Mahārāja was in Boston, he said that he placed his health as a higher priority than his *sādhana*, at least when he was ill, I presume. I cannot pray when I am in pain.

But in *Dialogues with Silence*, Thomas Merton prays to his God and Christ and the Virgin Mary; he doesn't complain of monastic politics. Of his craft, he writes, "Let me at least disappear into the writing. It should mean nothing special to me, nor harm my recollection. The work could be a prayer; its results should not concern me." (*Dialogues with Silence*, p. 135)

"Lady, I have written too much, and I am not as good at words as a writer ought to be. When I talk to you, the deep things I ought to say simply leave me inarticulate. But anyway, I can say I love you not by spectacular speeches and gestures but by being a poor, plain Trappist: obscure, more or less stupid, not notable for anything." (*Dialogues with Silence*, p. 149)

I defied Prabhupāda's order, God's law, and now I suffer the reaction. I became a slave to the senses and the infatuated, romantic mind. Captured by fantasy, a will-of-the-wisp, despite the warnings of the *Bhāgavatam*.

So now I've told them that because of my health breakdown, I cannot dialogue with them directly. I will do it by proxy. I don't know their response to this yet, but I feel relieved of the "swirling" in my mind. Not so feverish or worried. Let them make their decision on their own, and I will go on living my peaceful life of Kṛṣṇa consciousness as far as possible in Rehoboth Beach, and sometimes travel (like to India).

From Thomas Merton's *Journals*, Volume 3, p. 40: "Is it right or wrong for me to be alone? When I have no solitude, I'm convinced I need it. When I am alone, I am convinced I have found the situation I need. Then I wonder if my need for it is enough to imply a right to it, even when my superiors think I need it. Can I face the fear of being thought eccentric? What is it that I really fear—the opinions of men, or the fear of offending God? If they were not against me, I would not fear that I was not perhaps pleasing to God. How far do the opinions of men represent the values of God? Do I really know what they think of me anyway? Or do I imagine they are opposed to me simply because I am afraid they will be? And if I am afraid of them, is it because my conscience tells me they *ought* to be opposed to me?"

Even those defending me bring up the fact that I was publicly humiliated, and "for one who has been honored, dishonor is worse than death." "Oh, but that's for *kṣatriyas*," I used to rationalize. The *Gītā* later teaches that for the liberated soul, honor and dishonor are of no account. He doesn't mind if he's praised or decried. He just takes shelter of Kṛṣṇa and chants His holy names in abject humility. *Dainya*—feelings of unworthiness—are a good quality in a Vaiṣṇava.

I overheard a disciple describing me on the phone: "He's isolated and embarrassed."

Wearing *sannyāsī* clothes to go
for blood work.
Painless needle: she
calls me "Buddy."

"This was a productive talk."
I can travel to the temples
in Italy and speak to the devotees
as retired elder if the ache
doesn't come at *Bhāgavatam* time.

Lightning and thunder close by
as we sat in the gazebo
fingering *japa*. "Let's get
out of here!" Rainsplash,
windshield wipers all the
way home.

Agreed to "open door
policy," but rest assured
hardly anyone will come by.

Madhava Smullen's reply:
"Would it really be such a bad
thing if millions of people started
wearing Kṛṣṇa tattoos?"—
sounded right to me.

First game of the World Series,
Red Sox winning in the rain.
I go to bed for regulation—
baseball's *māyā*, right?

They have to do something but
prefer I own it, not be forced.
Peer review of books,

visits to the holy *dhama,*
Can you swallow that?
Any more?

Why are you wide awake
at 1:30 A.M.? Can't sleep.
Lie there open-eyed,
search for stanzas.

Can you write sketches,
is that allowed? "ItM"?
He asked me, "Will you paint
again?" Said, "It's not automatic.
you just don't get those inspirations
every day." And you need a strong
head. Remember rows of *sādhus*
with their bead bags? A former life.

Wind sounds at the window.
Try to go back to bed.
Too late for that.
Greet the morn.

VERSE 27

namo 'kiñcana-vittāya nivṛtta-guṇa-vṛttaye
ātmārāmāya śāntāya kaivalya-pataye namaḥ

"My obeisances are unto You, who are the property of the materially impoverished. You have nothing to do with the actions and reactions of the material modes of nature. You are self-satisfied, and therefore You are the most gentle and are master of the monists."

COMMENT

In the purport to this verse, Prabhupāda states that no one can actually be a renouncer unless one gets something better. Devotees have left their material assets, and so do not give anything material to anyone. But they can deliver the supreme asset, the Personality of Godhead, because He is their only property.

The verse describes the Lord as the master of the monists, or those who desire to merge within His personal effulgence, the *brahmajyoti*... "but the devotees enter the transcendental pastimes of the Lord, which are never to be misunderstood as material."

Again, Kuntīdevī is offering obeisances. In the last verse, she stated that Kṛṣṇa could only be approached by the materially exhausted, and here she says something stronger: He is the property of the *akiñcana* devotees. The word used for property is *vittāya*, which literally means "acquired," but contains the sense, "captured." Kṛṣṇa is so attracted to the materially exhausted that He gives Himself to them.

It is pleasing that Queen Kuntīdevī says that Kṛṣṇa is transcendental to the modes of nature and is therefore self-satisfied— *ātmārāmāya*, drawing satisfaction from Himself. This has made him *śāntāya*, "gentle." Gentle is such a nice word. Why does self-satisfaction lead to gentleness?

When one is self-satisfied, then he has nothing to acquire from outside himself. He is peaceful and can be generous and intimate with others without fear of loss; he is gentle.

Kuntīdevī mentions Kṛṣṇa's mastership over the monists. Interesting contrasts in language: self-satisfaction, gentleness, yet mastership. Usually we think of mastership as possibly opposed to gentleness or self-satisfaction—when you rule someone, it means you have some desire to conquer or to exploit those under you.

And another interesting contrast in this verse: Kṛṣṇa is the property of the *akiñcana* devotees but the master of the monists. He has given Himself as something to be owned to one class and

has established Himself as the ruler of another.

Prabhupāda writes, "A living being is finished as soon as there is nothing to possess. Therefore, a human being cannot be, in a real sense of the term, a renouncer." What a startling sentence! We may think a living entity by nature cannot truly possess anything, since Kṛṣṇa is the owner of everything. Therefore, when we say, "I renounce this object," we can only mean we renounce our sense of false ownership of the object; if we didn't ever possess it in the first place, how can we renounce it? What does Prabhupāda mean that the living entity is "finished" as soon as there is nothing to possess?

Prabhupāda means it's the constitutional nature of the living entity to desire to possess something. In relation to material possessions, there's an interesting statement in the *Bṛhad-bhāgavatāmṛta* about the way a devotee sees whatever he owns in this world: "Kṛṣṇa's fully surrendered devotees accept all their worldly assets as His *mahā-prasādam* and maintain their attachments only for His sake. Thus their possessions and attachments, which fill them with the variegated sweetness of *bhajanānanda*, the supreme bliss of pure devotional service, do nothing but enhance their spiritual lives. What can Kṛṣṇa do for such exalted devotees? He simply remains indebted to them."

In the purport to this verse, Prabhupāda says that *jīvas* renounce something in order to get something better. Devotees renounce the material world for something "tangible in spiritual value." It seems that struggling devotees have to renounce the world on faith, since they can't always feel a tangible increase in spiritual "possessions." There is no other guarantee that they will attain something better for their renunciation.

In the purport, Prabhupāda emphasizes the renunciation of the Six Gosvāmīs. This is also mentioned by the previous *ācāryas*. In his *ṭīkā* to *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, Canto 5, Chapter 1, Verse 1, Jīva Gosvāmī states, "*Bhāgavata-ātmārāma* means one who is self-satisfied like the Lord. It is said, 'O great sage, among many millions who are liberated and perfect in knowledge of liberation, one may be a devotee of Lord Nārāyaṇa, or Kṛṣṇa.

Such devotees, who are fully peaceful, are extremely rare." (*Bhāg.* 6.14.5) Therefore, Mahārāja Parīkṣit has stressed that he meant the chief kind of self-satisfied person, who is the devotee, and not the secondary self-satisfied (the liberated person). It is not possible to enjoy householder life and at the same time be self-satisfied. So how come he has done that, being a great devotee? Liberation is also not possible in this state. Household life is the root from which comes bondage by material activities and defeat."

Jīva Gosvāmī, in his comment to a verse in the Fifth Canto, states, "In the first chapter, Priyavrata respects the order of Brahmā and follows it. Later, he gives up his kingdom and attains Mādhava." Nevertheless, in the Vedic history, there are pure devotees like the Pāṇḍavas who remain in household life. Even the Personality of Godhead, Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Lord Rāma, entered the *gṛhastha āśrama* in Their liberated pastimes. Aside from perfect devotees, the majority of ISKCON *brahmacārīs* eventually get married, and there is no fault in that. It is not a falldown, but if properly executed, household life is protection from subtle and gross illicit sex life. Therefore, when he began ISKCON in America, Prabhupāda saw the free mixing of boys and girls and introduced marriage between his disciples. He did this despite the criticism of some of his contemporary renunciants in India, and household life has proven to be the strong foundation of the spreading of the Kṛṣṇa Consciousness movement all over the world. The begetting of children from these marriages has produced a second generation of devotees.

In a well-known verse in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, Lord Kṛṣṇa states that when He shows special favor to someone, He takes away all his sources of income and places him into great difficulty. Hearing this, a person might become fearful of surrendering to Kṛṣṇa. Such a person might argue that if Kṛṣṇa worship goes against their very natures to be materially happy, then people can develop mental illnesses such as neuroses.

The answer to this argument is that when Kṛṣṇa takes things away from His devotees, He simultaneously awards them with

the sweetness of intimate surrender to Kṛṣṇa. This is a higher taste than any material loss and compensates for any depression experienced by Kṛṣṇa's forceful removal of attachments.

Is Queen Kuntī lamenting that it is better to be *akiñcana*—without kingdom—because now that the Pāṇḍavas have their opulent kingdom back, Kṛṣṇa is leading them? Does this mean she prefers to live on the street, so to speak, but with Kṛṣṇa? This idea would be hard to swallow. Modern evangelists propagate just the opposite idea, that because you are religious, you should have more prosperity, because the Lord is on your side and therefore you are rewarded. Who is right?

People should not pray to God for material prosperity. There is no guarantee that He will reward your prayers in that way. As Kṛṣṇa states in the *Bhagavad-gītā*, that happiness which tastes like nectar in the beginning but later becomes poisonous is in the mode of passion. It has a beginning and a bitter end. Queen Kuntī expresses a very intelligent decision. If the choice of living in poverty meant living intimately with Kṛṣṇa, she would choose material poverty. But Kṛṣṇa protected the Pāṇḍavas and gave them rule of the kingdom. Queen Kuntī's expression that it would be better to live without the kingdom was a statement of her love for the Lord, but it did not result in her being abandoned by Him, either materially or spiritually.

VERSE 28

manye tvāṁ kālam īśānam anādi-nidhanaṁ vibhum
samaṁ carantaṁ sarvatra bhūtānāṁ yan mithaḥ kaliḥ

"My Lord, I consider Your Lordship to be eternal time, the supreme controller, without beginning and end, the all-pervasive one. In distributing Your mercy, You are equal to everyone. The dissensions between living beings are due to social intercourse."

COMMENT

In the purport to this verse, Prabhupāda writes, "Eternal time is the witness of all our actions, good and bad, and thus resultant reactions are destined by Him." We may forget our misdeeds, but the Paramātmā feature of the Lord knows everything and arranges for peoples' destinies. "It is all predestined by eternal time." This time factor is also known as *kāla*.

Kuntīdevī follows the previous verse, which feels like a soft meditation, with this one, in which she recognizes Kṛṣṇa's power. Here there is no mention of "gentleness" or His being the property of His loving devotees, but He is *kāla*, eternal time, the Supreme Controller without beginning or end who pervades everything and witnesses all the *jīva's* actions. And though He is *sama*, equal to all in the distribution of His mercy, the living entities cause their own problems through social intercourse. In the purport, Prabhupāda relates the discussion to karma. Our karma causes so much suffering. Even enjoyment ends in suffering when we lose it at death. What's merciful about karma?

There is no mercy in karma. Therefore Kṛṣṇa comes to teach us how to get out of the cycle of karmic action and reaction. At the time of a person's initiation into Kṛṣṇa consciousness, he becomes freed from his karma as long as he sincerely pursues Kṛṣṇa consciousness under the order of his spiritual master and does not enact new sinful activities. The devotee becomes eligible to transcend the cycle of birth and death and go back to Godhead at the end of this lifetime. That is mercy, above karma.

Prabhupāda says it is useless to say we don't know why we're suffering; even if we have forgotten the exact correlation between our actions and our present condition, our constant companion has not. That makes Kṛṣṇa seem so relentless. Is karma only about justice? And what about the myriad living entities who don't know His rules? How can they act in such a way that doesn't bring more suffering on themselves?

Those living beings who are below the human species cannot free themselves from karma by taking to Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

They can only live out their lifetimes and in the next life rise to the next highest species until they finally enter the human life, where freedom of choice becomes possible. Then, by taking to the easy process of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, we become eligible to transcend karma.

Prabhupāda writes that the *jīvas* are given "as much freedom as they deserve," then he says that their suffering is caused by their misusing that freedom. If Kṛṣṇa's ultimate goal is to rescue the *jīvas* from the material world and reinstate them in the spiritual world, how is it a help to *jīvas* to give them freedom, which they will inevitably misuse?

It is not inevitable that the *jīvas* will misuse their freedom. In those cases, when they are under the covering of *māyā*, they misuse their free will and engage their senses in the service of their own sense gratification. When a person understands that his senses belong to Kṛṣṇa and he engages his senses in Kṛṣṇa's service, then he rightly uses his freedom. *Hṛṣīkeṇa hṛṣīkeśa-sevanaṁ bhaktir ucyate.* (*Cc. Madhya* 19.170) Engaging the senses in the service of the Lord is *bhakti*.

That both Kuntīdevī and Prabhupāda mention social intercourse as the source of problems indicates that it is during social intercourse that all one's lower qualities are displayed. That's because, as Prabhupāda points out, we approach the world and one another with an attitude of exploitation rather than service. Those who are trying to change their attitude of exploitation to one of service are making *the* change that has to be made in order to become a devotee. An aspiring devotee makes a statement of faith and holds onto it during the inevitable struggle between himself or herself and the material energy that results from trying to make this change. Along with Kṛṣṇa's mercy, it takes great individual courage to make the change.

"We must remember that *Paramātmā* is our constant companion." What are some hints of this practice of remembering *Paramātmā* in our daily lives?

Devotional yogis practice the eightfold *aṣṭāṅga* path and by arduous *āsanas*, *prāṇāyāma*, and attainment of *samādhi*, they reach

the point of seeing the four-armed form of Kṛṣṇa in the heart. By the easier practice of pure *bhakti*, followers practice the ninefold principles of chanting, hearing, remembering, worshiping, etc., and by perfection in any one of these principles, they can attain the perfection of seeing Kṛṣṇa in the heart. Devotees attain a "Kṛṣṇa conscience," by which they always are aware of what is right and wrong in terms of pleasing Kṛṣṇa, and they act for His pleasure only. Thus they are in constant remembrance of the Lord. This is the perfection of worshiping the Lord in the heart.

This verse describes Kṛṣṇa as *samaṁ carantaṁ*, equally merciful in distributing his love. If this is true, then how is it possible to go to hell for eternity? How is it possible for the soul to be *nitya-baddha*, eternally conditioned?

It appears that this dilemma was already addressed by Kṛṣṇa's devotees, as in the prayers of the *mahābhāgavata* Vāsudeva Datta, who requested the Lord to place the karma of all living entities upon his own soul. (*Cc. Madhya* 15.160–163) None of the Vaiṣṇava *ācāryas* accepted eternal damnation or hell for a soul except for Madhvācārya, who accepted eternal hell without a return for the *jīva*.

In a room conversation in Delhi in 1974, devotees tried to get a conclusion from Śrīla Prabhupāda in the light of Christian preaching:

Prabhupāda: "That's nice, but they do not follow, and still they say they are Christians. They do not follow. Christ is all right. According to the time, according to the country, according to the atmosphere, he's all right, but the followers, they reject."

Devotee No. 1: "The followers try to make everyone fear God. Their whole aim is to make everyone so much afraid. They always try to instill fear in everyone they speak to: 'You are going to hell.'"

Devotee No. 2: "That is the principle of eternal hell that is used to make people surrender, fear of eternal hell."

Prabhupāda: "Yes."

Devotee No. 1: "Fear of God."

Prabhupāda: "According to time. . . *deśa-kāla-pātra*. That kind

of forceful, does not act very nicely. One should know the science, but the class of men to whom Jesus Christ said, they are not very much advanced. Under the circumstances, the fearfulness of hell is quite appropriate for them. Actually, one who does not go back to home, back to Godhead, he is put into the hellish condition of life. That is fearfulness, but we are so blunt that we do not take care. It is fearful. Just like Prahlāda Mahārāja said that, 'Nṛsiṁhadeva, I am not afraid of Your fierce feature of Nṛsiṁha, but I am very much afraid of this materialistic way of life.' *Saṁsāra. Saṁsāra* means this material world. So it is actually very fearful. The whole atmosphere is fearful. *Padaṁ padaṁ yad vipadāṁ*. To make adjustment, you have to accept something fearful. Just like this fight. In the future there may be some adjustment so that people may live peacefully. Therefore we have to fight. This is also, the method is itself fearful. To gain a position where there will be no fear, we have to accept a fearful method. So, in the material world, whatever we think, they are not very happy proposition, that's everything is fear. *Karma-kāṇḍīya*, they have to undergo so many hardship, then they get something profit. People are working so hard to get some profit. In the material world, everything is fearful, hardworking.

Here is an excerpt from the relevant commentary on *Bhagavad-gītā* 16.20 ("Attaining repeated birth amongst the species of demoniac life, O son of Kuntī, such persons can never approach Me. Gradually they sink down to the most abominable type of existence."): "'Will those born in the wombs of *asuras* become liberated at some time by Your mercy, after many births?' 'These fools, having been born in demoniac wombs, not attaining Me at all, proceed to the wombs of the lowest creatures, like dogs. Use of the word *eva* after *aprāpya* indicates that there is no possibility for them to get My mercy. A good birth suitable for practicing to attain the Lord is very rare. The *śruti* also says, "Those with bad conduct attain low births such as dogs, pigs and *caṇḍālas*." (*Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 5.10.7) But because you have the quality of *satya-saṅkalpatva* (having all your desires fulfilled), you can

make them qualified, even if they are so unqualified. Anything is possible for the Lord, but though He could do this, He does not have that desire, since there is no good reason for Him to do that. Thus, there is no fault of prejudice in the Lord. The author of the *Vedānta* says, *vaiṣamya-nairghṛṇye na*: 'There is no prejudice or hatred in the Lord.' (*Vedānta-sūtra* 2.1.35) Therefore these two verses are very appropriate. Thus, those *asuras* described here who do not accept scripture have been shown to be constant inhabitants of hell."

Prabhupāda writes, "The unalloyed devotees and the Lord are transcendentally attached to one another. For others, the Lord has nothing to reciprocate, and therefore He is called *ātmārāma*, self-satisfied." So many materialists feel they are "spiritual" in their own way. Without knowing specifically about devotional service, they feel some inner sense of God's presence, and some of them accomplish great things: the polio vaccine; Shakespeare's plays; inventions, such as electric light, the telephone, the automobile. One could argue that God had to be reciprocating with them; otherwise, how could they have achieved even material success?

God reciprocates with great scientists, inventors, artists, etc., through the heart as Supersoul. He gives them inspirations after their hard endeavors. They say they accomplish their achievement by "ninety-nine percent perspiration, one percent inspiration." But it's a fact that without the permission of God, no one could achieve anything worthwhile. The manifestation of unusually great actions are called *vibhūtis*. These are described in the Seventh and Tenth Chapters of *Bhagavad-gītā*, where Kṛṣṇa describes how He is present in many manifestations of the world. Thus the ordinary man can see God in great creations and creators and qualities that are obvious to everyone.

After poetically enumerating many of these qualities, Kṛṣṇa says to Arjuna, "But of what use is all this detailed information? With but a spark of My splendor I maintain the whole universe." (*Bg*. 10.42)

PERSONAL COMMENT

I am an envious person. It's terrible. I can't hear a lecture or read a book or see a picture of a Godbrother without finding fault. "He's too showy in his *kīrtana*." I'm easier on the women, maybe because I don't see them as competition. I'm masculine, but ego-centered. I no longer have many followers (I used to have hundreds of disciples), but I want those remaining to be fiercely loyal to me. I become envious if they get a lot of *śikṣā* and inspiration from someone else.

What to do about this? I realize it's a bad quality, and so I try to check it. I reason with myself as to the irrationality of minimizing others in comparison to myself. There's room for all of us to be loved. It's very dangerous to dislike Vaiṣṇavas. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura says it's offensive to commit Vaiṣṇava *aparādha;* that's only the negative side. The positive side is you should love the devotees and be eager for their company. I like devotees' company in moderate doses, but for long-term company, I prefer my own.

But I berate even my own self. I'm always banging myself on the head for not being good enough. But I'm kinder to myself. I finally find peace alone because I'm all I've got. I dwell on how Kṛṣṇa, in His unbounded love, must love me too. But you need to extend that vision to others: He loves all His children, and especially Prabhupāda's children. So beware of your snake-like envy. It has a poisonous bite.

Is talk of my evolving situation with the ISKCON committee taboo? I don't think it should be. I am the one who would be most embarrassed by the candid expressions, so if I don't mind the self-revelations, why should anyone else? I think they are an interesting diaristic literature, a masks-off look at me and ISKCON. It's healthy.

I find the "personal comment" sections of PMRB to be as important as the straight śāstric questions and answers. The personal section is more original and more fun to write.

Halloween kids come and ring the doorbell, as many as ten or fifteen at a time. Their parents stand in the road and watch. We give them candies offered to Kṛṣṇa and a greeting, "Hare Kṛṣṇa!"—and they run away. When I first opened the door on the gang, they innocently said, "Hello," not "Trick or treat." They all wore typical costumes, but I out-surprised them in my saffron *kurta, dhotī* and shaved head. Did they think I too was dressed up for Halloween?

I went on video chats for two days with two of the committee members, for over an hour each time. But they perceived me as being in so much anxiety in the way I held the phone and my physical being that they asked to going back to speaking through my proxy. Yesterday I hit a recent all-time headache low, twelve hours' pain in the right eye. Now we are preparing another letter, "transparent," frank, trying to bring about closure.

Bala's birthday party—
pizza at Nicola's, say the
prasādam prayer under your
breath, leave a four dollar
tip.

Talk to Lalitāmṛta in her
last week. She's too weak to
speak. You preached to Kauliṇī
who repeats it to Lalitāmṛta
who nods. She has spiritual fears:
What will happen after death?

"You'll go back to Godhead or
be born in a wonderful devotee
family. Tell it boldly, My devotee
will never perish." Five minutes and
they thank me and ask me to stop.

The appearance day of Rādhā-kuṇḍa. Two versions: Prabhupāda told his disciples not to bathe but only sprinkle drops; the *śāstras* say to bathe.



VERSE 29

na veda kaścid bhagavaṁś cikīrṣitaṁ
tavehamānasya nṛṇāṁ viḍambanam
na yasya kaścid dayito 'sti karhicid
dveṣyaś ca yasmin viṣamā matir nṛṇām

"O Lord, no one can understand Your transcendental pastimes, which appear to be human and are so misleading. You have no specific object of favor, nor do You have any object of envy. People only imagine that You are partial."

COMMENT

Kṛṣṇa's activities appear to be that of a human being, but they are transcendental. "He is undoubtedly known as partial to His pure devotees, but in fact He is never partial, as much as the sun is never partial to anyone." (*Bhāg.* 1.8.29, purport) Pure devotees love the Lord under all conditions, whereas merely pious persons approach the Lord only for some material benediction, and when they receive it, they are no longer interested in a connection with the Lord. So the partiality in receiving the Lord's mercy is relative to the receiver and not to the partiality of Kṛṣṇa.

Kuntīdevī says that Kṛṣṇa is impartial—no one is the specific object of His favor or His envy. This brings up several questions. One is that perhaps to conditioned souls, this is disappointing

news. It seems to be human nature to want to be special in the eyes of God. But here it is said that everyone is equal. Is that a sign of our envy?

It may be a sign of our envy but also our misunderstanding of God's unlimited compassion. When Kuntī states that He is impartial, she means that He loves everyone, even those who are His enemies on the battlefield of Kurukṣetra. All are eligible for liberation. Whoever comes in contact with Kṛṣṇa is actually favored by Him. No one can be His enemy. As for our innate human desire to want to be special in the eyes of God, that can be fulfilled. As stated in the purport, it is up to the receptive power of the living being to receive Kṛṣṇa's mercy to a greater degree or lesser degree. No one is excluded from a special, intimate relationship with Kṛṣṇa. We should not misunderstand the statements about Kṛṣṇa's impartiality.

Related to this, even when we accept that Kṛṣṇa is equal to all, and *because of that*, I too have been allowed to associate with His holy name. But we may not always understand His presence in our lives. We have heard devotees say they have found themselves judging Kṛṣṇa's responsiveness, measuring it against what they consider appropriate. That seems a step away from surrender. Or is such doubting and judging necessary? If not, how do we find our way back toward surrender?

We should not be judging Kṛṣṇa's responsiveness according to our own conceptions of what is appropriate. However he deals with us is perfect. True surrender means to accept Kṛṣṇa's dealing with us unconditionally. He is always perfect, the perfect reciprocator of our service. Thus knowledge of God is necessary for surrender. He is not a being to be doubted or measured according to our own conceptions of how He should act in our lives.

Another thought that comes to mind when considering Kṛṣṇa's impartiality is that if no one is the particular object of either His favor or His envy, Kṛṣṇa must not bear malice toward any living entity no matter what activity he or she engages in. The depth of love and compassion that would be possible when

one is completely free of malice is unfathomable. Yet we tend to judge ourselves and others as if they/we were unlovable by Kṛṣṇa. Why is that?

Again, it is due to lack of knowledge of Kṛṣṇa. We have to accept at least theoretically that He is infinitely compassionate to all of His parts and parcels, all of His children. By regularly hearing about Kṛṣṇa from the spiritual master, we will come to the stage of understanding that we are loved by the Lord under all conditions.

Both the verse and the purport mention that Kṛṣṇa's pastimes *appear* human but are transcendental. What makes them appear human is the range of human emotions that get expressed, albeit in an ideal and Kṛṣṇa-centered way. What is the actual difference between human emotional experience and spiritual emotional experience?

Human emotional experience always has some modicum of sense gratification. We are "all too human." We are victimizers and vulnerable victims. Our relationships are always imperfect. And so our experiences are always somewhat illusory if they are actually on the human or conditioned level. Spiritual means above human, suprahuman. Spiritual emotions are centered on Kṛṣṇa when the devotee desires only to please the Lord. Then although the devotee is a human, he acts beyond the range of human emotions. Similarly, while Kṛṣṇa may appear human, He is always above sense gratificatory activities and acts only for His own transcendental pleasure (which is flawless) or for the pleasure of His devotees.

One may fear that he or she is reluctant to receive the mercy of the Lord. What is the cure?

Why should one be reluctant to receive the mercy of the Lord? It is the most wonderful thing! In a *Bhagavad-gītā* purport to 4.10, Prabhupāda discusses different reasons why people fail to enter a loving relationship with God. One fear is that of the Buddhists or impersonalists, who think that God will cheat them and be a disappointment, as their other human relationships have been. Therefore they prefer a negation of the absolute truth in personal

form. He says another reason is that people may become angry with all sorts of speculation and take to hallucinatory drugs, which confuse their minds completely, and they come up with weird conceptions of God, even thinking themselves God. These are some unfortunate reasons why people may be reluctant to receive the actual mercy of God. But if one knows Kṛṣṇa as He is, then he'll be most eager to get even a drop of that mercy and will seek it in the Lord's holy names and from worshiping the feet of the Vaiṣṇavas and other standard methods of *bhakti*.

The verse states, "Oh Lord, no one can understand Your transcendental pastimes, which appear to be human and so are misleading." There may be a doubt about the word "misleading." The everyday sense of the word is "purposeful misdirection," but Queen Kuntī doesn't mean to say that the Lord is purposeful. It would run counter to His entire program for the living entities. So what is going on there? Is He trying to fool the already misdirected?

The actual meaning of "misleading" is that the Lord plays as a human being but His pastimes are actually superhuman. It's not a motivated deception on His part, certainly not to bewilder the fair-minded devotees.

According to Śrīla Prabhupāda's expert analysis, suffering persons tend to want their suffering to end. Contrast that with Queen Kuntīdevī, who prays for more and more suffering, just so that she can behold the Lord.

Prabhupāda stresses that although Kṛṣṇa descends and "plays" as a human being, He is not so, but always transcendental. This emphasis, however, may result in a feeling of distance between the Lord and humanity. On the other hand, we become enthused when hearing of Kṛṣṇa being "human" (as in the chapter "Lord Caitanya as Person" in *From Copper to Touchstone*). Also, Christianity is based on Lord Jesus's incarnation as human, and emphasis is placed on Jesus being "real God and real man."

How can we be enthusiastic Prabhupādānugas?

We can remain faithful to the teachings of Śrīla Prabhupāda by accepting that Kṛṣṇa is always God. Prabhupāda used to say,

"When He's in the lap of His mother, He's God; when He's playing with the cowherd boys, He's God; when He's dancing with the *gopīs,* He's God; in His different incarnations, He's God; in the universal form, He's God. Kṛṣṇa is always God. When enjoying pastimes, Lord Kṛṣṇa takes humanlike forms and superhuman forms and acts in extraordinary, miraculous ways. He may appear to be a man, but He is never an ordinary man. That is the difference between Kṛṣṇa and a *jīva,* or conditioned soul. Even liberated souls cannot possess all of the qualities of Kṛṣṇa, nor can they present His spiritual qualities in the quantity that they exist in the original Personality of Godhead. It is not something that should create distance between God and the devotee, but it should create devotion. Our God is great. Simultaneously, by the force of *yogamāyā,* the pure devotees, especially in Vṛndāvana, forget Kṛṣṇa's Godhead and treat Him as their transcendental son, friend and lover.

In the purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda states, "By utilizing the sun rays, sometimes even the stones become valuable, whereas a blind man cannot see the sun, although there are enough sun rays before him." There are people who do not see that the valuables of this earth come from the energy of the sun, and there are people who just cannot see or conceive of God and who are blind because of being sectarian religionists. It's hard to argue with both of them. But one of the most difficult things to argue is the problem of evil in this world, such as poverty and injustice. Why do such undesirable states of affairs exist if there is a being who is very powerful, very knowledgeable, and very good? Why can God not interfere in our free will and make us love Him, just as sunrays can make stones into valuables?

Kṛṣṇa can interfere in our free will, but He does not. If He did force us to love Him, it would not be love that is freely offered. Kṛṣṇa gives us a minute amount of free will to love God and be just to all living entities or to be envious and miserable and create trouble. The material world is like a prison for those who wish to misbehave. Honoring their free will, Kṛṣṇa does not interfere with their wrongdoings, and thus the material world

becomes a place of injustice, especially in the inauspicious age of Kali-yuga.

In a lecture on this verse given in Los Angeles on April 21, 1973, Prabhupāda spoke as follows: "So the Lord says in the *Bhagavad-gītā*: *paritrāṇāya sādhūnām vināśāya ca duṣkṛtām* (*Bg.* 4.8). So two purposes. When God incarnates, He has got two mission. One mission is *paritrāṇāya sādhūnām* and *vināśāya ca duṣkṛtām*. One mission is to deliver the faithful devotees, *sādhu*. *Sādhu* means saintly persons.

"The *sādhu*... I have explained several times. *Sādhu* means devotee. *Sādhu* does not mean the worldly honesty or dishonesty, morality or immorality. It has nothing to do with material activities. It is simply spiritual, *sādhu*. But sometimes we derive, '*sādhu*,' a person's material goodness, morality. But actually '*sādhu*' means in the transcendental platform. Those who are engaged in devotional service. *Sa guṇān samatītyaitān* (*Bg.* 14.26). *Sādhu* is transcendental to the material qualities. So *paritrāṇāya sādhūnām*. The *paritrāṇāya* means 'to deliver.'

"Now if a *sādhu* is already delivered, he is on the transcendental platform, then where is the necessity of delivering him? This is the question. Therefore this word is used, *viḍambanam*. It is bewildering. It is contradictory."

We often think of *ācāryas* as those who should achieve perfection and never disagree on anything with anyone. But in practical reality, we never see anyone who would agree with everything said by another sage. Most *ācāryas* do not think that hell can be eternal or that it is illusory. Śrī Madhvācārya, however, contradicts and states, "The wicked fall from there, enter hell, and moreover they do not rise up. To a place they call pit." (*Brahma-sūtra-bhāṣya*, 3.1.14) Everything that Madhvācārya said is pretty much just the opposite of what Śaṅkarācārya would say, as if almost by principle. That does not mean that Śaṅkarācārya achieved or did not achieve perfection just because he considered hell illusory or temporary, but it seems that there are different ways to see how God is equal to everyone, and even if they all contradict, they could be right. Or is there only one explanation

to the whole system, and contradictions are not acceptable? How exactly can God be equal to the *gopīs*, who gave up everything, including worldly respectability, to serve God, and at the same time be equal to wicked Rākṣasas, *piśācīas* and demons? Is it possible to explain it in one way only?

In the absolute sense, Kṛṣṇa is equally merciful to the demons and to the pure devotees in that He grants them liberation (when He kills the demons personally). But as we have said many times, Kṛṣṇa shows His special mercy towards His pure devotees in ways that He does not manifest to the demoniac. That is not a fault of impartiality on behalf of Kṛṣṇa. It is Kṛṣṇa's prerogative of being *bhakta-vatsala*, or especially inclined toward His devotees.

From *Śrī Navadvīpa-dhāma-māhātmya* (also found in the *Bhaviṣya Purāṇa*): "Once as Madhva was traveling in the association of his disciples, he arrived in Śrī Navadvīpa and decided to spend some days within the forests of Modadrumadvīpa. One night, as Madhva lay sleeping, Lord Gaurāṅga appeared to him in a dream. The Lord told Madhva, 'It is well known to everyone that you are My eternal servitor. When I appear here in Navadvīpa, I will accept your *sampradāya*. Travel everywhere and carefully uproot all the false scriptures of the Māyāvādīs and reveal the glories of worshiping the personal form of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Later, when I appear, I will personally broadcast your pure teachings.' The Lord then disappeared.

When Madhva awoke, he was astonished, and as he remembered the Lord, he began to cry in separation, saying, 'Will I ever see that beautiful golden form again?' A celestial voice from the sky replied, 'Worship Me secretly and you will come to Me.' Carrying these instructions within his heart, Madhva continued his travels, more determined than ever to defeat the Māyāvādī philosophers."

In Prabhupāda's lecture on this verse given April 21, 1973, he said as follows: "The Māyāvādī's philosophy is like that. It is called anthropomorphism. They say that: 'Because the... The Absolute Truth is imperson, but because we are persons, we imagine that Absolute Truth also person.' Just the opposite.

Actually that is not the fact. We have got this personal form as reflection of God."

In the same lecture, Prabhupāda said, "The example is given: Just like if you decorate the original person the reflection of the person in the mirror, it also appears decorated. So we are reflections. In the Bible also it is said that man is made after the image of God. So as Kṛṣṇa is transcendental, we. . . He has got two hands, two legs, one head. So man is made after God means we are reflections of the image of God. Not that we manufacture, imagine some form according to our form. That is mistake."

Prabhupāda also said, "So if you decorate Kṛṣṇa, you become decorated. If you satisfy Kṛṣṇa, then you become satisfied. If you offer nice foodstuff to Kṛṣṇa, then you enjoy them. Perhaps those who are outside the temple, they have never imagined such nice foodstuff."

Śrīla Prabhupāda relied on the enthusiasm of devotees a lot. He was proud that no one served Kṛṣṇa for money, but is it such a huge mistake, as some say, to pay salaries to some preachers? Isn't it better to have honest, working householders running the society part time? Temples like Udupi do not pay laksmi in exchange for services, since Lakṣmī is for Viṣṇu, not for the *jīva*, to enjoy, but they give *prasādam* that the *brāhmaṇas* can sell to make a living.) Is that the way?

There is śāstric evidence to support this. From the *Brahma-vaivarta Purāṇa*, Kṛṣṇa Janma Kanda, Chapter 59: "The purifying power of fire, the sun, and the holy *brāhmaṇas* is eclipsed by the divine power of the Vaiṣṇavas. The activities of the Vaiṣṇavas are neither karmic nor performed for the sake of materialistic enjoyment." But in a room conversation that was entitled "*Vairāgya*, Salaries, and Political Etiquette," given on April 28, 1977, Prabhupāda had the following exchange:

"Tamāl Kṛṣṇa Mahārāja: In other words, giving an apartment is the same thing as providing a salary.

"Prabhupāda: All right, apartment can be. . . But what is this? They are given high salary. Because his service is essential—'All right, you take apartment.'

"Prabhupāda: You take *prasādam*. But why salary? Where is the question of salary? Where is *vairāgya*, renouncement? So in all circumstances the salary process should be stopped. One who wants salary, he can work outside.

"Tamāl Kṛṣṇa Mahārāja: Actually, even if you don't give a salary, if you give an apartment and you give food and you give all these other things for someone to maintain his household life. . .

"Prabhupāda: Because his service is essential.

"Tamāl Kṛṣṇa Mahārāja: But that has to be determined very strictly.

"Prabhupāda: Yes. Yes. Whether his service is absolutely required? So you give him."



VERSE 30

janma karma ca viśvātmann ajasyākartur ātmanaḥ
tiryaṅ-nṛṣiṣu yādaḥsu tad atyanta-viḍambanam

"Of course it is bewildering, O soul of the universe, that You work, though You are inactive, and that You take birth, though You are the vital force and the unborn. You Yourself descend amongst animals, men, sages and aquatics. Verily, this is bewildering."

COMMENT

In the purport, Prabhupāda says that Kṛṣṇa's pastimes are inconceivable. And because He is "inconceivably powerful," everything is possible for Him. All of His actions are bewildering

to ordinary people, but it can be understood by pure devotees by their intimate relationship with Him. They know that in all situations, Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Lord.

Kṛṣṇa is a mass of contradictions: He appears to be born into this world, yet He is the unborn; by His will, everything in this world functions, yet He is inactive; He is the soul of the universe, yet He appears as a boar and a fish. There's a nice line in the purport: "No one can calculate Him exactly."

Throughout this section, Kuntīdevī has been praying to "her Kṛṣṇa." We hear and appreciate her sentiments to whatever degree we are capable. But do we have a Kṛṣṇa? Can we pray to Him?

We can follow in her footsteps and know Queen Kuntī's Kṛṣṇa. We also have our own Kṛṣṇa according to our personal capacity, our psychophysical nature. As we grow in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, Kṛṣṇa becomes our own sweet Lord. Ultimately, we can know Him in our *siddha-deha*, or in our eternal specific relationship.

The verse says that Kṛṣṇa appears in all the species—animals, aquatics, humans, etc. In other places in the *Bhāgavatam*, it says that Kṛṣṇa descends into every species out of His compassion for the living entities trapped in various bodies. Why would He bother to do that if the lower species are so locked in their ignorance that they wouldn't be able to recognize Him? It seems when Kṛṣṇa appears as a fish or a boar, it is humans and demigods who recognize and appreciate Him. Does Matsya have pastimes with other fish as well and bring about their liberation?

We read in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* that when Ṛṣabhadeva was caught in the forest fire, all the animals and other entities who died with Him were all liberated simply because of his transcendental presence.

Viśvanātha Cakravartī's *ṭīkā* to this verse refers to the famous "Janmāṣṭamī" *śloka* of *Bhagavad-gītā*: *janma karma ca me divyam / evaṁ yo vetti tattvataḥ* (*Bg.* 4.9). This means that if you understand His contradictory birth and activities, you will become a devotee and not take birth again. This is the symptom of a liberated person.

In a lecture Śrīla Prabhupāda gave on this verse in Los Angeles on April 22, 1973, he said the following: "Their love is unending. Everyone in Vṛndāvana. Just like Yaśodāmātā or Nanda Mahārāja. They are in paternal affection with Kṛṣṇa. So the father and mother love Kṛṣṇa, the friends love Kṛṣṇa, the girlfriends, they love Kṛṣṇa, the trees love Kṛṣṇa, the water loves Kṛṣṇa, the flowers, the cows, the calves, everyone loves Kṛṣṇa. That is Vṛndāvana. So if we simply learn how to love Kṛṣṇa, then we can create immediately this world as Vṛndāvana. That is the only central point. How to love Kṛṣṇa. *Premā pum-artho mahān.*"

There is confusion about the word "love," mainly because of the sexed-up contemporary culture. Is there a better word in English that can describe the *premā* of devotees in Vṛndāvana?

Love is a fine word if applied to Kṛṣṇa without feelings of lust. The ideal Sanskrit word is *bhakti.* In many translations of *Nārada-bhakti Sutra, bhakti* is translated simply as "love." But Śrīla Prabhupāda's translation uses the phrase "devotional service," indicating the active devotee's devotion to the Lord. In the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta,* Kṛṣṇadasa Kavirāja distinguishes between *kāma,* or lust, and *premā,* or love, by saying that lust is when one gratifies his own senses, but love is for gratifying the senses of Kṛṣṇa.

Why does it seem from this verse that an advanced stage of Kṛṣṇa consciousness means to become bewildered by Kṛṣṇa's greatness? Is it that in the beginning, you take all the knowledge too casually?

Advanced devotees become bewildered by Kṛṣṇa's inconceivable nature. They know Him both as the all-great and as the familiar friend or lover. These are the highest types of devotees. A neophyte devotee becomes overwhelmed by God's greatness and approaches Him in awe and reverence. The Lord is not as much pleased by the awe and reverence of the neophyte devotees as He is by the familiar treatment He receives from His intimate devotees, who sometimes even reprimand Him under the influence of *yogamāyā.*

The transcendental pastimes of the Lord are not only

bewildering but also apparently contradictory. In *Caitanya-bhāgavata*, Lord Caitanya, in the form of Varāhadeva, said He doesn't like the *Upaniṣads'* words describing Him as without legs, hands, mouth or eyes. This is also bewildering and apparently contradictory. Are not the *Upaniṣads* the Lord's words?

The *Upaniṣads* establish the absolute in impersonal terms, as beyond all taint of matter. In doing so, they dwell on the "negative way" of describing the absolute truth in terms of what He is not. He is not anything of this material world; He is inconceivable. But the *Upaniṣads* lack descriptions of the Personality of Godhead except in a few of the theistic *Upaniṣads*, such as the *Gopāla-tāpanī*, *Īśopaniṣad* and the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*. So Lord Caitanya, in the form of Varāhadeva, said He didn't like this Upaniṣadic type of description, which omitted concentration on worship of the Lord in His personal form. The *śāstras* serve different purposes to elevate souls up to the understanding of God as a person, and the *Upaniṣads* have their place in that plan. It is not bewildering or contradictory.

We understand that Kṛṣṇa is *adhokṣaja* and cannot be comprehended by our limited capacities. Yet a qualified guru is one who uses reason to both understand and explain the Lord. Many persons need reasons to make sense about the Lord and feel disappointed when their intelligent questions are answered with the principle of *acintya*, which may sometimes be used as a clichī. Impersonalists sometimes say that God can neither be explained nor understood. But we personalists are supposed to make use of our senses and intelligence. How can we assist intelligent persons in Kṛṣṇa consciousness?

God is not completely unknown. But no one can comprehend Him fully. He is *acintya*, or unknowable, in that sense. But the Vaiṣṇavas have access to many pastimes and personal qualities of the Supreme Lord and can know Him in reciprocation of their devotional service. We can introduce intellectual and curious persons into the world of Kṛṣṇa, His amazing and logical teachings in *Bhagavad-gītā*, and His *acintya* yet personal pastimes in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. And direct access with the senses is also available,

by hearing His holy name, and we can touch Kṛṣṇa by the tongue. Devotional service also begins with the tongue in the honoring of Kṛṣṇa *prasādam,* or food offered to Kṛṣṇa. One can see Kṛṣṇa with the eyes through the *arcā-vigraha,* and one can touch the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa or His pure devotees. Kṛṣṇa's full glories cannot be enumerated, even by Śeṣa-nāga, the thousand-headed snake form of the Lord who goes on glorifying the Lord for thousands of years. But if a devotee attempts to enumerate even a fraction of Kṛṣṇa's glories, Kṛṣṇa is pleased, just as a father is pleased by the broken words uttered by his growing child.

In this verse, Kuntīdevī enumerates many ways in which the Supreme Lord bewilders us by His many contradictory qualities. Is she stating the fact of the Lord's capacity to bewilder the living entities, or is she beseeching the Lord to kindly explain these things to His dear devotees?

She's doing both. She is stating the puzzlement of the human mind to comprehend the infinite God in His contradictory acts, and she is also praying to the Lord to please reveal Himself, as in the prayer to Lord Jagannatha, *jagannātha-svāmī nayana-patha-gāmī bhavatu me,* "Oh Lord of the universe, kindly reveal yourself to me." Lord Jagannatha appears to be a crude form, painted and made of wood. But the pure devotee prays that the Lord reveal His divinity through this form. The Lord's pure devotees in Vṛndāvana are not at all troubled by the Lord's apparent contradictions. Mother Yaśodā thinks Kṛṣṇa is her child to be protected, the cowherd boys accept Kṛṣṇa as their friend to sport with, and the *gopīs* yearn to play with Kṛṣṇa as their conjugal lover. None of them even think of Kṛṣṇa as the *acintya* Lord but as their dearmost beloved.

PERSONAL COMMENT

I had a dream where I was giving a *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* lecture to a large audience of devotees. Because of my recent experience of sadness ("a man of sorrows"), I was speaking of the sadness of Kṛṣṇa. Of course, Kṛṣṇa is always jolly, but I was somehow

expressing His sadness. Does he feel sad for all the suffering *jīvas*? As Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu, He experienced that the world seemed void in the absence of Kṛṣṇa, and tears were flowing from His eyes. But that is an especially acute ecstasy of love in separation. Anyway, it was a nice feeling, lecturing in this mood. Perhaps it was *dainya,* feelings of unworthiness. The audience appreciated it. Will I have a role to experience more of this in honest presentations, but without self-pity?

From a letter by John Coltrane to Don de Michael, editor of *Down Beat* (from *Coltrane*: *The Story of a Sound,* p. 83): ". . .You know, Don, I was reading a book on the life of van Gogh today, and I had to pause and think of that wonderful and persistent force—the creative urge. The creative urge was in this man who found himself so much at odds with the world he lived in, and in spite of all the adversity, frustrations, rejections, and so forth—beautiful and living art came forth abundantly. . . if only he could be here today.

"Truth is indestructible. It seems history shows (and it's the same way today) that the innovator is more often than not met with some degree of condemnation, usually according to the degree of departure from the prevailing modes of expression of what have you. Change is always so hard to accept. We also see that these innovators always seek to revitalize, extend and reconstruct the status quo in their given fields, whatever is needed. Quite often they are the rejects, outcasts, sub-citizens, etc. of the very societies to which they bring so much sustenance. Often they are people who endure great personal tragedy in their lives. Whatever the case, whether accepted or rejected, rich or poor, they are forever guided by that great and eternal constant—the creative urge. Let us cherish it and give all praise to God. Thank you and best wishes to all. Sincerely, John Coltrane."

The "creative urge" resonates with me. My Godbrother Haridāsa said to me that Prabhupāda wanted devotees to express Kṛṣṇa consciousness through their own experience, and then he asked, "but why isn't it being done?" It seems when they

do it they are suspected of being ego-centered and not Kṛṣṇa-centered. And so Kṛṣṇa consciousness is expressed without the experiencer, without the experience. Those who have the creative urge will express it in their Kṛṣṇa consciousness works, even at the risk of being misunderstood or rejected.

Moved into a new house. Quiet and private. But I agree to receive visitors and speak to them from the scriptures. Waiting for the news about me to be broadcast. Daily headaches for several hours. A new strategy for the afternoon outings. We used to walk a half hour on the Rehoboth Beach boardwalk and sit in a gazebo outdoors and chant *japa* for an hour. But it has become too cold to sit and chant. Today we walked for half an hour but then sat in the car facing the ocean and chanted on beads for the hour. Expect to keep this up all winter.

FREE WRITE

Beyond autobiography. Gremlins on the mind. Time of death heartaches. Man with excruciating pain from cancer needs constant massages, gets them from shifts of compassionate devotees. Depressed soul attempted to take his life. Put rocks in his bookbag and entered the Ganges. Got dragged all the way down to the Jalangi, by the bridge, lost his glasses and his *dhotī* but saved his life. Encourage him that he has not offended devotees, deserves to live. He should come home and join us here.

Listen to Prabhupāda lecture, first time in a long time. Aspire to speak like him. Listen alertly to his examples. But it will take long work to restore the *ślokas* to memory.

They're having a meeting, trying to make peace. I sit it out upstairs. I went to the stairwell and heard them speaking of production of my books. Maybe they're over the hard part about personal relationships. I could go down and hear personally what's going on. But I might get bored. Meetings stress me. Anyway, I'll go down.

Outlandish Kṛṣṇa hops and skips in original, pristine Vraja.

Spiritual world. The medieval, dirty, noisy (with armies of monkeys) town is somehow also Gokula covered to keep away the insincere. You are not going there in 2008 but plan to go in '09. Māyāpura in 2008, hemp shoes.

Draw pictures of *sādhus* and people wearing shirts and pants. *Sannyāsīs* wear *kaupinas*.

Gaura-Nitai are worshiped in this house.

What will they think of me?
You can't draw seriously
mini-lectures in the morning
about Yudhiṣṭhira: "O my lot!"

Aggrieved 640,000,000 were
killed to put him on the throne.
Even Vyāsa and Kṛṣṇa of superhuman
deeds could not convince him don't
lament. It was left for Bhīṣma.

Another gray day. They don't
know I wear jeans outdoors
in the cold, boardwalk, my
serious *japa* as long as I am
able.

A committee of five to
check up on me during the
year. Show them your
face, not your underwear.
Cane in my right hand, no way
to carry *tridaṇḍa*.

Bow at their feet,
they return obeisances,
sometimes a hug. But
where is love?

It was left for Bhīṣma:
"No one can know the ways
of the Almighty. Don't even
inquire into it." Everything
is happening, down to
the pulse beats.

"It's all a blessing." He can
say that. Maybe it's true.
But it feels rough. Quiet
in the front seat. Give me
some comic relief.



VERSE 31

gopy ādade tvayi kṛtāgasi dāma tāvad
yā te daśāśru-kalilāñjana-sambhramākṣam
vaktraṁ nīnīya bhaya-bhāvanayā sthitasya
sā māṁ vimohayati bhīr api yad bibheti

"My dear Kṛṣṇa, Yaśodā took up a rope to bind You when You committed an offense, and Your perturbed eyes overflooded with tears, which washed the mascara from Your eyes. And You were afraid, though fear personified is afraid of You. This sight is bewildering to me."

Comment

Covered by *yogamāyā*, the Supreme Lord and His pure devotees exchange loving service in which the pure devotee forgets the position of the Supreme Lord, and the Lord also accepts the service of His devotees, sometimes taking a subordinate role. He enjoys this more than He enjoys worship with awe and reverence. This takes place in the original abode of Goloka-Vṛndāvana,

and Kṛṣṇa's playful, childish relationship with Mother Yaśodā is unique. Queen Kuntī is adoring the particular pastime where Mother Yaśodā threatened to punish Kṛṣṇa, and in fear tears came from His eyes. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "Kuntī was conscious of the exalted position of Kṛṣṇa, whereas Yaśodā was not. Therefore Yaśodā's position was more exalted than Kuntī's." In remembering this scene, Kuntīdevī was bewildered and praised the love of Kṛṣṇa and Yaśodā.

This verse and purport basically state that Kṛṣṇa is conquered by love, and that He is especially conquered by pure love, as exhibited by the residents of Vraja. What does it mean to conquer Kṛṣṇa?

To "conquer" Kṛṣṇa means to make Him come under your control.

Kuntīdevī mentions that Kṛṣṇa appears to be afraid when His mother caught Him and began to bind Him, yet He is fear personified. Is Kṛṣṇa actually afraid? Is it possible for the Supreme Person to feel anything beyond His own power and majesty? That is, is He able to fully enter His own pastimes? If so, how?

Kṛṣṇa is certainly able to perfectly enter His humanlike pastimes and give up His sense of supreme power and majesty. He does this to please Himself and His pure devotees. He does it by His inconceivable mystic potency known as *yogamāyā*.

There is a notable and peculiar connection between this verse and the verse describing the same pastime in the *Dāmodarāṣṭakam ślokas* of *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*. Not only is it about the same pastime but the same word *gopī* (*gopī adade*) refers to Mother Yaśodā in the *Padma Purāṇa's Dāmodarāṣṭakam* verse: *idaṁ te mukhāmbhojam atyanta-nīlair vṛtaṁ kuntalaiḥ snigdha-raktaiś ca gopyā/ muhuś cumbitaṁ bimba-raktādharaṁ me manasy āvirāstām alaṁ lakṣa-lābhaiḥ*. However, Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī, in his *Dig-darśinī-ṭīkā* on this verse, writes that *gopyā* refers to either Yaśodā or to Śrīmatī Rādhārani Herself.

Although the beauty of Satyavrata Muni's meditative vision is such that it cannot be phrased, he tries to indicate his vision

with a metaphor: "Your countenance is a blooming lotus which extinguishes every affliction with the nectar of supreme bliss. May it be present in my mind again and again. This fully bloomed lotus is encircled by Your dark-blue, glossy and red-hued curls, which are like bumblebees humming around a corolla." The adverb *muhuḥ* is related to the past participle *cumbitaṁ* and the verb *āvirāstām*. The meaning is, "May His lotus face, kissed again and again by the *gopī* (Yaśodā or Rādhā) enter my mind again and again." Why would Satyavrata or Śukadeva not refer to Rādhā directly in this verse or in many other places? After all, other Vṛndāvana pastimes are related here directly, and one does not need to imagine a veil of secret meetings. Why is there so little mention of Rādhā in the *Bhāgavatam*? And will this word *gopyā* be interpreted differently by devotees in different *rasas*, according to their tastes?

The subject matter of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa pastimes is very grave and confidential, and Śukadeva Gosvāmī does not want to reveal too much about it, lest it be taken cheaply. Also, it has been said that if he uttered the word "Rādhārani" in his discourse to Mahārāja Parīkṣit, Śukadeva would fall into a paralyzing ecstasy and not be able to continue his narrations. Pure devotees in the *vātsalya* or *mādhurya rasa* may take the word *gopyā* to be either Yaśodā or Śrīmatī Rādhārani, according to their internal mood. In his *Laghu-bhāgavatāmṛta* (verse 45), Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī states, "Śrīmatī Rādhārani is dear to Kṛṣṇa, and Her *kuṇḍa*, known as Rādhā-kuṇḍa, is similarly dear to Him. It is the favorite place of Kṛṣṇa. Of all the *gopīs*, Śrīmatī Rādhārani is the most dear to Kṛṣṇa."

During Kārttika season, devotees sing *Dāmodarāṣṭakam* daily. In his 1974 Māyāpura lecture on this verse, given during Kārttika, Śrīla Prabhupāda tells the whole story himself: "So here it is said that *kṛtāgasi. Kṛtāgasi*. . . so Kṛṣṇa was offender before His mother. The mother, Yaśodā, was taking care of the milk, and Kṛṣṇa wanted to suck her breast. So mother was very busy. So when the milk was overflowing, she immediately left Kṛṣṇa and went to take care of the milk. Kṛṣṇa became very much angry. So He

went to the butter stock and broke the butter pot, spoiled it, and when Mother Yaśodā saw that the child is breaking the butter pot, she immediately wanted to catch Him, and Kṛṣṇa fled away. And then, after all, He was a small child, and Mother Yaśodā caught Him and wanted to bind Him with a rope. This is a fact. *Kṛtāgasi.* Then *gopy ādade tvayi*: 'Because You were offender, therefore she wanted to bind You.' *Dāma. Dāma* means rope. *Tāvat.* 'And what was your condition at that time?' The condition was *yā te daśā.*' *Daśā* means condition. So he was crying. Lord Kṛṣṇa, out of fear of His mother—'Now Mother will bind Me'—so He was crying. And while crying, the tears washed the *kadjala,* mascara. So they were dropping, and He was fearful, crying, and His head was down, flapping. This condition. *Ninīya. Vaktraṁ ninīya,* face. He felt culprit, that, 'I have done wrong.' *Bhaya-bhāvanayā.* He was so much afraid that 'Mother will bind me. My freedom will be lost.' *Sthitasya.* "So Kuntīdevī is remembering that scene, and she became astonished. Why?" (Lecture on *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 1.8.31, Māyāpura, 1974) We may ask the same question: Why? Why does Kṛṣṇa prefer this type of familiarity to a more respectful or appropriate relationship?

The answer is in the scriptures, such as *Caitanya-caritāmṛta,* Adi-lila 1.6: "Desiring to understand the glory of Śrīmatī Rādhārani's love, the wonderful qualities in Him that She alone relishes through Her love, and the happiness She feels when She realizes the sweetness of His love, the Supreme Lord Hari, richly endowed with Her emotions, appeared from the womb of Śrīmatī Sacidevi as the moon appeared from the ocean."

And in the *Laghu-bhāgavatāmṛta,* Purva Kanda 1.65: "Kṛṣṇa known as Yadu-Kumāra is Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa; He is different from the Kṛṣṇa who is the son of Nanda Mahārāja. Yadu-Kumāra manifests His pastimes in the cities of Mathurā and Dvārakā, but Kṛṣṇa never leaves Vṛndāvana."

In *Nectar of Devotion,* chapter 50, it is said, "One devotee said, 'My dear Kṛṣṇa, how can I address You as my son when You are addressed by the great Vedantists as the Absolute Truth and by the Vaiṣṇavas who follow the principles of Nārada-pancaratra as

the Supreme Personality of Godhead? You are the same Supreme Person, so how shall my tongue be so extraordinarily bold as to address You as an ordinary son? In this statement, there is a mixture of neutrality and parental love, and the result is imcompatible." It seems that here Queen Kuntī is aware of Kṛṣṇa being the Supreme Lord, but isn't it incompatible with her being one of the personalities who enjoy parental affection towards Kṛṣṇa (as stated in *Nectar of Devotion*, chapter 43)?

Queen Kuntī's bewilderment about Yaśodā and Kṛṣṇa in the Damodara pastime is not an incompatible mixture of *rasas*. It is presented as one of her wonderful prayers in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, a scripture in which there is no flaw. She cannot enter the same intimacy as Mother Yaśodā, but from a distance she adores it and worships it.

It almost seems that Queen Kuntī is mentioning bewilderment after bewilderment, as if this is part of her ecstasy—to view the Lord's activities and to be bewildered by these wonderful memories. Prabhupāda states directly that "Kuntī was conscious of the exalted position of Kṛṣṇa, whereas Yaśodā was not. Therefore Yaśodā's position was more exalted than Kuntī's." Kuntī treasures her moods in approaching the Lord, and she also pleases Him by her affectionate bewilderment. Would Queen Kuntī (or a devotee like her) with approach to the Lord already established) aspire to or relish being a *gopī* in complete transcendental forgetfulness, or is she satisfied in her position of *jñāna-bhakti*?

Queen Kuntī is praying to Kṛṣṇa not out of the desire to know Him as the Supreme but out of her pure devotion. Each pure devotee who is established in their *siddha-deha*, or eternal relationship with Kṛṣṇa, is completely satisfied with that exchange and does not hanker for another.

Purports like this one from Śrīla Prabhupāda are clear statements; they are not "merely" *vaidhī-bhakti* but are also continually infused with the highest spontaneous love of the residence of Vraja.

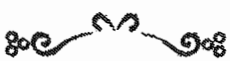
It seems in this verse that Kuntīdevī directly glorifies Kṛṣṇa

in amazement, and indirectly glorifies Mother Yaśodā in appreciation. I am under the impression that unless we are free from *anarthas*, we will have a hard time praising or glorifying others, even God, and our prayers will be far from being spontaneous; they will be like a practice, as in jump-starting a machine. Do you think Kṛṣṇa will accept our rusty prayers?

In *Bhagavad-gītā*, Kṛṣṇa says, *ye yathā māṁ prapadyante/ tāṁs tathaiva bhajāmy aham*, "As all surrender unto Me, I reward them accordingly. Everyone follows My path in all respects, O son of Pṛthā." Kṛṣṇa accepts the hymns of the Vedas, the glorifications of great sages and demigods, the "bewildering" appreciation of Queen Kuntīdevī, and especially the intimate exchanges with the residents of Vraja, where He is treated as their dearmost, without care for His Godhead. He simultaneously certainly accepts all sincere prayers and aspirations to serve Him, from the neophyte to the most advanced devotees.

Should we aspire to have intimacy in our relationship with Kṛṣṇa? Or is it better to remember Kṛṣṇa as the Supreme Lord and keep respect while hearing and discussing His unique pastimes?

A devotee should aspire for the highest intimacy with the Lord. But we cannot attain to it by "jumping over" like a monkey. We have to execute the regulative principles of the *pāñcarātrikī* and *bhāgavata mārgas*, the path of worshiping the Lord in the temple according to rules and regulations, and the path of chanting and hearing from *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. Out of deep respect, genuine love and intimacy will develop, as Kṛṣṇa sees that we are to be trusted.



VERSE 32

kecid āhur ajaṁ jātaṁ puṇya-ślokasya kīrtaye
yadoḥ priyasyānvavāye malayasyeva candanam

"Some say that the Unborn is born for the glorification of pious kings, and others say that He is born to please King Yadu, one of Your dearest devotees. You appear in his family as sandalwood appears in the Malaya hills."

COMMENT

There are different opinions as to why the Supreme Lord takes His birth. In the *Bhagavad-gītā*, Kṛṣṇa states that He appears to reestablish the principles of religion, to protect the pious, and to annihilate the impious. The example of Malayan sandalwood is appropriate. Prabhupāda writes, "Trees can grow anywhere and everywhere, yet because the sandalwood trees grow mostly in the area of the Malaya hills, the name sandalwood and the Malaya hills are interrelated." Similarly, Kṛṣṇa is known as Yadava and Yadunandana, although He is not actually the son of King Yadu. But He glorified King Yadu by taking His birth in that family, and therefore He goes by those names.

Kuntīdevī begins to discuss the possible reasons for Kṛṣṇa's appearance in this world. She mentions "the glorification of pious kings," and Prabhupāda says in the purport that this refers to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira. Yet Yudhiṣṭhira suffered so much, even though he was pious, a great king, and a great, great devotee of Kṛṣṇa. How does Kṛṣṇa's treatment of Yudhiṣṭhira glorify Yudhiṣṭhira?

Yudhiṣṭhira's tolerance of his sufferings is his own glory. Kṛṣṇa humbles and purifies His devotees as an example to the world and for the personal evolution of the devotee to the purest status. Just as gold is purified of all foreign, impure elements by the hottest fire, the devotees sometimes undergo ordeals just

to bring out their purest qualities. Kuntīdevī also mentions that Kṛṣṇa may have been born to "please King Yadu, one of Your dearest devotees." Yadu was the son of Yayāti, and the Ninth Canto (verse 18.40) explains that although he refused his father's request to exchange his youth with his father's old age, he did so for devotional reasons and was therefore not *adhama-jña*, ignorant of religious principles. Still, Yayāti cursed his son that he and his descendants would never enjoy kingship. And yet Kṛṣṇa was born in this dynasty, and Yadu is mentioned as a dear devotee. Again, it seems, a devotee (and his dynasty) underwent suffering. For a *kṣatriya* to be deprived of his right to rule, especially the eldest son in line for the throne, is no small suffering, because it means he cannot do his proper duty in a culture where duty is all. Why does Kṛṣṇa allow these favored devotees to suffer?

I have already explained: By suffering and passing all tests, the devotees are glorified. The devotees, even *kṣatriyas*, are not ultimately interested in ruling but in pleasing Kṛṣṇa in whatever way He treats them. Kṛṣṇa favored Yadu by being born into his family, and this was more important for Yadu than ruling the world.

In his lecture on this verse in 1974, Prabhupāda said as follows: "Even ordinary person, if he is God conscious, he takes Kṛṣṇa as supreme father. Just like the Christians, they take that 'O Father, give us our daily. . . .' Father means to ask Him, 'Give me, give me, give me, give me.' Nobody wants to give father, but wants to take from father. Sometimes our students, when they spend extravagantly and I point out, he says, 'My father has sent money.' Sometimes. 'My father has sent money.' Yes. 'Why did you stay at Ashoka Hotel?' 'My father sent money.' 'Why not ask your father to send money? Why you are collecting by making life member?' So means idea of father. . . Father means that 'Whenever I want to stay in Ashoka Hotel, he'll send money,' not that 'I will send money to father. He may stay at Ashoka Hotel.' Nobody thinks like that. 'Father may send money, and I shall stay in Ashoka Hotel.' This is the idea of father. Father means to exploit him, to exploit.

"So the father conception of God, mother conception of God, is not bad. Just like in Bengal especially, they have got mother conception. Mother conception means the same thing, to exploit, take from mother, or father. But the Vaiṣṇava conception is not to accept God as father or mother but as son. Son means to give. Father means to take from him, and son means to take from the father. So if you become father of God, then your business will be to give, not to take. That is Vaiṣṇava conception."

Do we know about any saint in the Christian tradition who would not want to pray to be a son to God but rather to take care of God as the son, i.e., act as father or carer of God, thus being in what Prabhupāda calls here the "Vaiṣṇava conception?"

Jesus Christ, the son of God, was born to his parents Mary and Joseph in Nazareth. His birth was by immaculate conception, without seminal discharge, just as the births of Kṛṣṇa and Lord Caitanya were. Mary and Joseph took great paints to protect their little son from the tyrant King Herod, who wanted to kill him. They fled to Egypt to escape the genocide of Herod and were always in anxiety about the little Christ child. Joseph was a carpenter and trained his son in the trade through boyhood and youth. The Franciscan friar St. Anthony of Padua is typically shown carrying the child Jesus in his arms. And the founder of the Franciscans, St. Francis of Assisi, initiated the worship of the holy child Jesus in the manger, or creche, at Christmas time. Christ is also worshiped in statues as a holy child, such as in the famous Infant of Prague.

In his *ṭīkā* to this verse, Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura says as follows: "*puṇya-śloko nalo rājā / puṇya-śloko yudhiṣṭhiraḥ*. There are two types of pious kings (*puṇya-śloka*), such as Mahārāja Nala and Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira." Prabhupāda translates it, "Mahārāja Nala (*nalo rājā*) was also celebrated as the great pious king, but he had no connection with Lord Kṛṣṇa. Therefore Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira is meant here to be glorified by Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa." How is it possible to be a great and pious king but not have the connection to God? Is it at all possible for a secular king or a secular society to be moral and good?

We might see some advantages of the secular society, especially in comparison to an intolerant totalitarian state. But unless the ruler knows the ultimate goal of life, guiding the citizens and going back to Godhead through the *varṇāśrama* system, his rule can produce no lasting benefit. Even King Duryodhana was ruling the kingdom adequately, but he was a nondevotee of Kṛṣṇa and the Pāṇḍavas, and so he had to be dragged down from his office. Mahārāja Nala is recorded as being a good king in history, but he pales in comparison to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, who is glorified by Lord Kṛṣṇa on account of his being a pure devotee of the Lord.

The term "God" is used with a wide variety of different meanings. On the one hand, there are metaphysical interpretations: God is a prime mover, a first cause, or a necessary being that has its necessity of itself, or the ground of being, or the being whose essence is identical with its existence. Or God is not one being among other beings—even a supremely great being—but instead, Being itself. Or God is an ultimate reality to which no concepts truly apply. It seems that when someone like Einstein says God, he will mean one thing, whereas when we say God, we mean something different.

Śrīla Nārada tells Śaunaka Ṛṣi in the *Śrī Hari-bhakti-sudhodaya* (1.51), "Ah, you are most extremely fortunate, because the entire population is being empowered by you spiritually. The truly fortunate leader of society is one who can instill devotion for Lord Hari in the hearts of people tormented in material existence." Kṛṣṇa is *uttamaśloka*, whereas the devotee is *punyaśloka*. He worships Kṛṣṇa with selected prayers (another meaning of the word translated as "pious king").

In his *ṭīkā* on *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 1.8.32, Jīva Gosvāmī writes as follows: "*Kecid iti catuṣkam. Kecid* (i.e., the first word of this *śloka*) refers to the four *ślokas* 32 through 35 as the four reasons mentioned in this verse: (1) some say that You appear to show how *ajaṁ* is born (*ajaṁ jātaṁ*); (2) some say it is to show how a pious king should be glorified; (3) some say You appear so that

the Yadu family is glorified; and finally, (4) some say it is God who defines everything, not that anything else can define God, Kṛṣṇa, just as the type of tree (*mal* tree) gives the name to the whole region (Malaya)."

A human being, being so limited and conditioned, cannot define the unlimited and unconditional God. If God is the definition and origin of reason itself, it is a futile attempt to define, prove or argue the existence of God, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, by *anumāna* (logical inference). It appears that we keep trying again and again to define God, but it's just like looking at the moon and thinking we can measure it through the branches of the trees in the foreground (*śāgvā-candra-nyāyaḥ*).

There are so many different opinions about why Kṛṣṇa appears. Are they all good?

All the opinions offered by Queen Kuntī are valid. Kṛṣṇa appears to glorify King Yadu, to give relief to Lord Brahmā when the universe was overflooded with demons, to spread the chanting and hearing of His holy names, etc. To give an ordinary example: when we go to a supermarket, we may go with the intention of buying one thing, but then we decide to buy many other things that are available there. Kṛṣṇa comes and accomplishes many pastime intentions at the same time.

Prabhupāda writes in his purport, "When there is a pious king ruling over the world, the people are happy. When the ruler is impious, the people are unhappy. In the age of Kali, in most cases, the rulers are impious, and therefore the citizens are also continuously unhappy. But in the case of democracy, the impious citizens themselves elect their representative to rule over them, and therefore they cannot blame anyone for their unhappiness."

What a state we are in, according to this philosophy! We Americans especially are so in love with the idea of democracy, the so-called democratic ideal of a government "of the people, by the people, and for the people." Prabhupāda's points seem to directly contradict this. No one is qualified, being impious, and no one seems to care, or it is divided. The so-called "pious" leaders, though they defend the right to life and pro–family values or

want prayer back in schools, have many other issues centered on improving their own eating and sleeping. The Lord can simply reestablish the pious kings on the throne, so why doesn't he just do that now? Why are we stuck with a world that has no strong pious leaders? Why isn't it the Lord's desire now to reestablish religion, as He did in the time of the Pāṇḍavas?

It is the Lord's desire that there be pious kings. But this is the age of Kali, the age of quarrel. There are no pious leaders, but rather the *śūdras*, or lowest class of people, have taken leadership posts. By hook or by crook they have garnered votes and are exploiting the people. Kṛṣṇa will not force a pious government upon societies. Formerly there was monarchy, and a strong, pious ruler saw to the benefit of all the people. Democracy has inherent flaws in that the most ordinary people elect their leaders without knowledge of leadership values. Democracy could work only if actual pious leaders existed today and the general mass of people were enlightened enough to find such a pious leader. The situation does not seem so bright for these circumstances to take place. And neither will Kṛṣṇa interfere with the free will of the people and their leaders.

As we grow up in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, it becomes an important dynamic to appreciate that there is no one answer for any one question, as referred to in this verse. And yet, is it not simultaneously important to develop the necessary chastity of being satisfied to simply hear and repeat what our founder-*ācārya* has said?

We should not doubt the words of the spiritual master. But he himself often gives many different sides of the truth, and even apparent contradictions. In the spirit of Queen Kuntī's different opinions as to why Kṛṣṇa appears, we can accept our spiritual master's different statements and accommodate them all as valid versions. Sometimes after giving a variety of valid opinions, he may establish one as being all-important, as being the *mahā-vākya* conclusive verse or truth. A keen disciple of the spiritual master listens faithfully to whatever his guru teaches and tries to distinguish what is the most important emphasis.

It seems that all of Queen Kuntī's statements are true, even though at first they appear to contain conflicting assertions. They sound like inspired poetic and literary embellishments. They inspire awe—the Unborn taking birth for us—in affection. He relates as a human. Verses like this are so nice to just hear. We can just savor them in appreciation, with no questions whatsoever.

Why was King Yadu so dear to the Lord?

Although Yadu was a king, he dedicated his everything for the pleasure of the Lord. Therefore, Kṛṣṇa desired to appear in his dynasty just to please him. This is a reciprocation between Kṛṣṇa and His devotees, be they kings or be they cowherd boys. A king like Yadu is overjoyed that Kṛṣṇa appears in his kingdom and appears to subjugate Himself to the king. Therefore Kṛṣṇa is known as Yadunandana, one who gives joy to Yadu.

PERSONAL COMMENT

In Volume 2 of *A Poor Man Reads the Bhāgavatam*, I playfully refer to myself as "Rock Bottom." Little did I know that the bottom had not been reached. I did not know I would tumble from my position as an unblemished *sannyāsī*. Branded on the forehead with the scarlet letter. Am I now Humpty Dumpty? "Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,/ Humpty Dumpty had a great fall./ Now all the king's horses and all the king's men/ could not put Humpty Dumpty together again." He's usually pictured as a big cracked egg. World or society reputation is one thing, and reinstatement with Prabhupāda and Kṛṣṇa is another. I truly think it is easier to be forgiven by the Lord and the spiritual master than by the society of devotees. At least the institution can be unforgiving, punishing. They act as the right arm of the founder-*ācārya*: "He can give no more initiations." He cannot be trusted as he was before.

Now I need to reach true nondefensive humility. And yet live my own life.

FREE WRITE

IBM Selectric. Go slow and make fewer mistakes. That man won't forgive me. Fewer obstacles. November 23 is Black Friday, the biggest Christmas shopping day of the year. But people don't buy paintings because they are too personal. What should you be doing instead of chanting your *japa*? It is like chewing your cud. It is a must. But you say it makes you too drowsy or too intense towards headaches. That is probably true. Do some of them, a little at a time, they will add up. I told that man not to do them while driving his car. I said *japa* was more important than the *śila* worship he does in the morning. He'll do what he thinks he can, not what he can't.

Japa bag sits on the desk, inviting you. Go do them.

Interrupted by G.N. coming in asking me if I want to memorize verses. Yes. We go over second and third chapters of *Bhagavad-gītā*. Slowly but surely you get them back. It will be a long time before you are confident enough to say them in a class lecture. Where did they go? Some kind of brain loss. The humming machine. On your sixty-eighth birthday, December 6, go out with three men to the pizza restaurant. Oh, you're not supposed to do that. Make your own pizza. Dress in saffron. No TV. Go to that inviting bead bag right now.

My typist just informed me that we lost a half hour of my dictation on the microcassette (starting with Chapter 8, Verse 22). That means I'll have to go back and do it over. I don't have files of the past material, so I'll have to do it from scratch. Rewriting "personal comment" will be the hardest of all because they were recorded spontaneously in a time which is now past. Just see the importance, at least to me, of preserving materials you write. If they are lost, you can never recapture them exactly as they were.

I dreamt I was in India with no passport, no assistant, wearing rags, mostly unrecognized in a busy ISKCON temple. A devotee

asked me to clean the toilets. I asked him how to do it. I waited for the "dream" to end and for relief from my plight to come, especially to find the passport. Finally, after a long time and many humiliating incidents, I awoke.

Your passport's safe for now,
get ten-year multiple-entry visa
to India. Don't be afraid, you're
plucky, can endure any scorn,
indifference and monkey attacks.

Multiple entries, epauletted men wave
you through customs, up all night,
arrive Mumbai. Why aren't you going
to Vṛndāvana?

I have my anxious secrets,
skin deep, known to me;
afraid they'll steal my glasses.
The world becomes a fog.

Spoke to a liberal devotee-
author who agreed to be a
peer-reviewer. He said,
"You push the envelope." Good
chance he'll pass my book,
my far-out *Under Dark Stars*.

In India, continue PMRB
but expand on "personal comment."
Record the details of your return
to the strange new land,
the people, the ambience as
it overwhelms me. Hope
I don't spend days in pain.

VERSE 33

apare vasudevasya devakyāṁ yācito 'bhyagāt
ajas tvam asya kṣemāya vadhāya ca sura-dviṣām

"Others say that since both Vasudeva and Devakī prayed for You, You have taken Your birth as their son. Undoubtedly You are unborn, yet You take Your birth for their welfare and to kill those who are envious of the demigods."

COMMENT

Here Kuntīdevī gives more reasons why Kṛṣṇa made His appearance in the world. Vasudeva and Devakī, in their previous births, were married as Sutapā and Pṛśni. They underwent a severe penance and asked the Lord to grant them a son like Him. Kṛṣṇa replied, "There is no one like Me. I am the one and only Supreme Personality of Godhead. Therefore I shall come personally as your son." So Kṛṣṇa took birth as the son of Vasudeva and Devakī, born in the prison house of Mathurā. The verse states another reason for Kṛṣṇa's appearance: "To kill those who are envious of the demigods" (*sura-dviṣām*).

Prabhupāda mentions Sutapā and Pṛśni, who "underwent a severe type of penance to get the Lord as their son, and as a result of such austerities, the Lord appeared as their son." In the *Laghu-bhāgavatāmṛta*, we hear that Sutapā and Pṛśni's son, Prācīnabarhir, was the same incarnation who appeared before Dhruva Mahārāja after he performed his austerities. This creates a whole new dimension to the Dhruva story, knowing that Viṣṇu did not descend from the spiritual world to speak to Dhruva but was at that time living on earth. It's interesting that Dhruva sees Him in His four-armed form—and that He must have appeared to his parents as a child in that form, and then does so again when He appears as the son of Devakī and Vasudeva. It's the form they most desire to see.

Why do those who want Kṛṣṇa as their son have to undergo such austerities if becoming the parents of Kṛṣṇa is about having sufficient love in one's heart? Don't austerities generally harden the heart, rather than soften it or fill it with *bhakti*? And those who are qualified to have Kṛṣṇa as their son seem to hardly need to perform such heavy austerities, since they already possess both the desire and the heart to achieve their desire. So why does Kṛṣṇa insist on these persons practicing intense austerities, and for such long periods?

This question stumps me. I try to envision what Prabhupāda might have said in answer. Getting Kṛṣṇa as your son is not a cheap thing. First deserve and then desire. There are devotional austerities performed for achieving Kṛṣṇa, and therefore they do not harden the heart. Sometimes Kṛṣṇa puts His devotees through tests just to see how much they love Him, how much they want Him. It's not everyone who can have Kṛṣṇa as their son, but only the most deserving. Nothing can stop them in their desire, and they prove it.

Kuntīdevī expresses reasons for the Lord's appearance. In my book *Prabhupāda Appreciation*, I quoted from *A Passion for Truth*, by A. J. Heschel, regarding arguments for God's existence (appearance): "Some religious philosophers, such as Kierkegaard, however, disclaim the proofs. Kierkegaard's rejection of any undertaking to find rational proof for the existence of God was due not only to the inability of reason 'to understand what is absolutely different from itself' but, above all, to the presumptuousness inherent in such an effort. For to prove the existence of one who is present is the most shameless affront. . . The existence of a king, or his presence, is commonly acknowledged by an appropriate expression of subjugation and submission—what if, in his sublime presence, one were to prove that he existed?"

Here in the purport Śrīla Prabhupāda refers to atheistic materialists. What about atheistic spiritualists who do not believe in God but accept subtle matter (i.e., mind and intelligence) as spiritual? For example, many New Age mediums, meditators,

and some yogis and atheistic or nontheistic Buddhists—do they fall between the spiritual theists and atheistic materialists?

Anyone who does not accept the absolute name, form, and qualities of the Supreme Personality of Godhead is atheistic. Theism means accepting God as a person. Other spiritualists may be moving in the right direction, but they have not reached true theism.

A definition of the word fideism: "Following failing attempts to reconcile faith with reason, fideism holds that reason is unnecessary and inappropriate for the exercise and justification of religious belief." Does the bewilderment of Kuntīdevī make a similar point? Is it impossible to have reasonable perspective in the case when the Unborn takes birth? Why does it *have* to be "bewildering"?

Kṛṣṇa's apparently contradictory natures are not bewildering to the pure devotee. They are bewildering to the materially rational mind, that He can be unborn and yet born as the son of Vasudeva and Devakī, etc. But it all makes perfect sense to the faithful devotee when he understands the mechanism of *yogamāyā*, by which Kṛṣṇa makes all things possible to satisfy His pure devotees while He bewilders the nonbelievers.

According to *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (10.3.32–40), Sutapā and Pṛśni seem to have desire for sex. Still, the Lord says that no one was as highly elevated as them (*Bhāg.* 10.3.41). Sutapā's and Pṛśni's desire was to conceive a child like Kṛṣṇa, and so their union was not mundane lust.

This verse mentions that Vasudeva and Devakī got Kṛṣṇa as their son because they prayed for Him. And yet in the purport to this verse, Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that their performance of serious penance was the reason they got the Lord as their son. Is it right to say that the prayers of a devotee are significantly more important than whatever penances he might perform?

Vasudeva and Devakī and Nanda and Yaśodā got Kṛṣṇa as their son because of their intense desire to take care of Him and to have the parental relationship. This was more important than the penances they performed. Many yogis, and even demons

like Hiraṇyakaśipu, perform extreme penances but never get the Lord as their son. They have no such devotional desires or prayers in mind. So if penances were the criteria, then the great penance performers could become the parents of Kṛṣṇa, but they do not have it in their hearts, and so Kṛṣṇa never becomes their offspring in devotional *līlā*.



VERSE 34

bhārāvatāraṇāyānye bhuvo nāva ivodadhau
sīdantyā bhūri-bhāreṇa jāto hy ātma-bhuvārthitaḥ

"Others say that the world, being overburdened like a boat at sea, is much aggrieved, and that Brahmā, who is Your son, prayed for You, and so You have appeared to diminish the trouble."

COMMENT

Brahmā is known as *ātma-bhū* because he is born directly from Lord Nārāyaṇa without the assistance of Nārāyaṇa's consort, Śrī Laksmi. When there is trouble in the universe that the demigods cannot solve, they approach Brahmā, and if even he cannot save the day, then he prays to Kṣīrodakaśāyī Viṣṇu, who lives in the transcendental planet within the universe known as Śvetadvīpa. In the purport, Prabhupāda writes as follows: "Such a problem arose when Kaṁsa and others were ruling over the earth and the earth became too much overburdened by the misdeeds of the asuras. Brahmaji, along with other demigods, prayed at the shore of the Kṣīrodaka Ocean, and they were advised of the descent of Kṛṣṇa as the son of Vasudeva and Devakī. So some people say

that the Lord appeared because of the prayers of Brahmāji."

Kuntīdevī is listing possible reasons for Kṛṣṇa's appearance. In the previous text, she says that Vasudeva and Devakī had prayed for Him, and therefore He had agreed to appear as their son. He also appears for the welfare of those who are envious of the demigods. In this text, she says that because Brahmā prayed for Him to come to solve the problem of Kaṁsa, Kṛṣṇa agreed to appear to "diminish this trouble."

It is a nice idea expressed in this verse that Kṛṣṇa appeared to solve the problem of His direct son, Brahmā. There are descriptions in the *Bṛhad-bhāgavatāmṛta* of Brahmā's relationship with Lord Nārāyaṇa—how he has daily talks with the Lord, who explains transcendental truth to him and clears any doubts or misgivings he may have.

Aside from this, Kṛṣṇa's dearest and deepest promise is that He will protect His devotees because He loves them. That Kṛṣṇa would go to the trouble to appear personally at Brahmā's request and in his hour of need is touching. It is an expression of His highest quality as *bhakta-vatsala*. These pastimes make us want to become devotees. What can we do to help ourselves come into a loving relationship with Kṛṣṇa?

We can help ourselves by remembering that our loving relationship with Kṛṣṇa is original and constitutional. It's the original energy of the living being. Hearing these explanations from the bona fide spiritual master and from the *bhakti śāstras* will awaken our Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Therefore, *śravaṇaṁ kīrtanaṁ viṣṇoḥ smaraṇaṁ* is the path, the *bhakti-mārga*. As we make even tiny footsteps of love toward Kṛṣṇa, He makes enormous steps toward us.

In the purport, Prabhupāda uses Brahmā's position as *ātma-bhū* as evidence of Kṛṣṇa's omnipotency. He writes that Kṛṣṇa is not bound to any condition of matter. Is He bound to or does He bind Himself to any condition of spirit?

Kṛṣṇa allows Himself to be bound by His devotees' love for Him. He allows Mother Yaśodā to bind Him with ropes, and He is bound by the ties of affection by the *gopīs* of Vraja.

What does it mean that God is "complete"? We also appear to be complete, even if we don't possess all potencies in full. How is Kṛṣṇa's completeness different from our own?

Kṛṣṇa is complete in His unlimited quantity, whereas our completeness is minute. As stated in the *śāstra, nityo nityānāṁ cetanaś cetanānām/ eko bahūnāṁ yo vidadhāti kāmān.* The living entities have the same qualities as Kṛṣṇa because we are made in His image. The comparison can be made to the drop of salty water in the ocean and the entire Pacific Ocean. In quality, both the drop and the entire ocean are the same. But the quantity difference is beyond measure.

In his purport to this verse, Prabhupāda writes, "Without spiritual contact, matter cannot create. This principle was followed from the very beginning of the creation." In his *Paramātmā Sandarbha,* Jīva Gosvāmī quotes to defeat the Māyāvādīs, who say that the world is illusory: "That the material world is real is also confirmed by the following prayer by Brahmā and the demigods (*Bhāg.* 10.2.26): 'Oh Lord, You are the active principle, the real truth, in all the ingredients of creation.' This is also confirmed by the following words of the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* (2.6): 'Then he saw that the material world was real.' What about the creative urge, such as the artistic expression or the poetic muse? By its nature does it belong of the category of illusion or to the category of spiritual potency?

It has to be utilized for the right purposes in order to be spiritual. Any creative process has the spiritual spark. It is godly or real just by definition. Therefore the creative drive is evidence, proof by negative inference (*avita*) of the existence of immanent God, the original Personality of Godhead.

In the purport to this verse, Prabhupāda writes, "One who foolishly considers Nārāyaṇa to be like other living beings should take a lesson from this. Nārāyaṇa is not an ordinary living being." In a conversation with Nārada Muni, Yudhiṣṭhira Mahārāja said, *dehendriyāsu-hīnānāṁ/ vaikuṇṭha-pura-vāsinām:* "The bodies of the inhabitants of Vaikuṇṭha are completely spiritual, having nothing to do with the material body, senses, or

life air." (*Bhāg.* 7.1.35). What is the difference, then, between them and Lord Nārāyaṇa Himself?

Lord Nārāyaṇa has a curl of hair on His chest known as Śrīvatsa and the Kaustubha jewel around His neck, which the Vaikuṇṭha personalities do not have. They are also all His servants, who worship Him in awe and reverence, whereas He is the Supreme Godhead, the worshipable. With beautiful prayers, making of obeisances, waving of peacock fans and yak-tail fans, the residents of Vaikuṇṭha worship Lord Nārāyaṇa. He is pleased with them.

Jīva Gosvāmī raised a question about God's omnipresence. In *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 10.1.19, it is stated that Brahmā went to the Kṣīra Ocean. Why did Brahmā go to the milk ocean if Kṛṣṇa is omnipresent? Jīva answers that Brahmā followed the prescribed process, like going to the temple. Can a pure devotee be omnipresent to some degree?

By his books and by his recorded lectures, a spiritual master can continue to be present even after his disappearance from the world. But he cannot be present everywhere (or all-knowing) to the degree that Kṛṣṇa is. The pure devotee considers himself the servant of the servant of the servant—a thousand times removed—in his service to the original Supreme Controller. The pure devotee never presumes to be God, and his sincere followers should never consider him as such.

The Lord has many names: Keśava, Madhusūdana, etc. Is a devotee free to address the Lord by any of His names, or does the time and place have to be right? Kṛṣṇa addresses Arjuna as Kaunteya and other names, but they seem to have a pretty free exchange in the *Gītā*. Arjuna has many names for Kṛṣṇa, and Kṛṣṇa has many names for His dear devotee Arjuna. Is there any discernible rhyme or reason to these great personalities choosing these names of affection?

The names are chosen with reasons. When Arjuna was hesitating to fight, Kṛṣṇa sarcastically addressed him as *mahā-bāho*, or strong-armed one. Arjuna addressed Kṛṣṇa as Madhusūdana,

implying that Kṛṣṇa had killed the demon Madhu, which was appropriate, but why should he want to kill all these preceptors and others on the battlefield of Kurukṣetra? The expert *ācāryas* and commentators know the confidential meanings and why Kṛṣṇa uses special names for His devotees and why the devotees address Kṛṣṇa according to time and place and intention.

What is the significance of the fact that different traditions, including the pure Vaiṣṇava tradition, speak of spiritual personalities taking virgin or motherless birth? Is it purely to demonstrate the inconceivable omnipotency of the Supreme Lord?

The significance of "the immaculate conception" of an *avatāra* is to prove that He is not a byproduct of lusty sex union. He does not come by sex union at all but enters the mind and heart of one parent and is then transferred to the heart of the other. This was the case in the birth of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, as well as Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. The same thing occurred in the appearance of Lord Jesus Christ.

We hear many times about the world being overburdened with demons at the time of the Lord's appearance. These demons were so powerful that we hear in this purport that Lord Brahmā himself could not deal with them. It is five thousand years later, and we can assume that Kali-yuga is much progressed in its demoniac ways. Yet it seems fanciful that any of the bad characters on the planet nowadays are more powerful than their predecessors. The demons are petty, but the times are worse.

There are Vaiṣṇavas and people in general who believe that Kṛṣṇa is an incarnation of Viṣṇu, as opposed to the followers of Lord Caitanya, who say that Kṛṣṇa is original and Viṣṇu is His *avatāra*. The pastime of Brahmā praying to Viṣṇu could be used in favor of those who propound that Viṣṇu is supreme. What answer would you give to such a challenge?

All the incarnations come through Kṣīrodakaśāyī Viṣṇu, including Kṛṣṇa Himself. Kṛṣṇa appears on schedule as one of the incarnations. But in the *mahā-vākya*, or most important verse in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, it is stated, *ete cāṁśa-kalāḥ puṁsaḥ / kṛṣṇas*

tu bhagavān svayam. All the incarnations in the list just given are parts or plenary parts of the original Supreme, but the *avatāra* named as Kṛṣṇa is Śrī Bhagavān Himself, the original Personality of Godhead. The fact that Kṛṣṇa dutifully appears on schedule does not negate His being the original all-powerful source of all the incarnations.

PERSONAL COMMENT

Gopī-mañjarī said that Vṛndāvana is too intense for her. She feels herself unworthy to enter. She prefers the *audārya-dhama*, Lord Caitanya's Māyāpura. Her remark influenced me for this winter's trip.

Stay on focus: your Kṛṣṇa consciousness, or lack of it. Be careful not to write only when you are feeling depressed. It will give a wrong impression of your diaristic self. A scholar of Kafka said he really wasn't so negative, but he vented the dark side of himself in his diaries.

I dreamt I was with Prabhupāda out in the streets of an Indian city. I was his intimate servant, and he was affectionate to me. I thought, this is the best kind of service out of all possible services. I was the most fortunate devotee. There were different kinds of amusements in the streets, and Prabhupāda was interested in them. He asked me if I wanted to stop and get a soda, and we stopped. But then a huge elephant came down the street, and I was so frightened by it that I became blinded and separated from Prabhupāda. The streets were so busy and congested and filled with amusements that I could not find my way back to him. A toy alligator began biting at my fingers, and I knew the only way I could stop it would be to wake up from the dream. But that meant I couldn't find my way back to Prabhupāda. And so it happened that way, I awoke, losing that most fortunate service.

Just one more controversy to settle in my public letter and then it will be finished and can go out publicly. Then both sides are

held responsible to uphold it and make no new reinterpretations or open the issue again. I just hope the few personal comments I have made along the way as this ordeal has unfolded will not be considered in that category. They are a personal history of what happened while I went through that wringer and were not intended as derogatory toward the devotees who worked with me cooperatively in the process of making this public statement. But, yes, let's put us all behind us and speak of other things, like "shoes and ships and ceiling wax and cabbages and kings." Like Kṛṣṇa. Like the daily climb through the headaches and the sixteen rosaries before bedtime.

It would be nice to reinstate the morning *Bhāgavatam* class, but certainly this morning I could not do it, and most mornings. It is a shame because I want to keep in practice as a lecturer and give *āśrama* status to our house.

Are you afraid to do a free write?

I should not be. I had my unrestrained days, and peer review should not censor them. You write whatever comes to mind. Directed free writing is whatever comes to mind, but on a particular subject. For example, how are you going to prepare for your late December lecture? It will be a large gathering of disciples in someone's house in Queens, New York City. You will be exposed, on the spot. Your confessional letter will have already been published. Look out at them with all the poise you can muster.

You can't speak unprepared. Dale Carnegie says whoever attempts that is crazy. You would crumple up after fifteen minutes and not be able to think of anything else to say. You have to be guided by *śāstra*, a verse and purport, a topic. Then you can develop a talk. You prepare as much as possible beforehand.

I was thinking of a verse in the teachings of Lord Ṛṣabhadeva to His sons. It's one I used in the old days at Sunday feast lectures. It's in the Fifth Canto, Chapter Five, verse one (*nāyaṁ*

deho deha-bhājāṁ nṛloke/ kaṣṭān kāmān arhate viḍ-bhujāṁ ye/ tapo divyaṁ. . . etc.). You can prepare by studying the verse, and even the preceding chapter about Ṛṣabhadeva's activities, and more on His teachings to His sons.

Jesus at Gethsemane on
my desk, dark figures in the
background, his disciples asleep
while he prays: "Do I have to take
this chalice? But it's Your will,
not mine."

Another picture on the wall:
Prabhupāda, back to us, making
praṇāmās to Gaura-Nitāi
in Baltimore; he looks so graceful,
just stopped by for a brief *darśana*
near the end of his life on earth.

If your eyes are tired,
why don't you rest? Too
tired for *japa*? Cozy house,
Sunday football on TV.
The ministers abstain,
prepare a lecture, three
weeks to go.

It was not the gorgeous
sacrifice or austerities of
the king that made the Lord
appear, but only his devotion.
Nābhi's priests, however, were
ashamed that the purpose of
the king was merely to ask
for a son.

Waiting for evening
pancake snack. He got
the idea when driving past
the International House of Pancakes
out there where the car lights
and streetlights and the traffic goes
by and no cars crash at red
lights. Chanting rounds twelve to sixteen
on the way home
from your forty-minute bike workout.
Where is your attention?



VERSE 35

bhave 'smin kliśyamānānām avidyā-kāma-karmabhiḥ
śravaṇa-smaraṇārhāṇi kariṣyann iti kecana

"And yet others say that You appeared to rejuvenate the devotional service of hearing, remembering, worshiping and so on in order that the conditioned souls suffering from material pangs might take advantage and gain liberation."

COMMENT

Now Kuntīdevī gives the generic reason for Kṛṣṇa's descent. He appears to reestablish the science of devotional service unto Himself. As living beings, our constitutional nature is to serve, and the true object of service is the Supreme Lord. "Unfortunately, the illusioned living beings, out of misunderstanding only, become servants of the senses by material desire. This desire is called *avidyā,* or nescience." In this way we become entangled in the

cycle of birth and death and transmigrate into different bodies.

But because Kṛṣṇa is so causelessly merciful, He appears and teaches devotional service, consisting of hearing, chanting, remembering, serving, praying, etc. Taking up all of these services or any one of them can help us to get out of the tangle of repeated birth and death. Prabhupāda ends this purport, "This particular type of mercy is bestowed upon the living being by the Lord in the form of Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu."

Kuntīdevī says *bhave 'smin kliśyamānānām/ avidyā-kāma-karmabhiḥ*, that Kṛṣṇa appears to help the conditioned souls who are suffering from the material pangs of ignorance, lust, sense gratification, and fruitive work. It is worth noting that these conditions, and not only the things they cause, are in themselves forms of sufferings or *kleśas* (she uses the word *kliśya* to express this). According to various sources, there are five *kleśas*: ignorance, egotism, desire, aversion, and attachment to worldly existence. How does devotional service overcome all this suffering?

Devotional service cuts at the root of all suffering by identifying the living being as spirit soul, part and parcel of Kṛṣṇa, intended to work in devotional service. All our troubles are caused by the ignorance of bodily identification, which manifests as the various *kleśas*. Devotional service is so nice that by one stroke it eliminates all the nefarious entanglements. We do not have to work at eliminating our *anarthas* by various means, but by the one means of *bhakti*, performed in any of the nine devotional principles.

Kuntīdevī says that perhaps Kṛṣṇa appears so that the suffering conditioned souls "might take advantage and gain liberation." This makes it sound like Kṛṣṇa's personal presence in this world does not guarantee that the conditioned souls *will* take advantage. What hinders a conditioned soul from taking advantage?

In a previous purport, Prabhupāda says that people don't take to God consciousness out of previous bad association or out of a stubborn obstinacy. Kṛṣṇa's appearance in the world personally and through His pure devotees is a golden opportunity, but He does not force us to take it. We can misuse our tiny free will.

In the purport to this verse, Prabhupāda writes that Kṛṣṇa appears in every millennium to reestablish the way of religion. He then goes on to say that "the factual way of religion is to accept the Lord as the supreme authority and thus render service unto Him in spontaneous love." It is interesting how Prabhupāda juxtaposed supreme authority with spontaneous love, two attitudes that are usually separated in our line. It seems he does so to establish the concept of servitude. When one does not serve Kṛṣṇa, he is suffering from *avidyā,* ignorance. From ignorance, all material life begins. Kṛṣṇa rescues the living entities by introducing them to the practices of *bhakti.* Is what makes *bhakti* so powerful over other attempts at religion simply that it is Kṛṣṇa's own system of religion, the one we are supposed to follow? Or is there something intrinsic in *bhakti* that gives liberation?

Bhakti is Kṛṣṇa's own way, and that makes it intrinsically superior. He is the supreme authority of religion. To satisfy Him is the most powerful act a living being can make, and it is also the thing which gives him or her the greatest pleasure. *Bhakti* is completely pure, with no tinge of another motivation, as in the systems of *karma, jñāna,* or *yoga.* That is what makes it so special.

"No one can manufacture a new path of religion, as is the fashion for certain ambitious persons." There are hundreds of new religions. In fact, it seems easier to start your own religion rather than to fit into an old institutional framework of established churches. Why, then, does Prabhupāda seem to put down such efforts? Must all manmade religions be corrupt? Is ISKCON a manmade religion, started in 1966?

Religion is made by God. That is the point. By new religions, Prabhupāda refers to manufactured processes created by conditioned souls who disregard the ancient scriptures and the *parampara.* A new religion based on the speculation of an imperfect being is bound to be defective. It must suffer the four defects of conditioned souls: the tendency to commit mistakes, to be in illusion, the cheating tendency, and the imperfection of senses. Thus, manmade, rather than God-made, religions are doomed to failure, even though they may become popular from time to time.

ISKCON is not a manmade religion. It is a branch of the eternal *paramparā* coming down from Kṛṣṇa to Brahmā to Nārada to Vyāsa to Madhva, etc. It is a *sampradāya* that was picked up by the Supreme Personality of Godhead five hundred years ago in His appearance as Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya Mahāprabhu, and since then has been known as the Gauḍīya *sampradāya.* As a disciple of Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, Prabhupāda is in this line of disciplic succession. He carried this movement to America and began the International Society for Krishna Consciousness as a branch of the Gauḍīya *sampradāya.*

In his purport to this verse, Prabhupāda states, "the factual way of religion is to accept the Lord as the supreme authority and thus render service to Him in spontaneous love." What if after many years of one's practice, one does not develop spontaneous love? Does it mean that one is following religion in name only?

Spontaneous love is rare. It is not a cheap thing. But one should not be disappointed. One should go on performing *vaidhī-bhakti,* devotional service under the rules and regulations and await the day when his or her service will blossom into pure love of God, by Kṛṣṇa's grace and by the sincerity of the devotee.

In his *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* lecture on this verse given in Māyāpura on October 15, 1974, Prabhupāda said as follows: "I have seen in Paris, Napoleon's statue. 'France and Napoleon, one.' I asked them, 'Where is your Napoleon? France is there, but where is your Napoleon?'

"So these things are going on all over the world. Why? Now, *avidyā. . .*"

What is the problem of worshiping someone who is not permanent but is a great man, a leader? Is that on its own a sign of ignorance, or is Prabhupāda talking about a general idea?

To worship a conditioned soul, even a great politician, as God is known as anthropomorphism. These worldly figures are all fallible soldiers, and despite the big impression they may make on the world during their lifetime, things go on after their disappearance, with the same maladies of birth, death, disease, and old age. No great man has come to invent a cure for these

basic anomalies. So why should they be worshiped? Admiration is one thing, but worship is another. Worship is properly for God only and for pure devotees of God who glorify Him and point to pure devotional service as the goal of life.

In the same *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* lecture given in Māyāpura on October 15, 1974, Prabhupāda makes an interesting statement in an ecumenical spirit: "If you are expert, trained by your spiritual master how to worship, that is *arhaṇam*. And *śravaṇam*, the same thing. *Yad-vandanam*, offering prayers. Some way or other. . .

"Therefore I say that the Christians, they're also Vaiṣṇavas; the Muslims, they're also Vaiṣṇava, very, mean, lower stage, because they're offering prayer. *Yad-vandanam*. They offer prayer: 'O God, give us our daily bread.' They do not know very much, but the beginning is there. Beginning is there because they have approached. . . *Catur-vidhā bhajanti māṁ sukṛtino 'rjuna*. That going to the church or going to the mosque, that is also pious activities. One day they'll come out pure Vaiṣṇava, one day. But that beginning is good. But atheism—'Don't go to church. Don't go to temple. Don't go to mosque'—this propaganda is very, very dangerous to the human society." How shall we understand the statement that Christians and Muslims are also Vaiṣṇavas?

Prabhupāda calls them Vaiṣṇavas on the principle that they accept God. He has sometimes described scriptures other than the Vedas as pocket dictionaries. They are not as voluminous or complete as the unabridged dictionary, but nevertheless they are functional. When one is capable of understanding God consciousness in full, he can consult the unabridged dictionary. But God consciousness is also contained in the pocket dictionary. And most important is the behavior of the religionists. To be real Vaiṣṇavas, the Christians and Muslims—as well as the Vedic followers—must demonstrate the qualities of a pure devotee.

Why do we normally think ourselves to be a separate religion? Is Vaiṣṇavism or ISKCON a "separate" but "pure" religion?

It is interesting to note that today in the news there was confirmation that former Cardinal Ratsinger, now the present pope, was originally critical of the 1986 ecumenical gesture of the

previous pope, who in Assisi gathered representatives of many religions and engaged them in collective prayer. So the present pope has called to meet Muslim and Jewish leaders, but made sure it was not a common prayer but just a lunch. I would first feel personally more comfortable to pray together rather than sit at the same table with them. Being a Hare Kṛṣṇa, of course, it's natural, however, to consider whether you would attend such a gathering if invited. Would you accept an invitation to collective prayer with representatives of Native Americans, Africans, and Muslims? Would you go, or would you consider it to be minimizing the Vaiṣṇava unique position?

I would be willing to attend a collective prayer meeting with the Catholic pope and representatives of other religions. But it should not be a mere publicity stunt or superficial arrangement by the Catholics toward others. Ideally, there should be a chance for the devotee to present the Vaiṣṇava *siddhānta* at such a meeting.

In a lecture on the next verse, Prabhupāda refers back to this verse: "Anyone who has come to this material world, *bhave*, in this material world, *asmin*, in this *kliśyamānānām*, they are all working very hard or taking trouble very much like the ass, working, *kliśyamānānām*. He cannot bear so much burden. Still he's loaded with so much burden. This is *kliśyamānānām*. If you can bear some load, that's all right. But if you cannot, if it is overloaded, then it is very difficult to go on. So in the previous verse it was suggested that *śravaṇaṁ smaraṇam arhāṇam*." (Lecture on *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 1.8.36, Los Angeles, April 28, 1973.)

From the first look at this verse, it appears as a solution, but actually, the more you do *smaraṇa smaraṇam arhāṇam*, the more one becomes aware of the material burden. How can one resolve this? Why is it so hard for a family man to survive and meet his ends? Why does *śravaṇaṁ smaraṇam* make it even harder by highlighting the burden of work one has to carry through to the grave?

Kṛṣṇa has made the same point in other contexts, as in His comment to Yudhiṣṭhira Mahārāja (*Bhāg.* 10.88.8): "If I especially

favor someone, I gradually deprive him of his wealth. Then the relatives and friends of such a poverty-stricken man abandon him." The same point is also made by devotees like Sudāmā Brāhmaṇa and Vṛtrāsura. In the words of Sudāmā, "To a devotee who lacks spiritual insight, the Supreme Lord will not grant the wonderful opulence of this world—kingly power and material assets. Indeed, in His infinite wisdom, the unborn Lord well knows how the intoxication of pride can cause the downfall of the wealthy." (*Bhāg.* 10.81.37) And as stated by Vṛtrāsura, "Persons who fully surrender at the lotus feet of the Supreme Personality of Godhead and always think of His lotus feet are accepted and recognized by the Lord as His own personal assistants or servants. The Lord never bestows upon such servants the brilliant opulences of the upper, lower, and middle planetary systems of this material world. When one possesses material opulence in any of these three divisions of the universe, his possessions naturally increase his enmity, anxiety, mental agitation, pride and belligerence. Thus, one goes through much endeavor to increase and maintain his possessions, and he suffers great unhappiness when he loses them." (*Bhāg.* 6.11.22)

The solution for the devotee householder is to work humbly and receive whatever Kṛṣṇa gives him as his just rewards. In any event, he should not give up his *śravaṇaṁ smaraṇam arhāṇam*. He should not consider devotional service to be in opposition to his personal happiness. The householder's austerity is to somehow take care of his wife and children and at the same time keep them all enlivened in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. He is not interested in becoming a very rich man, but he works at whatever trade is available to him and depends on Kṛṣṇa to help him meet his ends.

Prabhupāda states that the Lord is more merciful than we can expect, giving us the process of devotional service in order to gain liberation. We have the tendency to forget or take His mercy for granted. Why does this happen to us?

Because we are dull and ungrateful. We are like spoiled children who do not appreciate all that our parents are doing for us. This is our mentality of callousness towards Kṛṣṇa's sweetness and kind

intentions. It is based on our original rebellion. We can get out of it, however, by applying ourselves sincerely to *vaidhī-bhakti.* By regularly hearing about Kṛṣṇa's mercy toward us, we will gain conviction in His good intentions. The more we hear of His glories, the more our hearts will soften. The more we chant His names and associate with devotees and serve in His holy *dhamas,* the callous covering will be softened, and our original gratitude toward the Lord will be evinced. Then we will see that the Lord is more merciful than we can expect. He is giving us much more mercy than we deserve, and when we get an inkling of this, we will break down and cry tears of remorse and thankfulness. Kṛṣṇa is our savior, our best friend.

We are hearing of the reasons for the Lord's appearance. Now we hear about rejuvenating certain devotional services. Why did it all start to go downhill after the Lord left?

The Lord left the earth at the end of Dvāpara-yuga, just as Kali-yuga came in. By the Lord's own arrangement, things deteriorate with time, and Kali-yuga is the worst of the four yugas. Without His auspicious personal presence, the personality of Kali began to dominate, taking up residence in the places allotted to him. When Kṛṣṇa saw Kali abusing the bull of religion, He did not kill him but allowed him to reside in places of gambling, intoxication, meat eating, and illicit sex. Kali then flourished in these places until the whole world became covered with their influence. So we are in a dark age, but it is said that for the next ten thousand years, there can still be a revival of Kṛṣṇa consciousness before Kali-yuga really sets in for the remainder of its 432,000 years. That golden age is the revival of the *saṅkīrtana* movement of Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu, which began with His advent.

Sometimes even among devotees we find those who propound new paths of religion. According to *Nectar of Devotion,* these are an unnecessary disturbance in society. How can we recognize them? Is it possible that they are following the true path of religion in another way?

I do not find among the sincere devotees of Śrīla Prabhupāda propounders of a new path of religion. He was very serious

that we continue to follow exactly what he taught, allowing for changes according to time and place. But not a new path of religion. Rūpa Gosvāmī's statement is that a religion that doesn't follow the *śruti* and *smṛti* but is something concocted is just a disturbance in society. Prabhupāda has laid out his aims so clearly in all of his books and lectures and private instructions that there should be no confusion, and followers of a "new path" should be disregarded. This does not disallow the creative and intelligent application of new techniques to the changes in material society. Prabhupāda himself was dynamic and made changes in terms of time and place and persons when he came to America. This has to be done, he said, with great intelligence. Anyway, it is happening by force of circumstances that the devotees of ISKCON are finding they must make changes to meet the new situations they are faced with. They should always do this, however, by keeping Prabhupāda's basic instructions in mind.



VERSE 36

śṛṇvanti gāyanti gṛṇanty abhīkṣṇaśaḥ
smaranti nandanti tavehitaṁ janāḥ
ta eva paśyanty acireṇa tāvakaṁ
bhāva-pravāhoparamaṁ padāmbujam

"O Kṛṣṇa, those who continuously hear, chant and repeat Your transcendental activities, or take pleasure in others' doing so, certainly see Your lotus feet, which alone can stop the repetition of birth and death."

COMMENT

Śrī Kṛṣṇa cannot be seen by ordinary vision, but only when one has changed his life to one of spontaneous love of Godhead. When Kṛṣṇa was on the earth, the great demons were not able to appreciate His presence. The only qualification is devotional service, which begins by the process of hearing. Even hearing fails to work if it is done from an unqualified speaker. In the *Bhāgavatam*, the Lord's pastimes begin with His dealings with the Pāṇḍavas. In the Tenth Canto, there are the pastimes of Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs*. But all of these pastimes are absolute and equally beneficial. "It is said that the Vedas and Purāṇas, etc., are all made to revive our lost relation with Him. Hearing of all these scriptures is essential."

Verse 35 is tied to verse 36, in which Kuntīdevī praises some of the items of *pañcāṅga-bhakti*. Prabhupāda says that to see Kṛṣṇa, we have to develop spontaneous love of Godhead. It's a different kind of vision than the one we normally have. What exactly is different about it?

With mundane eyes, we see a tree, but we do not see Kṛṣṇa. We see a mountain or the sky, but we do not see Kṛṣṇa. When our eyes are anointed with love of Godhead, we do not see the tree alone, but we see Kṛṣṇa in the tree, in the mountain, in the sky. Wherever a pure devotee looks, he sees Kṛṣṇa. When the pure devotee child Prahlāda was challenged by his demoniac father, "Do you see your Kṛṣṇa in the pillar of this palace?," Prahlāda looked at the pillar and said, "Yes," seeing Lord Nṛsiṁhadeva within. Hiraṇyakaśipu then attempted to kill Kṛṣṇa by smashing the pillar with his sword, and Nṛsiṁhadeva leaped out of the pillar in which He was hiding. Hiraṇyakaśipu could not see the Lord because of his lack of Kṛṣṇa-vision, but Prahlāda saw the Lord everywhere he looked.

Prabhupāda says that Rāvaṇa, Hiraṇyakaśipu, Kaṁsa, Jarāsandha, and Śiśupāla were unable to appreciate the Lord's presence despite their high material qualifications. Yet they were able to see the Lord. We are practicing devotion, not following

these demonic persons. Why can't we see Kṛṣṇa, whereas they could? Is it because they heard so assiduously, even without love?

One answer is that these great demons were devotees in their past lives, just as the doorkeepers Jaya and Vijaya were cursed to take births in the material world, where they engaged in inimical pastimes with the Lord. So it was Kṛṣṇa's arrangement that they should be able to see Him and fight with Him because of His desire for bellicose exchanges with His devotees. Also, it is a fact that they were intensely Kṛṣṇa conscious because they were always thinking of Kṛṣṇa in their desire to kill Him. Their Kṛṣṇa consciousness was not *bhakti*, but it worked them into a state of intense meditation, which enabled them to see the object of their hatred.

Prabhupāda says that hearing acts very quickly if it's done from the right source. Yet we hear in the *śāstra* of persons who engaged in austerities for millions of years to gain a sight of Kṛṣṇa. Can you define what Prabhupāda means by "very quickly"?

Prabhupāda used to say that you may see Kṛṣṇa in a minute, or you may fail to see Him in millions of years. It depends on your *utsāha*, or enthusiasm. So "quickly" is a relative term. A devotee who finally attains the devotional vision of Kṛṣṇa after millions of years is overjoyed at his good fortune.

Is it possible to practice the other activities of *bhakti* without also practicing serious hearing?

All conditioned souls have to hear about Kṛṣṇa as the first item in the nine principles of devotional service. Even Rukmiṇī desired to marry Kṛṣṇa after hearing about His glories from Śrī Nārada. Kṛṣṇa's intimate friend Arjuna did not gain enlightenment until he heard directly from the Lord in *Bhagavad-gītā*. Of course, the *gopīs* fell in love with Kṛṣṇa just by seeing His beautiful bodily features. But they also heard about His wonderful qualities by hearing from their girlfriends and other relatives in Vṛndāvana. All devotees' love for Kṛṣṇa is activated by *kṛṣṇa-kathā*, either hearing directly from Kṛṣṇa of hearing about Him from His devotees in disciplic succession.

If we are meant to hear all of Kṛṣṇa's pastimes and not consider one of them more or less important than another, how will we follow Rūpa Gosvāmī's instructions for *rāgānuga-bhakti*, where he encourages devotees to hear from one whose service attracts them and become fixed in that mood of service? Or is that kind of hearing only for advanced devotees?

Rāgānuga-bhakti is for advanced devotees. In his purport to this verse, Prabhupāda criticizes the practice of indulging in selectively hearing only about Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs*, to the neglect of hearing about Kṛṣṇa and the Pāṇḍavas. He says all of Kṛṣṇa's pastimes in the *Bhāgavatam* are of equal importance. There is no need to speculate on this instruction but to follow it and enjoy all the tastes of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. If the stage comes where we develop exclusive attraction to a particular service, it will occur by natural attraction, not artificially.

In his purport to this verse, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "The Supreme Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa cannot be seen by our present material vision. In order to see Him, one has to change his present vision by developing a different condition of life, full of spontaneous love of Godhead." Why is it that *uttama-adhikārīs* such as Nārada, in his life as the son of a maidservant, could not see Viṣṇu in detail and could only hear Him once? Why is Kṛṣṇa so hard to get? Is there something that we should know about it? Is it pretentious on our part to say that Kṛṣṇa is this or that without proper realization?

Kṛṣṇa is hard to get. No one should pretend to have seen Kṛṣṇa in a bush in Vṛndāvana, or to have read His mind. Prabhupāda has explained to us that the mood of the Six Gosvāmīs was crying out to Kṛṣṇa in separation. They never claimed they saw Kṛṣṇa, but they asked, "Where is Kṛṣṇa? Is He on the Govardhana Hill? Is He at Rādhā-kuṇḍa?" In this way they were always feeling pangs of separation from their beloved Lord. Instead of being so interested in seeing Kṛṣṇa directly, we should be interested that Kṛṣṇa see us. If we act in devotional service sincerely as a servant of our spiritual master, then we may be satisfied that Kṛṣṇa is watching our actions and is satisfied with us. Prabhupāda has

said our goal is just to make Kṛṣṇa smile.

Some religionists say, "No one can see God." Is that statement confirmed by Kuntīdevī?

No. In this verse, Kuntīdevī says that those who continually hear and chant "certainly see Your lotus feet." This is confirmed elsewhere in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (7.10.48): "All of you Pāṇḍavas are extremely fortunate, for the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Kṛṣṇa, lives in your palace just like a human being. Great saintly persons know this very well, and therefore they constantly visit this house."

"When the hearing process is perfect and complete, the other processes become automatically perfect in their own way." (TQK, Ch. 19) Hearing the glories of devotional service, especially of the process of hearing, is very inspiring. Yet, in this case one may feel daunted or discouraged by how difficult pure hearing may be in order to fully benefit from the process.

To conceive of actually reaching perfection may be discouraging, but to be engaged in the path of perfection is satisfying. Even if we are at the beginning and are still experiencing impediments, to be confident that we are in the very best process should not be a source of discouragement. It is the source of the highest happiness.

Those who have perfected the hearing process or are practicing it "take pleasure in others doing so." This statement has prompted a devotee to write me as follows: "This statement makes me cry. My ultimate desire in life is to always be in the association of those envy-free *sādhus*. This is my most heartfelt prayer."

Śrīla Prabhupāda speaks about making the hearing process perfect and complete. What are keys to success, as well as pitfalls, that we should take into consideration in order to achieve this perfection of hearing?

Hearing should be regular, constant. We should hear from pure devotees in the association of like-minded saintly persons. And the hearing should be accompanied by practical service unto the spiritual master. We should not pollute our hearing process by listening to *prajalpa*, mundane, frivolous topics.

In Prabhupāda's synonyms to this verse, the word *acireṇa* is translated as "very soon." By following the process, a devotee will see Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet very soon. What does "very soon" mean?

As I have said, Śrīla Prabhupāda used to reply to this question by saying that Kṛṣṇa consciousness may take place in a moment, or it may fail to take place in millions of lives. It depends on our sincerity and endeavor. Kṛṣṇa will reciprocate accordingly.

What is the most accurate "litmus test" for listeners to know whether a speaker is speaking pure *kṛṣṇa-kathā*?

When the listeners feel bodily transformations, such as tears, horripilations, trance, etc., they may know that they are hearing from the topmost devotee. Even before symptoms of *bhāva* occur in the hearer, they will feel themselves transformed to the spiritual world in mind and intelligence, and they will hear with great faith.

How valid is this mentality: "I am hearing, and it is wonderful, and right now I am feeling very submissive. So I can now put aside this hearing and go on to other things, and the hearing I have done will protect me even if I forget Kṛṣṇa in my subsequent activities"?

This is not a very good mentality. If one is actually tasting wonderfully, one should hanker to go on doing it as much as possible. He should think, "I want this as much as possible. I should put myself in a position where I am always hearing in this way." Hearing Kṛṣṇa consciousness is not like a temporary "high." It is a state of life that one should immerse oneself in as much as possible, twenty-four hours a day.

If the living entity is in constant danger of being influenced by non-Kṛṣṇa sound, such as the mundane *kathā* of television and radio or body-based conversations with coworkers, etc., is the only answer to "retreat" further into authorized Kṛṣṇa sound?

If one cannot escape mundane sounds, then one should turn within oneself silently and chant the mantra and think thoughts of Kṛṣṇa. We are inevitably surrounded by non-Kṛṣṇa sound, and so we must turn within and concentrate the mind on *kṛṣṇa-kathā* we have heard, *Bhagavad-gītā* verses, talks of the spiritual master,

meditations on the sublime. And then whenever possible, one should actually listen to sound vibrations which are not in the category of mundane.

Prabhupāda emphasizes that all of the *Bhāgavatam* is important, and one has to develop a contextual understanding of the Lord and His name, fame, form, and pastimes before sitting in on the most elevated activities. Yet ISKCON devotees also give intimate hearing to Kṛṣṇa's pastimes with the *gopīs*, and in different places, Prabhupāda approved of this. ISKCONites normally take the stance of not being advanced enough to appreciate the Tenth Canto pastimes. Is there still danger within ISKCON of developing *sahajiyaism* or offensiveness as a result of reading the special portions of the Tenth Canto, or have most serious devotees passed through this hazard zone?

There is still danger of devotees developing *prākṛta-sahajiyaism* if they indulge in Kṛṣṇa's pastimes with the *gopīs* and neglect hearing His pastimes with the Pāṇḍavas. We have to take Prabhupāda's instructions as he gives them in time and place. In this particularly purport, he says that the pastimes of the Pāṇḍavas are as good as those with the *gopīs* and that some people indulge in hearing about the *gopīs* out of lust. So take one purport at a time and appreciate it as his realization for us.

If a *jīva* takes particular interest in certain pastimes of Kṛṣṇa—His slaying of demons, for example, or His dealings with the *gopīs*—does that have any relation to one's *svarūpa-siddhi*, one's eternal mood of service to Kṛṣṇa?

It is possible, but not in the early stages of devotional service.

PERSONAL COMMENT

Permanently scarred. "They may be angry when they read your letter, but when they see you, they will soften because the relationships go back so far and are so deep." Besides that, you can't go through life trying to get everyone to like you. Make any

alienation bring you closer to the protection of Prabhupāda and Kṛṣṇa. Cling to your priority of sixteen rounds of *japa* daily.

Headaches increasing. Episodes of clearness in between. How can you expect to enjoy your experience in India at this rate?

Negative things about headaches (12/13/07):

1. They steal time from *japa*, writing, etc. I have to lie down and "do nothing." They take your life away.
2. They produce a pain in your head. You have to patiently tolerate it.
3. You have to take medicine with rebound syndrome.
4. Fear of the next headache.
5. Et cetera.

Negative things other than headaches:

1. Letter of my infamous falldown will be published in a few days. This will lower my estimation in devotees' eyes. I have to report to probation monitors regularly. I'll feel depressed about this. It will cause inferiority and anxiety (unless I can change it to humility).

Nārada dāsa wants to introduce me in my Queens appearance. Say, "This is a spiritual war, not a material war." Comparison to battle of Kurukṣetra where 640,000,000 people were killed. He's defending me. How will I follow it up? Nārada said it would have been better were I to have answered it with a short note. But there is too much discrepancy between the small amount I told and the full exposure. So the GBC ordered me to give a fuller account, and I did so.

Bala is bringing Dattātreya down from Philadelphia to live with us in Delaware. Śāstra and I are going out for lunch. You go back and forth between boredom and pleasantness. The temperature is up to sixty-nine degrees on December 15. Bluebirds on the curtain. Will you lecture? What's his name, the founder of the

dynasty Ṛṣabha was born in? I keep forgetting. Look it up in the open book. Priyavrata. Then came Āgnīdhra. Priyavrata was persuaded by Brahmā to give up a mendicant, celibate life with his guru Nārada and become the emperor of the world. He and his wife sired Āgnīdhra and others. Āgnīdhra was seduced by a lovely society girl. One of his sons was Nābhi. Nābhi and Merudevī performed a *yajña* with their priests, and Lord Viṣṇu appeared. He appeared not because of the opulent *yajña* but because of their devotion to Viṣṇu. They asked for a son like Viṣṇu. Ṛṣabhadeva became their son. He had the signs of Viṣṇu on His feet and body. He was beautiful, yet He appeared like one haunted. His chief son was Bhārata. Ṛṣabha instructed His one hundred sons.

A devotee writes to me that he's taken on a *śikṣā-guru*. He says, "My life can only become fully enriched, however, by continuing my relationship with you, my spiritual master. I try to read your books but honestly I have difficulty finding the time to even read Śrīla Prabhupāda's books. Also, sometimes I can't relate or understand everything you write. I find your free-writing hard to follow, and this is a cause of sadness for me, because I know it is your favorite way to write. However, there are some of your books which I really enjoy and are practical and inspiring in many ways for me."

FREE WRITE

Eight shopping days left before Christmas. Prayer wrappers for gifts and heart of present must be related to Kṛṣṇa. He wrote a story/vignette with beautiful prose like Rilke and Hemingway, but the man was impotent and the woman gave him a brown reefer, and I said this is not acceptable for publication in a Kṛṣṇa conscious organ. The gift wrapping must open on a Kṛṣṇa conscious gift. Otherwise it doesn't matter that the woman was as beautiful as dawn, although not actually pretty, and the man was very lonely—the deft strokes don't add up.

I'll break the news to him. Time is running out, and we don't

have our visa forms yet. They say don't worry, there is plenty of time, all you need is a full day at the embassy. But you'll need the forms. I have no life skills. No life skulls, Vince Scully, sulk no more. That was his advice: Just pick up your life and get on with it. Some may sneer or jeer at you. But you just get on with your life in a basically merry way. G.S. wrote me that it was a beautiful letter, and he wanted to simultaneously hug me and offer obeisances. "Not a bad start." He realizes how exhausting it must have been to satisfy all the different parties. He wants to phone me soon. My eyelids are heavy. Good advice. Don't mope or be depressed or worry what others are thinking of you. Pick up and go on with your life.

George W. Bush, everyone says he's a schmuck. They say things are improving a little in Iraq but not in Iran. Holy Hucklebee pulling ahead in Iowa. J.S. gave up reading newspapers as a *Kārttika* vow. Four weeks, it's over now. I followed no vows. Take the probation committee seriously. Don't lie to them. Keep up the standards. Dick Cheney is not involved. It's absurd you favor Hillary Clinton, and even the New England Patriots with their great quarterback. Remember his name? Tom Brady. Priyavrata Mahārāja.

Are you going to apologize? Don't state any anger. Say, "Let's forget it, leave it behind and get on with our lives."

Eight shopping days left before Christmas. The stores are packed. You buy me a present and I buy you a present. Getting our visas. Cars on the roads, red lights, green lights. Christmas trees outdoors with white lights, wreaths on the front doors in the suburbs. Creche settings. A flag of baby Jesus, Mary and Joseph on the front of one house. A tall church being built. Roadwork. Women in tight jeans, men in baggy jeans. Bad day for my *japa* today. Headaches and sleepiness. But tomorrow is another day, hopeful always to improve, to get a break.

December 17. In three days we drive to New York, two lectures in one day. Tell them you have left the past behind and are going forward and want them to go forward with me.

Tofu wieners and hot dog rolls, with macaroni and water.

Another hole opens, this time over the left eye. Go to Śāstra's to exercise on the bicycle, if you feel up to it. Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen. *Ante nārāyaṇa-smṛti.* Thinking of Kṛṣṇa at the end of life. King Kulaśekhara: Pray always, in good health, because when death comes, it will be in dire straits and hard to chant. So be practiced to always chant.

Ṛṣabhadeva manifested signs of the Supreme Personality of Godhead on the soles of His feet, the flag, the thunderbolt, elephant goad, umbrella, lotus, conch, cakra, etc. His body was well-proportioned and beautiful. King Nābhi, seeing all supreme symptoms in his son, thought Him the best of human beings or the Supreme Being and gave Him the name "Ṛṣabha." Indra became envious of King Ṛṣabha and stopped pouring water on Bhāratavarṣa. Ṛṣabha smiled a little and supplied water Himself upon His own place, known as Ajanābha. King Nābhi was overwhelmed with transcendental bliss and raised his son with great affection.

Seeing that his son was so popular, Nābhi enthroned Ṛṣabha as the emperor of the world. He entrusted Him to the care of the *brāhmaṇas* and went with his wife Merudevī to Badarikāśrama in the Himalayas, where he engaged in austerities with great jubilation. In due course of time, Mahārāja Nābhi was elevated to the spiritual world.

Ṛṣabhadeva took on the duty of emperor of the world, married a wife named Jayantī and produced one hundred suns, the chief of whom was Bhārata. "In his honor, this planet has become known as Bhārata-varṣa." (*Bhāg.* 5.4.9)

Stop writing because you have got a pain in your eye. Baladeva has just entered the front door downstairs, and he should not see you writing with all the high-powered lights on. Tell him you want popcorn. Rest in reclining position in your La-Z-Boy chair. There is no way out of this today. It will just have to run its full course.

FREE WRITE

Please email my Virgin Airlines ticket so Bala can take it with him when he leaves early in the morning for the Washington, D.C., embassy. I'm getting a ten-year multiple-entry visa for $163.00. I lost my bearings, didn't know what I wanted to do. He returned, more medicine, I'm feeling better.

"You are my *śikṣā* guru. You are a Vaiṣṇava. Final point, you are a great devotee." Take a poll count, pro and con responses. Don't neglect to count the roses as much as the daggers. "So-and-so is making noise again." Protect yourself. No one inimical should know my phone number or address. They should not know the way to reach the yellow submarine. This is an ideal place to suffer in peace. Gird your loins for a month's travel and socializing *with* your burden. Be positive-minded, and it may not be as bad as the worst expectations. Beautiful, spiritual India. Journal notes. Answering PMRB questions.

Mall shopping, outlet stores, end-of-year sales. Devotee houses don't have outside Christmas decorations. But inside we have pictures of Prabhupāda and Kṛṣṇa. I have a nice one of Prabhupāda with his back turned toward the camera. His *śikhā* is almost like a Catholic monk's tonsure, a graceful bend to his body. I like it, watch it, my spiritual master, the forgiving one, the worshiper-*bhagavān*. He said if you have a picture of Śrīmatī Rādhārani without Kṛṣṇa, it's almost like a picture of an ordinary woman. Maybe that's why instinctually I didn't like the picture from the *Brahmara-gītā*, Rādhā making her soliloquy, hand on Her breast. And similarly, we don't like a picture of Kṛṣṇa alone. He's always with His devotees.

The asterisk next to Barry Bonds' record for the most home runs means he cheated because he did it by taking steroids. Kṛṣṇa has no asterisk. His record-breaking feats are all unblemished, nothing dubious about them. My achievements are all with asterisks, some motivation, some tendency to cheat, imperfect senses, speculation. . . time to go to bed. . .

". . .I also hope you are spared any continued torment from

devotees who may hold resentment for you because of your past weakness. It is time for all of us to move on, forgive ourselves and others for discrepancies, to appreciate one another. I have never been a very verbal disciple, neither a frequent writer, but I hope the future can bring us closer together. I'd like to know what you are doing, hear your thoughts, and most definitely read the ongoing *Poor Man* series.

"I have to run now but will keep in touch. Thanks again for your honesty. In return, I can honestly say that I admire how you have dealt with this whole situation and that you remain Prabhupāda's man. Devotees with your level of responsibility have not always chosen to remain on the path when dealing with similar moments of irregularity. Your example is encouraging." Jay-o.

7:59 in his pajamas don't be
afraid of the censors. They'll
snip your private parts.

Offer them that which might be
most controversial, bold, to decide,
how's this? Hide the best. Hide the
beat. Hide nothing. No leather,
no grains cooked by karmīs, no
lies.

Working in the salt mines. He phones once
in three weeks, and they go over
together what he's been doing, his laundry,
his *japa*, his truth serum.

Up all night planning the itinerary.
Send your man into the city again to get
your visa. But his visa isn't ready,
so wait. I want to selfishly get
my own. Be on the safe side. Carry
a gun. That's not safe!

Pensive goat, artist of the past.
Can he rise and chant his beadies or
will the head cave in before he
even starts? That's been my problem.
Call for the monks. Help. I
need to chant with no head pain.

A book of sketches begun
some months ago, now too cold
to walk the boardwalk.

Too pained to say the quota.
Dial 911, dictate a letter but
your typist is away. "You are
the best in ISKCON for forty years."

Good letters coming in, they like
the humble. Takes two to
tango. You are my *śikṣā*
guru. All those years he did
it for them, compassion and
good books, good looks faded.



VERSE 37

apy adya nas tvaṁ sva-kṛtehita prabho jihāsasi svit suhṛdo 'nujīvinaḥ
yeṣāṁ na cānyad bhavataḥ padāmbujāt parāyaṇaṁ rājasu yojitāṁhasām

"O my Lord, You have executed all duties Yourself. Are you leaving us today, though we are completely dependent on

Your mercy and have no one else to protect us, now when all kings are at enmity with us?"

COMMENT

The whole material world moves on the false attempt to become independent of the laws of nature. But the highest goal of human life is to work hard under the guidance of the Lord and become completely dependent on Him. The Pāṇḍavas were the ideal example of this dependence. They were highly qualified by their own activities, but always looked for the mercy of the Lord, knowing that every living being is dependent by his constitutional position. According to *Bhagavad-gītā* 7.19, *bahūnāṁ janmanām ante/ jñānavān māṁ prapadyate/ vāsudevaḥ sarvam iti/ sa mahātmā sudurlabhaḥ*. After many, many births and deaths, a fortunate person comes to realize that Kṛṣṇa is everything, and he surrenders unto Him. Feeling so much loving attachment to Kṛṣṇa, Śrīmatī Kuntīdevī therefore "felt such separation like a thunderbolt, and the whole prayer of the Queen was to try to persuade the Lord to stay with them." Not only were the Pāṇḍavas put into conditions of difficulty, but all of us are in the same situation, and the only remedy is to become completely dependent on the will of the Lord.

Kuntīdevī speaks plaintively in this verse. She has told how the Pāṇḍavas (and she) have suffered numerous calamities. Yet we get the sense that none of these troubles were real calamities in her mind because Kṛṣṇa was always present. Then she prayed that the calamities could come again and again, because her suffering allowed her to be with Kṛṣṇa. Now she is expressing her heart: she is now facing the *real* calamity that Kṛṣṇa will leave her and return to Dvārakā. Her feeling of impending separation is palpable. It would be interesting to hear something more about Kuntīdevī's mood of separation.

Her apparent fear is of the grandchildren of the enemies whom Kṛṣṇa has already killed. But it would seem that Kṛṣṇa would be able to take care of them, just as He has taken care of

Duryodhana and company. So her fear of Kṛṣṇa's separation goes beyond fear of the military powers rising against the Pāṇḍavas. She finds it unbearable to live without the presence of Kṛṣṇa. She feels intense love for Kṛṣṇa in her intimate parental *rasa* as Kṛṣṇa's aunt.

How can we feel Kṛṣṇa's presence in suffering? Is it possible for a conditioned soul to feel His presence in the absence caused by separation? Kuntīdevī seems to be expressing that she prefers the suffering, since that's when Kṛṣṇa is visible to her.

Especially in the beginning stages, we call to Kṛṣṇa in suffering, and He is present to us. Suffering prompts us to call out to Him. In a previous verse, Kuntīdevī explicitly enumerates sufferings undergone by her and her children in the *Mahābhārata* and says that she wishes these sufferings would come again and again because by coming, the sufferings enable her to remember Kṛṣṇa and thereby gain release from the repetition of birth and death. These episodes are tests for the conditioned soul. But a time comes when a devotee is able to feel the presence of Kṛṣṇa even without the tests, or when all tests have been passed. She then experiences a perpetual bliss of direct association with the Lord of her heart.

Prabhupāda discusses dependence and independence. He says that in this world, being dependent on another is considered a misfortune. Why? It would seem that being dependent on others absolves one of the hard work of being independent. It also seems that most people in the material world prefer a state of mixed dependence and independence. It seems that if one does not feel dependent on anyone, it is not possible to feel loved. How does that translate into spiritual experience? If one maintains a feeling of independence from Kṛṣṇa, is it possible to feel His love?

In this world, one is considered fortunate if he's not dependent on the welfare of others for finances and other handouts. He's self-sufficient. But it's true that feeling dependent on others makes us feel loved by them. For the most part, we would like to be self-sufficient. In connection with Kṛṣṇa, the situation is different. We are actually completely dependent on Him. We are not self-sufficient. And the more we realize this, the happier and saner

we will be. Only by being aware of our complete dependence on Kṛṣṇa can we fully feel His love for us.

Is dependence on Kṛṣṇa (or anyone else) the same thing as an abdication of personal responsibility? Does a dependent person have responsibility in a relationship? What does it actually mean to be dependent on another?

A dependent person feels grateful and freely renders service to the person on whom he is dependent. A dependent person feels responsible to support the cause of the person he's dependent on, and he does so willingly.

Whenever dependence on Kṛṣṇa is discussed among devotees, inevitably someone asks whether becoming dependent means giving up personal volition and direction. Does it?

Becoming dependent on Kṛṣṇa does not mean giving up personal volition and direction. As Kṛṣṇa says in *Bhagavad-gītā*, "Whatever you do, do it for Me." We retain our psychophysical nature, but we fully engage it in the service of the Lord. We become a scholar of Vedic literature. We use architectural skills to build a temple for the Lord. We do our personal heart's desire as an offering to the Beloved. It is full of freedom and personality. Kṛṣṇa has unlimited desires, and we can fulfill our own by perfecting our inclinations in His service.

Prabhupāda equates "material disease" with "thinking of becoming independent of everything." It's a powerful statement. Why does the soul feel pushed to embrace independence above all else?

We feel this way out of our fantasy to become God, the supremely independent one. With no one above us, no one to answer to, we act out the illusion of supreme will and independence. Of course, this is not possible, since each of us is but a tiny fragment of Kṛṣṇa's independence, and so when we try to act independently, we become smashed by the all-powerful illusory energy.

Prabhupāda uses the phrase, "work with valor but at the same time depend completely on the Lord," and he gives the Pāṇḍavas as exemplars of such behavior. When we hear the word

"valor," we think of nobility, but also *kṣatriya* pride. They sought the Lord's mercy, yet they were not "idle parasites." Elsewhere, Prabhupāda says that the Pāṇḍavas were "malleable" in Kṛṣṇa's hands. So they were executing His will, but by their own methods? These phrases give a lot of room for the Pāṇḍavas' personalities and the personal offerings to Kṛṣṇa. What is the dependence/independence dynamic between Kṛṣṇa and His devotees?

When Prabhupāda says the Pāṇḍavas were not idle parasites, he means that they always looked for Kṛṣṇa's mercy, but they were proactive in using their strengths to carry out His mission. They were given creative choices how to carry out different tasks on behalf of Lord Kṛṣṇa. Bhīmasena came up with his own scheme for how to kill the Rākṣasa by eating the food offerings intended for the demon and then finishing him off. Bhīmasena also killed the lusty military general who tried to seduce Draupadī by using a unique method of first pretending to be a woman and then crushing him to a pulp.

What does it mean to work with valor in the practical sense? Does it depend on the *āśrama*, or is it about spiritual work only?

Working with valor does not apply only to *kṣatriyas* on the battlefield. When the householder refrains from sex life with his wife and when he goes to work every day on his job, it is a test of his valor. It is not that valor is exhibited only by the *kṣatriyas*. One may also exhibit valor by refraining from being glued to the television news.

In his purport to this verse, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, "In the material world, to be dependent on the mercy of someone else is the utmost sign of misfortune." Why does he say that? What is so unfortunate in the "ulcerous" dependence on others, and why does it always bring out anxiety?

Dependence brings out the worst in us because it makes us obliged to another person. We may borrow money and then become anxious about paying it back. Whatever favor another person does for us has to be reciprocated, and the more we become dependent, the more anxious we become. A person who lives by the welfare state is looked down upon by society, and is

even considered a cheater sometimes. But he may actually need monetary help, and there is no other way for him. Nevertheless, his social position is considered condemned, and he wishes to get out of it.

This is such a nice purport, with Prabhupāda's comments on Sanātana: "Those who try to become falsely independent of the Lord are called *anātha*, or without any guardian, whereas those who are completely dependent on the will of the Lord are called *sanātha*, or those having someone to protect them. Therefore we must try to be *sanātha* so that we can always be protected from the unfavorable condition of material existence." Isn't it a material attitude to expect God's protection, as if He is our order supplier and obliged to protect us? Would He still protect us if we do not pray for protection for our own sake?

Kṛṣṇa has no obligation to give a devotee material protection, but He likes to do so. A famous verse in the *Bhāgavatam* says that sometimes Kṛṣṇa puts His devotees into material difficulties just so they take complete shelter in Him. So His exchanges with His devotees are free and are orchestrated by Him according to what will be the best for bringing out surrender in the dependence/independence relationship.

In *The Teachings of Queen Kuntī* (Ch. 20), Prabhupāda writes, "There is a verse in which Rūpa Gosvāmī says, *avyartha-kālatvam* (*Cc. Madhya* 23.18–19): "A devotee should be very much careful to see whether his time is being spent unnecessarily. He should ask himself, 'Am I now engaged in *māyā's* service or Kṛṣṇa's service?'" It is easy and clear when one lives in the temple or *āśrama* or *maṭha* to ask this question, but what about devotees who live with their families at home? Am I engaged in *māyā's* service when I'm glued to CNN news? What about Saturday shopping trips to the mall? What about when I drop my kids off at school? How can we be honest with ourselves and still ask this question?

The question may be legitimately asked by householders as well as *brahmacārīs* living in the *maṭha*. The householder's obligations of shopping, dropping his children off at school, and

so on are part of his *āśrama* duties, and they are not necessarily *māyā*. So he may still ask himself the question, "Am I now engaged in *māyā's* service or Kṛṣṇa's service?" Shopping and taking care of children are Kṛṣṇa conscious activities, just as much as serving the Deity by the *brahmacārī pūjārī*.

We have heard Prabhupāda speak many times about leading life based on goodness, where you take care of necessary duties and spare time for God realization, which is the primary aim of the human form of life. The line of thought expressed here, however, is a rare one where he directly stresses working hard under the guidance of the Lord. What exactly is working hard under the guidance of the Lord?

Working hard for the Lord starts with hearing and chanting, remembering and serving His lotus feet. Service like fund raising, managing a temple, or making life members may be equally stressed, but never to the neglect of the hard work of personal *sādhana bhakti*.

In his purport to this verse, Prabhupāda writes, "The highest achievement of perfect civilization is to work with valor but at the same time depend completely on the Lord." We aspire to attain such balance and level of surrender and perfection in life. The struggle for existence in this world gets so tough, and very easily we lose our higher vision of reality and think ourselves the doers and lords in this world. Thus the balance that allows us to keep making our series of small steps toward the right direction gets jeopardized, and the sense of dependence on the Lord gets despised. How can we be survivors in this world?

Why should we despise our dependence on the Lord? It's all we have. We can't make it on our own. We must work at the balance—working with valor but depending completely on the Lord. There is no alternative. The strong-hearted survive, the weak fall by the wayside. Just as on a ship we are advised to follow all the instructions of the authorities in case of an emergency, so living in this material world is similar. Follow the authorities who have survived and got through successfully, and we will stand the best chance to survive.

Is Queen Kuntī's asking Kṛṣṇa to remain with them a *gopī*-like reproach? As a great devotee, she must surely realize the Lord has His own purpose for whatever He does, so why should she lament (or why should devotees lament their separation if we know the Lord exists "within and without everything" (*Bhāg.* 1.8.18)?

Kuntīdevī realizes the Lord has His own purpose, and she accepts it on the rational plane. But she cannot prevent her emotional outbursts of desiring to keep the Lord with her. And this is no fault in her. Rather, it is an overflowing of her devotional service, and it pleases the Lord. Therefore He mildly smiled when she finished speaking her prayers.

People may say, "What if I want to work with valor and develop technology such as the Internet or a cure for cancer? What if this is my proclivity, and yet I still have to depend on the Lord, but in terms of developing modern technology—what's wrong with advancement of civilization?

There is nothing wrong with developing material technology side by side with Kṛṣṇa consciousness. One simply has to do it with the right attitude. Atheistic-minded scientists go about it in the wrong way, and their plans are foiled in the end. Kṛṣṇa conscious persons never neglect material development but warn us that one can become entangled in it at the same time. Better to live simply and think highly. Nothing should be done that makes us forgetful of our regular practices of Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

VERSE 38

ke vayaṁ nāma-rūpābhyāṁ yadubhiḥ saha pāṇḍavāḥ
bhavato 'darśanaṁ yarhi hṛṣīkāṇāṁ iveśituḥ

"As the name and fame of a particular body is finished with the disappearance of the living spirit, similarly if You do not look upon us, all our fame and activities, along with the Pāṇḍavas and Yadus, will end at once."

COMMENT

Queen Kuntī is aware that the existence of the Pāṇḍavas is due to Śrī Kṛṣṇa only. Without Kṛṣṇa's guidance, all of the Yadus are nonentities, just as the senses are useless without the guidance of consciousness. So no one should be proud of his prestige without being guided by the favor of the Supreme Lord.

In his *Krama-sandarbha ṭīkā* to this verse, Jīva Gosvāmī writes, *pāṇḍava pāṇḍu-sambandhinaḥ* —the Pāṇḍavas' fame is connected with Pāṇḍu himself. So here the glories of the Pāṇḍavas are being described. Should we devotees of ISKCON glorify and define our relationship with *our* Pāṇḍu, Śrīla Prabhupāda, our Kuru, Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, or should we always look at ourselves as servants and missionaries of Lord Caitanya, as they did? Isn't it true that Prabhupāda did not put his own name to his movement and never considered himself to be the supreme achiever?

It is true that Prabhupāda was very self-effacing and humble about his own place in ISKCON. Nevertheless, he insisted that he be described as the founder- *ācārya* of this movement and did not want his name neglected in that way. And although it is not called the "Movement of Prabhupāda Consciousness," there is nothing wrong if we constantly remember Prabhupāda as the giver of Kṛṣṇa consciousness and the giver of the teachings of Lord Caitanya. This is factually as well as emotionally correct.

In *The Teachings of Queen Kuntī* (Ch. 21), Prabhupāda tells us, "As soon as an important man dies, his name and form become unimportant, even though he may have been a big scientist, politician or philosopher. As long as we are alive, our name, form and activities are glorious, but as soon as the life is gone, the body is but a lump of matter."

There is a saying, *mṛta-māra-ṇanyāyaḥ*. It is the logical maxim of "slaying the slain." Prabhupāda seemed to de-emphasize the slain or a dead man's importance to an extreme. After all, when great people actually die, be it John Lennon, Socrates or Van Gogh, death makes us appreciate them more. Isn't this true? Hardly any

great artist is appreciated when he is still alive.

Posthumous fame is a matter of fact, but the hard reality is that the deceased person gains absolutely nothing from his increased good fortune after death. He doesn't benefit from royalties on book sales or record sales or by his new popularity in the university courses. And even his reputation changes, sometimes being appreciated and sometimes neglected or scandalized by new information or new biographies. Only a sincere devotee of the Lord lives on with unforgettable fame. As Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura sings, "They lie who say that Vaiṣṇavas die. True Vaiṣṇavas live to spread the holy name around."

This verse continues Kuntī's begging Kṛṣṇa to stay. She feels the Pāṇḍavas—such great heroes, now rulers of the world—will become nothing without Him. Their existence, identity, and meaning is directly tied to their relationship with their Lord. That is, their only identity is as Kṛṣṇa's servants. If the master is not present, the servant has no occupation and no meaning. Prabhupāda speaks about Kṛṣṇa's guidance of the Pāṇḍavas and mentions simplicity, the humility it takes to remain dependent.

The Lord is the "ultimate dependable object." How can I practice faith in this and avoid the lazy attitude of awaiting on the Lord for what I need?

One should develop the attitude of letting Kṛṣṇa act in His own sweet will. He is never late or neglectful in tending to His devotees' needs. But exactly when and how He acts is His prerogative. Our position is to wait faithfully and go on serving Him in patience. With this attitude, we can realize that Kṛṣṇa is already with us at every moment, especially in His holy name, and there is no undependability in Kṛṣṇa's reciprocation.

The name and fame Śrīmatī Kuntīdevī is talking about is not false ego or false prestige. What is it?

Kuntīdevī says, "The name and fame of a particular body is finished with the disappearance of the living spirit. . ." This may refer to false ego or actual fame. If it is false ego, then her point is that it disappears with the disappearance of the living spirit. This appears to be her main point in referring to the name and

fame of a particular body. If the name and fame were spiritual, it would not disappear with the body, so she is speaking of worldly name and fame, which certainly goes with the disappearance of the spirit.

The subtle body is always associated with the soul, but the gross body can be separated from the soul. Scientists try to make intelligent machines, but this seems to be impossible because intelligence is always connected with the soul. This body is but a machine made by Brahmā. Is the difference between Brahmā and the scientist qualitative or quantitative?

Lord Brahmā's creation of human beings is directly ordered by Kṛṣṇa. The placement of the soul within the body is done according to spiritual science, unknown to materialistic scientists. Their attempt to make an intelligent machine is something like creating a robot. They can never understand the placement of the soul within the intelligent living being.

PERSONAL COMMENT

The disciples meeting in Queens went well. About thirty or forty gathered. I apologized to them for breaking their trust. One devotee who was present wrote me later and said he thought it was "B.S." In the evening, I lectured at the Queens temple and later signed my books and distributed them for donations. A hundred people were present, and five hundred dollars was collected and turned over to the temple. Now we're back in the yellow submarine. Veda-Vyāsa remarked, "This Kṛṣṇa consciousness is something! Satsvarūpa started the day at the bottom of the list and ended as a superstar."

The GBC document and my letter are finalized for release on the ISKCON news websites. You can put it behind you, aside from the ongoing relations with the monitor committee and letters that come in and thoughts that keep coming into the mind. My Godbrother Hanumatpreṣaka Swami wrote me one of the most friendly and supportive letters I've ever received. He wrote as follows: "Maybe there are more details, details, details, but who

needs them? Basically it is a problem that I have, you have, and so many people in the pages of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* have: false ego manifest in a desire to be adored by the opposite sex.

"The most important thing seems to be that you are situated on a very, very progressive path, and the great contribution that you have made to ISKCON so far can continue to increase more and more. We look forward to that, we need that.

"I am sixty years old on January 12, so I am proceeding on the path behind you, and if you can get some of the thorns out of the way before we younger men step on them, that will be well appreciated. Thank you.

". . .It's not how we fall down in the battle that is so important. We all fall down, big or small, no? It's how we get back up and start fighting again that counts."

Bad day, three headaches. I'm certainly in the rebound syndrome with no perceivable way to break out. Perhaps a reduction in stress could occur, or an ability to heighten my pain threshold. As it is, they attack me subconsciously, but like clockwork, at least twice in twenty-four hours. My conscious mind doesn't want them to come. But there is a trigger that goes off at a light touch, like sabotage to my conscious desire for well-being. It's all biologically rooted. I have no control over my day. Can't say definitely to a person, "Come over in the morning or afternoon and I'll see you." It all depends on what happens in the head, and when, and how long it takes me to subdue it. At least I'm dependable in getting my sixteen rounds done, although sometimes at a whisper.

Light-years away; burn a votive candle
to bring you closer. Your whispered voice the
Lord's name. Oh what a tough day.

Finally a little clearing space.
Charming pause, don't get caught
doing something wrong. It will show

up on the video chat in the lines
of your prose, in the slack under
your chin—and most of all
in the private place where you
and Kṛṣṇa meet.

Do something right,
gāyatrīs, use your time
in *vaidhī* ways, read
a book, hear a lecture tape
do something right.

Say it over and over
early in the morning
while looking upon
Prabhupāda. Over and
over like a ballad to
a lover (or child
crying to its mother).

You don't know what love is
until you know the meaning of
the blues. Take it as a chance
to open up and cry. How you
blew it and had to tell the world
"I'm fool number one."
You don't know what love is
until you carry the burden,
look at the fool you are.

The gentler side. The
quiet night. The room
alone. I like these things
but they have to be a variety,
not always. You sometimes
have to mix and work hard.

It's easy to remember but so
hard to forget your infamy
and people will stick it in
your face. Don't forget what
you were. Prabhupāda even
said it's good to always remember
the bad you did, who you
were. What you are now
by Kṛṣṇa's grace: the difference.

FREE WRITE

Front-page headlines in the main Internet news venues. My only hope is that new sensational events will occur and my letter will gradually move toward the back pages. As it is now, the confessional letter appears odd amidst ads for renting a house in Vṛndāvana, selling a set of Prabhupāda's books, news of a festival in Toronto and South India, a tip on a new way to decorate *mūrtis* by applying ladies' mineral cosmetics, etc.

What's new? How is the world treating you? The pangs of world events—assassination of Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan—frightens us. How dangerous this place is, especially certain sectors, yet all sectors are spots of death, disease and old age. Here in Rehoboth, a community with so many retirees, it is a peaceful place. But we often hear ambulance sirens day and night as people with strokes are suddenly carried off to the emergency rooms of hospitals.

Post-Christmas retail sales keep the shoppers and sellers doing well. I expect guests tomorrow and hope I'll be up for the meeting. Eyelids heavy in the evening but peaceful now. Kṛṣṇa extends His hand to you at all times. The system is to touch the lotus feet of His pure devotees, not to touch their heads.

He said Prabhupāda seemed to overemphasize how people become unimportant after their deaths. But I defended him. He personally told me on a walk the worthlessness of posterity—passing fame and riches on to family survivors. Prabhupāda said

he's giving to his son, but he doesn't know where *he* is going. A prime minister may become one of two pet dogs in Switzerland (an astrologer predicted). It is no exaggeration, the deeds one does in this life, the actual deeds according to whether they are pleasing to Kṛṣṇa, form the basis for the next life. John Lennon may become—? His posthumous form in this world is of no value to the spirit soul who inhabited John Lennon's body. We have to examine, according to *guru, śāstra,* and *sādhu,* what a person actually accomplished.

No noises, please, no threats, please. But you have to get out there and face the world. For helping others. Go to India "for asking forgiveness and seeking purification." Preaching.

"I give my life in complete surrender
my one and only love.
As You appear in all Your splendor
my one and only love.

You fill my eager heart with sweet desire
I give myself in sweet surrender,
My one and only love."



VERSE 39

neyaṁ śobhiṣyate tatra yathedānīṁ gadādhara
tvat-padair aṅkitā bhāti sva-lakṣaṇa-vilakṣitaiḥ

"O Gadādhara [Kṛṣṇa], our kingdom is now being marked by the impressions of Your feet, and therefore it appears beautiful. But when You leave, it will no longer be so."

COMMENT

Prabhupāda mentions the unique marks on the soles of the Lord's feet: "The marks of a flag, thunderbolt, and instrument to drive an elephant, umbrella, lotus, disk, etc." He says that "the land of Hastināpura was thus marked while Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa was there." Queen Kuntī was afraid of bad luck in the absence of the Lord.

Readers of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and Kṛṣṇa consciousness tend to think that Lord Kṛṣṇa walks barefoot only in Vṛndāvana. They therefore think that in this instance, Kuntīdevī is actually thinking of Kṛṣṇa in Vṛndāvana. But we have to take Prabhupāda's purport literally. He says, "The land of Hastināpura was thus marked when Lord Kṛṣṇa was there with the Pāṇḍavas. . .," so therefore for at least some of the time the Lord walked unshod in the land of Hastināpura, although perhaps not as much as He did when He lived in Vṛndāvana as a cowherd boy.

In his lecture on this verse given in Māyāpura on October 19, 1974, Prabhupāda starts with a correction:

Devotee reading the verse: "'O Gadādhara, Kṛṣṇa, our kingdom is how being marked by the impressions of Your feet, and therefore it appears beautiful. But when You leave, it will no longer be so.'

Prabhupāda: Those who have got books, there should be one correction. It is written 'how.' It should be 'now,' n-o-w, not 'how.'"

Prabhupāda never had a problem correcting himself. Instead of *bhaja śrī kṛṣṇa-caitanya*, he introduced a correct version, *jaya śrī kṛṣṇa-caitanya*, and in many other ways he corrected himself. Why do some devotees see him as technically faultless? Is it because of unconditional love for the spiritual master or because they are fanatical? On the other hand, when Prabhupāda's editors, in the course of their service, have corrected simple English grammar, it has become such an issue. What is the difficulty that makes it so hard to be objective with one's spiritual master?

Jayadvaita Mahārāja and Dravida Prabhu published a booklet, *Responsible Publishing*, in which they explained thoroughly how

and why they made a new edition of the *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*. When the first translation of *Bhagavad-gītā* was published, Prabhupāda was working with typists and editors who were very inexperienced with Sanskrit and even English. Our famous—or infamous—errors, such as the planet of the Pitṛis being translated as "planet of trees." Jayadvaita Mahārāja, as well as Hayagrīva dāsa, were given general permission to make changes in the English so that it would conform to the highest literary standards. But when the new edition came out, devotees criticized it simply because the first edition was changed. They could not get past their narrow vision to see that improvements had actually been made, which brought the edition *closer to Prabhupāda's original intention*, but saw the new edition as a deviation. Jayadvaita Mahārāja actually worked with original manuscripts of Prabhupāda's and produced a new edition that was more favorable to Prabhupāda's intentions.

There is another interesting record of lamentation by Kuntīdevī in *Śrī Bṛhad-bhāgavatāmṛta* (5.79–88): "'After my family members were killed, Śrī Kṛṣṇa personally sat here at my side and expertly consoled me with persuasive arguments.

"'I always drink the immortal nectar of those charming words, so pleasing to the mind, and the smiles that went with them.

"'Even so, it is my misfortune that He no longer comes here. So how, dear sage, can I think He has shown me any mercy?'"

"Śrī Parīkṣit said, 'For Mother Kuntī, life seemed tormented with sorrow, remembering how Kṛṣṇa had at times shown His mercy and at other times not." She then spoke pitifully with tears in her eyes.

"Kuntī said, 'I had no husband to protect me, but Kṛṣṇa always interceded just in time to save me and my sons from calamity. From this I understood that Kṛṣṇa's mercy on me was special, greater even than His mercy on His mother, Devakī.

"'But now the thought that Kṛṣṇa is merciful to me never enters my mind, for everywhere in our home and the homes of our relatives I hear the loud mourning of the women whose

relatives have been slain.

"'Therefore, deprived of seeing Him, I begged Kṛṣṇa to take away our wealth and give us more calamities to bring Him again within our sight.

"'Kṛṣṇa gave the Pāṇḍavas their kingdom, freed from thorny opponents. Now thinking the brothers satisfied, He has abandoned us and resides in Dvārakā.

"'So I have given up hope that He will ever come back. Now I think His real mercy would be my quick death.

"'My last thread of hope—that Kṛṣṇa is always compassionate to His friends and relatives—can easily break if I simply consider how strongly He is attached to the Yadus.'"

It is interesting to see that Kuntīdevī talks in the mood of separation from Kṛṣṇa, and this mood makes it more intense. We always think of her as being a very powerful devotee, but here she appears to be helpless.

Kuntīdevī is surely not attached to having a beautiful kingdom. Why is she then saying this to the Lord?

Kuntīdevī is saying that the kingdom is beautiful because it has the impressions of the Lord's feet. It will not be beautiful when those marks are no longer there. She is not attached to beautiful gardens and buildings apart from Kṛṣṇa. The beauty of the land is that it is connected with Kṛṣṇa, is impressed with His personal, auspicious signs.

For someone who is living at home with family, it seems difficult to keep the presence of the Lord and to create a beautiful, spiritual atmosphere. Is it really possible to do this, and must one live in close association with other devotees in order to achieve it?

Living at home can also be living in close association with other devotees. One's house may not be a grand *mandir* with large Deities on the altar, but it can resemble a temple as much as possible, with an altar and *mūrtis* and regulative service being performed throughout the day. The beautiful impressions of Kṛṣṇa's presence can appear in a *gṛhastha's* home just as much as in the official temple, provided the people who live there are pure devotees.

The marks on the Lord's feet are auspicious. This is an intriguing topic to me. It is such a unique, mysterious, and inconceivable feature about Kṛṣṇa's form; devotees are encouraged to meditate on those marks. But this may get artificial, or even complicated for me. What could be a simpler way to meditate on Kṛṣṇa's presence?

The easiest recommended method for meditating on Kṛṣṇa is through the sound vibration of His name: Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare. All it takes is the vibration of the tongue and paying attention with the mind. This is certainly simpler than memorizing the different marks on the soles of the Lord's lotus feet. It is also the most powerful recommended form in this age.



VERSE 40

ime jana-padāḥ svṛddhāḥ supakvauṣadhi-vīrudhaḥ
vanādri-nady-udanvanto hy edhante tava vīkṣitaiḥ

"All these cities and villages are flourishing in all respects because the herbs and grains are in abundance, the trees are full of fruits, the rivers are flowing, the hills are full of minerals and the oceans full of wealth. And this is all due to Your glancing over them."

COMMENT

In the purport, Prabhupāda states that natural gifts are the prosperity of human life, not gigantic industrial enterprises. "If we have sufficient grains, fruits, vegetables and herbs, then what is the necessity of running a slaughterhouse and killing

poor animals?. . . If the human civilization has sufficient grains, minerals, jewels, water, milk, etc., then why should it hanker after terrible industrial enterprises at the cost of the labor of some unfortunate men?" Kuntīdevī's point is that all this natural abundance comes about by the mercy of God.

Kuntīdevī continues begging Kṛṣṇa to stay. Previously she said that the Pāṇḍavas had no existence, no meaning without Him. Now she says the same about the earth—it is flourishing only because of His presence. Pṛthivīdevi, the earth goddess, is a great devotee of Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇadas Kavirāja describes in the *Śrī Govinda-līlāmṛta* that when Kṛṣṇa walks, she runs under the ground and places her heart under each of his steps to pillow His walk.

It seems our tradition in ISKCON, however, is to speak disparagingly of this earth as if it were our enemy. "We're stuck in *this* place instead of living in the spiritual world." This appears to be more of a *jñānī's* attitude toward the world than a *bhakta's*, because it focuses on convincing the intellect to take up renunciation rather than appreciating the fact that Kṛṣṇa has graced this earth planet with His lotus feet. How can we increase our ability to see things from the viewpoint of *bhakti*? Or is the *jñāna* approach a necessary part of our advancement?

Jñāna is a necessary part of our advancement. We should not have a sentimental viewpoint toward Kṛṣṇa and the world but should understand things from the scientific process of *bhakti*. However, this does not mean that we should reject the earth as a horrible place. Once Hayagrīva dāsa referred to the earth planet as "rotten." Prabhupāda immediately corrected him, saying that Kṛṣṇa walked on this planet, so it could not be a rotten place. Because of Kṛṣṇa's appearance in this world, it has become a *tīrtha*.

How do "gigantic industrial enterprises" destroy the noble aims of human life? What are the noble aims? It seems that industry has facilitated much labor-saving, which should actually free people to pursue spiritual life. Sweat shops, assembly lines, the production of automobiles and the need for oil have not

produced a better quality of life for human beings. Devotees can use things in Kṛṣṇa's service, but they could just as well have done without it, as they did for thousands of years, using the bull for tilling the earth and protecting the cow, rather than killing her in the gigantic industrial enterprises of the slaughterhouses. Simple living and high thinking is a better principle of life than living under industrial enterprises where few benefit and many become slaves of the machine. Places like steel mills, coal mines and slaughterhouses force humanity to divert their energy from the noble aims of life, namely, worshiping the Lord by simple offerings of natural products. The industries have not actually brought about auspicious labor-saving but dangerous machines, congested highways, and labor–capitalist fighting. Prabhupāda uses the phrase, "squeeze out the vital energy of the human being," and says that people feel more "unrest and dissatisfaction" as a result of industries. But why do they support them and allow it to happen? Is it their own desire to exploit and lord it over material nature that drives them forward? It is the illusory conception of the living being that he will do better and be better by working hard in enterprises that actually bring him unrest and dissatisfaction. He allows it to happen because he is in illusion. Yes, it is his own desire to exploit and lord it over material nature that drives him forward to a life of dissipation and dissatisfaction.

Human prosperity flourishes by natural gifts and not by gigantic enterprises. Indian civilization was meant for living simply in a cottage, depending on the agrarian industry of food production and cow protection, which produced abundant milk. "If we have sufficient grains, fruits, vegetables and herbs, then what is the necessity of running a slaughterhouse and killing poor animals?" All the natural gifts are dependent on the mercy of the Lord, and all one needs to do is be obedient to His laws. Perfection of human life is developed by devotional service.

We know that Prabhupāda started his work in the 1950s. Some complain that his English is not contemporary or that some of his ideas are not contemporary, and that contemporary ideas are

needed for effective preaching today. But what strikes us is that he hits the nail on the head in this purport and is so in tune with the twenty-first century, addressing issues of sustainability and antiglobalization. Even the big oil-hungry powers have come to their senses to some degree. How should we apply Prabhupāda's intentions?

In the 1960s, ISKCON used to tag along with anti-war movements, but eventually we became politicized with the platforms of those movements whose attitudes we did not share. Many of them advocated meat eating, illicit sex, and intoxication. So Prabhupāda preferred that we preach purely on the Kṛṣṇa conscious platform, which includes anti-war protests against the draining of the earth for oil and many other things that involve world politics. But better we do it from the platform of the world peace movement, as Prabhupāda advocated it. In the 1960s, Prabhupāda published a very popular pamphlet called *The Peace Formula*, which quoted the *Śrī Īśopaniṣad* verse that everything is owned and controlled by the Lord and should be used for His purpose. That is ISKCON's peace movement—*īśāvāsyam*—the Lord in the center, and everything used for His purpose. That will bring about peace. Prabhupāda used to criticize the United Nations, who gathered under many, many flags but did not produce peace. He said when he used to go to the United Nations building in New York City, all he saw was that more flags were being added, but no peace. And the reason is that the governments meet without concluding that God is in the center, that everything belongs to Him and is owned by Him and should be used for His purpose. That should be our peace movement, our global unity.

Both Jīva Gosvāmī and Viśvanātha Cakravartī did not give any comments to this verse. Śrīdhara Svāmī's *ṭīkā* is just a one-liner: "Especially all these towns and lands flourish, being lucky (*sv-ṛddhāḥ*), very wealthy (*su-samṛddhāḥ*), and peaceful (*śānta*)." Why is it that while Kṛṣṇa is so much in favor of His devotees, many devotees are not so lucky, not too wealthy, and very often full of anxieties? Why are the lands that are the devotees' farms

not wealthy? Why does Kṛṣṇa take everything away before He gives pure devotion?

As stated in the *Caitanya-bhāgavata* (Madhya 9.240–241), "When you see a Vaiṣṇava of the highest order who seems to be suffering from material misery, you should know for certain that he is really experiencing the highest ecstasy. Bewildered by sense enjoyment and puffed up with pride in their knowledge, education, birth, wealth, beauty and so on, ignorant people cannot understand the activities or position of a Vaiṣṇava. A Vaiṣṇava, on the other hand, never considers birth, education, and wealth to be very important qualifications but distributes the Lord's mercy to everyone, regardless of their social position." This verse from the *Caitanya-bhāgavata* is a partial answer to the contradictory information of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. Kuntīdevī says that the cities and villages are all flourishing if Kṛṣṇa is glancing over them. She said that this was due to Kṛṣṇa's personal presence in Hastināpura, and that it would fade if He disappeared from their land. Now in the age of Kali, we don't experience this abundance because Kṛṣṇa is not present—Kṛṣṇa's presence is not desired by the mass of people. His influence is ignored.

The viewpoint in the *Caitanya-bhagavaa* (which is also stated in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*) is from a different point of view. It states that when Vaiṣṇavas become materially bereft, then they have no one to turn to but Kṛṣṇa, and they depend on Him completely. Materialists cannot understand the Vaiṣṇavas, and think that they must be failures, since they don't have all the advantages and amenities of material progress. But this stripping away of material pride from a devotee is actually a means by Kṛṣṇa to bring him closer to the Lord, who is his only protector. Therefore, whether one's land is blessed by Kṛṣṇa's glance or whether he lives in poverty, he should take it that everything is coming from Kṛṣṇa and fully depend on Him. If he loses material opulence, he should see the good side of it, but if he is blessed with riches, he may see that also—as Sudāmā *brāhmaṇa* did—as a personal gift from Kṛṣṇa and use it all in His service.

Ecology is a very important subject nowadays. Are we

supposed to be the best ecologists, even according to the material standards, or should we use the notion that "utility is the principle—*yukta-vairāgya*—allowing us to use everything, disregarding the ecological impact?

Yutka-vairāgya does not support pillaging the earth to the danger of the earth's very existence—creating global warming, exhaustion of fuels, blowing up cities by nuclear weapons, and other horrible anomalies—in the name of "utility is the principle." Kṛṣṇa consciousness is an ecological movement. We believe that the countryside is better than the cities, that the protection of cows is better than slaughtering them, that peaceful living in simple houses is better than pigeonholing people in skyscrapers. We are against waste of every sort. But our utmost goal is not material balance but service to Kṛṣṇa. The movements are compatible, ecology and Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Service to Kṛṣṇa under all conditions is the topmost goal.

So far, the ISKCON farm communities have not been very successful, and we have not been able to show a good example of ecology to the world. This means we have had to succumb to some degree to the pressures of Kali-yuga. We have to live practically. But we can minimize the horrible ways of life by not taking part in them as much as possible.

"The more we attempt to exploit material nature according to our whims of enjoyment, the more we shall become entrapped by the reaction of such exploitative attempts." Recently I've come to understand and explain our relationship with *māyā* as one where she only has power over us to the degree we are still trying to enjoy her. This does away with the idea of *māyā* "attacking us." Is this correct?

Everyone living in this material world has to be attacked by *māyā* in one degree or another. It is the nature of the place. Thus, we have to undergo volcanoes, hurricanes, tsunamis, and be "innocent" victims of wars. These are different forms of *māyā*, and no one can escape them. But it's also true that the more you

cease trying to enjoy the illusory forms of the material energy, the less *māyā* will be able to attack you. Avoiding sinful activities, which we fully think,we bring us enjoyment, will actually bring us great relief. Illicit sex, intoxication, meat eating and gambling subject us to all kinds of attacks, and we will avoid them as we avoid those sinful activities.

Śrīla Prabhupāda advocates a human civilization that takes advantage of nature's gifts, keeping in mind the Lord's grace and avoiding being victimized by its exploitative tendency. But how can this ever be possible without cultivating the *bhakti* spirit? It seems to me that even a good religionist can fall victim of a subtle form of bogus spirituality, thinking that nature's gifts are meant to be enjoyed by humanity, by God's grace, and it is thus just and religious to take advantage and acknowledge God's grace by giving thanks. Is this enough?

Living in the mode of goodness is superior to living in the modes of passion and ignorance. But it is not enough; it is still on the material platform. Transcendental even to the material mode of goodness is the stage known as *śuddha-sattva*. *Śuddha-sattva* is completely transcendental, and everything is done for the pleasure of Kṛṣṇa. It is done in full spiritual consciousness and in a spiritual body.

PERSONAL COMMENT

I wrote to a friendly Godbrother to ask if he would peer-review a manuscript. He wrote back as follows: "Here is my two cents' worth of opinion: My feeling is that your books serve a very important function, but are in some cases still very revolutionary to some sections of ISKCON. These sections—as far as I know—are concerned about those parts where you engage in very free writing and reveal almost everything about your personal thoughts and heart.

"I personally respect your choice one hundred percent, because it's your offering to guru and Kṛṣṇa. Why should I criticize? I know your wonderful Vaiṣṇava heart.

"But the un-understanding world is often cruel.

"At this stage of your life, you might therefore like to think strategically and decide what should be the main emphasis of your writing. An important question for you could be, how much critique can you or are you willing to handle at this point in time?

"I have no recommendation or suggestion on this question, because it totally depends on your own assessment and decision as a writer and servant of our exalted spiritual master.

"As you can see from my perspective, I am against control—even 'soft-edge' control. . ."

I fear the pain of the pain. In an awake-dream, I tried calling out in anguish to my sister, Madeline, but could barely pronounce her name. It is so frustrating to have headaches at this time, when the doctor has given me an extra cushion, which is supposed to prevent rebound. The cushion treatment ends four days before we are scheduled to leave for India. I'm determined to make the trip, but deciding ahead of time that I will relax, that I will say "No" to pressure demands to perform, and I will preserve whatever clear hours I have for friendly talk with like-minded friends and new devotees who have come to see me. Do it in a casual and accessible way, and they will simply have to accept where I am incapable.

I plan to continue writing PMRB, and maybe finish it.

Anne Lamott is an irreverent, witty Christian with dark humor. She was an alcoholic and drug addict for many years. She is a single mother, and writes with great love for her son, Sam. (She wrote a journal of his first year.) She writes mini-nonfiction chapters, which all indirectly evoke her faith in God, her praying life, and her close circle of friends and fellow church-goers, many of them very elderly and filled with a down-to-earth wisdom and dependence on God. They boost her in her many low points, her obsessions about hypochondria. In an essay called "The Mole," she writes, "There were no available surgery appointments until six weeks hence.

And I know me: I would feel a little more advanced bone loss each day, a little less small-motor control. That night at bedtime I looked down at my mole, and now instead of looking at it like a small cell bug, it suddenly seemed to be alive and spreading, like a stain. I was too young to die—or at least, I was too upset to die. You don't want to die when you're this upset—you get a bad room in heaven with the other hysterics, the right-to-lifers, and the exercise compulsives. But thinking of heaven made me remember something: that I believe in God. And I smote my own forehead. So I wrote God a note on a scrap of paper. It said, 'I am a little anxious. Help me remember that You are with me even now. I am going to take my sticky fingers off the control panel until I hear from You.' Then I folded up the note and put it in the drawer of the table next to my bed, as if it were God's in-box." And she writes of her depressions and anger about injustice in the world. In her own way she reaches out to others and helps with funny, tough truths and sharing good times. During mealtimes, devotees read me her short chapters, when they are not reading *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. We're reading Jaḍa Bharata's talks to Mahārāja Rahūgaṇa in the Fifth Canto, very analytical and uncompromisingly spiritual over material.

FREE WRITE

Oh Goloka Vṛndāvana. That's why I'm not there, and Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura is there. Or does he live in both eternal *dhamas* at the same time? There is his business card. Do you want to go? Prabhupāda said most people don't want to go. We went for a walk in our townhouse neighborhood. There was ice on the grass. He said I think negatively, describe myself "in a crisis." I don't have to talk that way. Call yourself a failure enough times and you'll become a failure. Be compassionate on yourself. I can do that better. It doesn't mean the biological block goes off. But you can rest. He said I seem to change patterns as to when I get H.A.'s, and asked if that was wrong for him to say. He thought it was me reacting with a "no." What did I think of that? I said I thought

it was an observation. The glass sheet on the grass, very unusual for Delaware. He asked if I felt head pressure. I said I have to go indoors again and take my knit cap off to find out what I feel.

Today has been a slow day. Even drooling sitting in my chair. But at least I felt like getting up and going for a walk in the cool air, just to see what it would be like. It wasn't so bad. You can still go or not; probably I will go. They want me to go with them.

Bring *Japa Reform Notebook*. Talk about your time with Swamiji at 26 Second Avenue. "They'll be bouncing off the walls. Do you like to do it?"

"Sometimes I get tired of it."

"It gets routinized."

"Yes. I could read *Japa Reform* and make comments. And at Puri read *Waves of Jagannatha Puri* and *A Pilgrimage Journal to Jagannatha Puri*. Read the advent of Lord Caitanya and His childhood pastimes when you're in Māyāpura, and make comments. And relax with your friends. You don't have to make the *parikramās* to Alalanath. See how you feel."

Śāstra says he waits eleven months to go to India. "No television." He says the atmosphere will be more relaxing for me. He very much wants me to go. He keeps emphasizing how comfortable our first-class Virgin Airlines seats will be. We wait in a special lounge and are the first to enter the airplane. We break our journey at London Heathrow for eight hours. Nārāyaṇa will be there to take care of me. Śāstra is not so aware of the medicines, and maybe the pain. But he thinks I should go. Dattātreya dropped by to say that in his opinion, if I don't want to go, I shouldn't.

Wake up at 2:30 A.M. with a panic attack, swirling over the time the Hell's Angels beat us up on the Boston Commons in '67, and the time I fell out the window, and when the store's plate glass fell down on my head. I did not feel a headache, but feared all this anxiety might disable me. I went back to bed, without medicine, and slept until 7:30 and woke well, sane, and

rested. Nitāi-Gaurāṅga dāsa also overslept, and they are just now preparing a late breakfast for me. If he asks me what book I want him to read, I won't ask for *Thus Spake Zarathustra.* Maybe Jaḍa Bharata instructs Mahārāja Rahūgaṇa. What's happening? Calm down, boy, you're going to India. Must talk to a monitor first and tell him I'm cool, but "Satsvarūpa, who gets headaches." (As if perpetually. Smile.)

Sleepy time guy
I hope your roughing is through
you're not alone, you know
the whole world is moving by.

Sleep the morning through
like a bear in the zoo
don't be apprehensive
there's nothing you can do.

Pick up beads and move them through
your paws another day
Kṛṣṇa's stern but sees you
kindly as you try to move.

Exercise, scrunch your face
the race is nearing end.
I recall you won before
and believe you can again
by his mercy and your want.



VERSE 41

atha viśveśa viśvātman viśva-mūrte svakeṣu me
sneha-pāśam imaṁ chindhi dṛḍhaṁ pāṇḍuṣu vṛṣṇiṣu

"O Lord of the universe, soul of the universe, O personality of the form of the universe, please, therefore, sever my tie of affection for my kinsmen, the Pāṇḍavas and the Vṛṣṇis."

VERSE 42

tvayi me 'nanya-viṣayā matir madhu-pate 'sakṛt
ratim udvahatād addhā gaṅgevaugham udanvati

"O Lord of Madhu, as the Ganges forever flows to the sea without hindrance, let my attraction be constantly drawn unto You without being diverted to anyone else."

COMMENT

These two verses seem to be best read together. In verse 41, Kuntī prays to have her affectionate ties for her kinsmen cut, and in verse 42, she prays for single-minded devotion to Kṛṣṇa: "Let my attraction be constantly drawn unto You without being diverted to anyone else." Why does Kuntīdevī want to cut her ties of affection for her kinsmen?

Prabhupāda gives three reasons in his purport, each one increasing in depth. First he says that because Kuntīdevī is related to both the Pāṇḍavas and the Vṛṣṇis and is attached to both sides of the family, she feels torn by their separate needs. Both sides are devotees of Kṛṣṇa. But she is living with her sons, the Pāṇḍavas. Kṛṣṇa has already given them so much time and attention and protection; now He is about to return to the other members of her family, the Vṛṣṇis. Although she does not want

to deny the Vṛṣṇis Kṛṣṇa's mercy, she also does not want Him to leave her and her sons. She actually wants both sides of her family to have Kṛṣṇa's association. Although Prabhupāda says it is Kuntī's "partialities" (or as Jīva Gosvāmī says, her "competing affections") that are troubling her, it is clear that it is also her sense of separation and imminent loss. Therefore this is such a loving prayer.

What's perhaps most notable in this text is that Kuntīdevī feels impending separation but not envy. Her affections compete, but only because she wants Kṛṣṇa to remain with her and her sons, without depriving the Vṛṣṇis of His merciful presence.

We also often have competing affections, and may also suffer impending separation from Kṛṣṇa. That is, we may not feel His presence when we feel we need His support the most. We may even feel ignored. At the same time, we may see others receiving His attention and mercy. Perhaps we feel this is unjust; we may see ourselves as being just as needy as the person who appears to have Kṛṣṇa's attention. How can a *śaraṇāgata* respond to this situation?

We should never think that Kṛṣṇa is being unfair or neglectful of any of his devotees. He is magnanimous, and He gives everyone their just rewards at the right time. We should be happy for the good fortune of other devotees. For Kṛṣṇa's own reasons, He may not be favoring us at a particular time, but we can use this as an occasion to love Him even more and yearn for His blessings.

So we do not have a right to complain to Kṛṣṇa for attention. Prabhupāda writes, "A pure devotee is ashamed to ask anything in self-interest from the Lord." But asking for something in the name of desiring our own advancement in pleasing Kṛṣṇa is not a selfish self-interest. That we can wish for. The desire for material things or subtle advancement over others would be considered undesirable self-advancement. Our attempt to make advancement should always be synonymous with serving Kṛṣṇa.

The second reason Prabhupāda gives for why Kuntīdevī asked to have her family ties severed is that this would "widen her activities of devotional service for all forgotten souls." This

reminds us of something Prabhupāda once said to his disciple Tamāl Kṛṣṇa Mahārāja. Tamāl Kṛṣṇa Mahārāja was very close to his mother. When he took *sannyāsa*, he asked Prabhupāda whether he should continue writing often to his mother. Prabhupāda replied, "That depends on whether you want to make her a special object of your mercy." But this idea of widening one's compassion from the limited family to the unlimited human family is attractive. Sometimes devotees have done it at the expense of caring for their immediate families. Does that matter? How does one actually achieve that broadening?

I read a statement once that "to escape the one-dimensional takes courage and strength and grace." What that means to me in this context is that it takes a lot of self-knowledge, both *sambandha*—who we are in our true identity—and a very deep awareness of the fact that we are not ultimately so different from the rest of the human race. Others share our same nature, and like us, they are separated from Kṛṣṇa and suffering. Compassion is something that comes from identification with others and not with otherness. Therefore it seems to be a stage of advancement, not something automatically attained.

Prabhupāda's example is nice. He states that the Gosvāmīs all came from rich, cultured families, yet renounced both wealth and family to serve Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu's preaching mission. We picture the Gosvāmīs as retiring to Vṛndāvana—writing books, but especially experiencing deep, *rasika* Kṛṣṇa consciousness. But Rūpa Gosvāmī, for example, was a highly educated and cultured person. He and Sanātana Gosvāmī functioned in the world for decades before they were sent to Vṛndāvana. Each had a particular service, and it is interesting how Caitanya Mahāprabhu teaches each of them in similar ways and yet gives them slightly different missions. Rūpa Gosvāmī was to systematize *rāgānuga-bhakti sādhana*, and Sanātana Gosvāmī was to systematize *vaidhī-bhakti sādhana*. Jīva Gosvāmī was also highly educated, trained in philosophy and Sanskrit on the Lord's order. Each of them left their wealth behind and used their education and other assets in Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu's service.

Another theme in these verses is how Kṛṣṇa is so kind, even to a weak devotee, that by His "all-powerful energy. . . he causes the devotee to become completely dependent on Him and thus clears the path for his going back to Godhead." (In the Sanskrit, Kṛṣṇa is called *viśva-īśa* to indicate his power to do this.)

We have already discussed a number of questions about dependence on Kṛṣṇa and surrender, but here's another one: every quality has an opposite. That Kṛṣṇa has the power to make me a devotee also means that He has the power to not give me His mercy. He is *viśva-īśa*, the master of the universe and supremely independent. We cannot control how He will act in our case or in any other case. Rather, He will act according to His own sweet will. Can we trust Him? Can we maintain hope to attain His service, even though He offers no guarantees how He will treat us?

In the last verse of the *Śikṣāṣṭakam*, Lord Chaitanya expresses, in the mood of the *gopīs*, that He does not demand a guarantee of acceptance by Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa can do with him as He likes. We trust in Kṛṣṇa because we are inevitably drawn to Him and infatuated by Him. He has nothing to do in reciprocation for us to further earn our adoration. This is the one-sided love of the devotees for Kṛṣṇa, and ultimately He can do no wrong to them in their eyes.

Verse 42 is a beautiful prayer for *ananya-bhakti*, pure devotional service. In the purport, Prabhupāda says that while Kuntīdevī is praying to have her family ties severed, it is not possible to give up all affection for others. Neither does practicing Kṛṣṇa consciousness require it. We must simply change our perspective from having ourselves in the center to having Kṛṣṇa in the center of our relationships. This comes by actual knowledge of the relative positions of Kṛṣṇa and ourselves. He is the center, and we are His part and parcels. He is the beloved, we are His lover.

Prabhupāda says affection for others is "a symptom of life"; therefore, it is constitutional and simply has to be brought out. If we change the object of our affection to Kṛṣṇa, how do we get over the hurdle that we don't know Kṛṣṇa? Desire, affection,

attraction, hankering—these are all emotions (*bhāvas*) and are not something we can create through pretense or intellectualizing. We can't pretend to feel something for someone we don't know. Therefore, Kṛṣṇa consciousness is never artificial but must be actually realized.

As we practice Kṛṣṇa consciousness, we are encouraged to do whatever is favorable for devotion and to give up everything unfavorable. *Pañcāṅga-bhakti* is favorable, especially hearing and chanting. What's unfavorable is anything that diverts our attention from the goal of loving and serving Kṛṣṇa. What diverts our attention is anything that creates material *rasa*—mundane relationships, illicit sex, intoxication, etc.

For many devotees, the problem seems to be that giving up what's unfavorable does not necessarily create instant spiritual advancement. There seems to be a period in which we are left with very little—no material *rasa* to speak of, and no spiritual *rasa* either, despite our efforts. Prabhupāda addresses this in his *Teachings of Queen Kuntī*. Prabhupāda explains that after severing her ties with her family Kuntīdevī should perform pure devotional service with full absorption in the Lord. But what about those of us who cannot seem to do that? And why can't we do it?

We do not have the *bhakti-śakti*, the true feeling of heart for Kṛṣṇa. Rather than remain "unemployed," we must employ our selves wholeheartedly in *vaidhī-bhakti* in the stage of fully desiring employment in Kṛṣṇa's loving service, and then it will develop.

Because, as Prabhupāda says, "affection for others is a symptom of life," and because "affection" can be translated as a need for *rasa*, how can the devotees abide after they have renounced whatever cultivates material *rasa*, and yet they do not have spiritual *rasa*? If we assume that Kṛṣṇa is guiding the devotee's advancement, we have to assume that this period is Kṛṣṇa's arrangement. Yet it's quite uncomfortable because it is natural for the soul to hanker for intensity in life, and especially for emotional experience. We have seen many devotees step back

toward material experience, and in many cases, they have done so simply to escape the emptiness. Of course, it doesn't work. As Prabhupāda writes, there's no point in trying to ignite a fire if you're going to pour water on it. Still, it seems to take a lot of faith to survive the emptiness of having nothing in either the material or spiritual world.

This requires great patience and faith. By hearing how kind Kṛṣṇa is to His devotees, we will develop this. Great devotees of Kṛṣṇa have been content to wait millions of years to receive the exciting *rasa* with Kṛṣṇa, and when they hear that at some time in the future they will attain it, they become ecstatic. So a little impatience is not warranted.

Was Śrīla Prabhupāda ever in this mood of cutting all attachment to family members?

Prabhupāda acted in a balanced way, just as he told Raghunātha dāsa not to act as a crazy man but to act as a gentleman and live in family life until the time was right for him to sever his ties. If family life becomes extremely incompatible with devotional service, then it can be cut off.

In his *Bṛhad-bhāgavatāmṛta* (4.1.1.8), Sanātana states, "They are dear to Him not because of bodily ties or because they help him reach the four goals of material life but because of their loving bond with the lotus feet of Śrī Kṛṣṇa." How can family members be dear to one as a result of their loving bond with Kṛṣṇa? After all, there are so many others who have this bond; does it mean they are as dear or even more dear than our family?

One has special ties of responsibility to one's material family. This occurs out of duty. One may feel more dear to the devotees who are not material relatives, but this should never be done to the neglect of wife and children. Besides this, wife and children should always be cultured in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

In the *Laghu-bhāgavatāmṛta* (*Uttara-khanda* 18), it is stated, "Because of constant intimate association with Lord Kṛṣṇa and close family ties with Him, some members of the Yadu dynasty are more exalted than the Pāṇḍavas." Is it because the Yadus were waiting that Kṛṣṇa wanted to go to them? But then, the Vrajavāsīs

are more exalted—why didn't Kṛṣṇa go back to Vraja?

Kṛṣṇa was cultivating separation with the residents of Vraja. He loved them most and wanted to be with them most. But He cultivated nearness with them by the mood of love in separation. Kṛṣṇa never steps even one foot out of Vṛndāvana, so He was always present in Vṛndāvana through the medium of remembrance on the behalf of the residents of Vṛndāvana. But He felt obliged to give His association to his other clans.

In his purport, Prabhupāda writes, "Desire cannot be negated, but in devotional service the desire is changed only for the service of the Lord in place of desire for sense gratification." A devotee writes, "Once—in 1967, I think—Prabhupāda stayed with one of his first disciples in his apartment. It was Prabhupāda's birthday, and the devotee made a cake for his birthday and brought it in with candles. Prabhupāda faithfully followed the Western tradition and blew out the candles. When asked if he made a wish, he replied thoughtfully, 'My wish is for Kṛṣṇa only.' Why I like this story is because in the process, he broke the *vaidika* rule, not to blow on a fire. My question is about the desire for new things for Kṛṣṇa. Is there a space in Kṛṣṇa consciousness for such a desire, or should we limit our wishes to the tradition? Or is any desire that is not a desire for traditional values to be considered sense gratification by default?

Prabhupāda was very liberal in accepting the affectionate offerings of his disciples, especially in the beginning years. There was nothing wrong on his part with accepting a birthday cake and blowing out the candles in reciprocation to the joyous love in which the devotees wanted to exchange with their "Swamiji." In later years, he restricted some of these offerings to make them more Vedic, and that was proper too. And the devotees were glad to learn. Some non-Vedic traditions have become established parts of ISKCON, like the ISKCON pizzas and family observances of Christmas.

A similar verse about severing attachment for family members is quoted by Uddhava in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. (11.29.39–40). *vṛkṇaś ca me su-dṛḍhaḥ sneha-pāśo*, "The firmly binding rope of

my affection for the families of the Dāśārhas, Vṛṣṇis, Andhakas and Sātvatas—a rope You originally cast over me by Your illusory energy for the purpose of developing Your creation—is now cut off by the weapon of transcendental knowledge of the self. Obeisances unto You, O greatest of yogis. Please instruct me, who am surrendered unto You, how I may have undeviating attachment (*ratiḥ syād anapāyinī*) to Your lotus feet."

Śrīla Prabhupāda says, "Sometimes service to the devotee is more valuable than service to the Lord." This is an amazing assertion by Prabhupāda. Usually, new devotees or common men are in awe and reverence to the Lord and know little about the glories of those who are dear to Him. This leads to more tension while discharging *sevā* for the Lord than for the devotees. I have seen devotees easily taking *sevā* given by devotees because, after all, devotees can always be convinced and coaxed, whereas the Lord in the Deity form seems not ready to be dealt with in a similar manner. But here Śrīla Prabhupāda explains the opposite. How important is it to be alert while carrying out *sevā* for the devotees of the Lord?

We should never think that the servants of the Lord are ordinary conditioned souls. When we see a policeman dressed in his uniform, we know he is an ordinary man, but we must treat him very respectfully because of his office. Similarly, one who is clothed with the ornaments of a devotee—obviously fixed in the service of the spiritual master—is not an ordinary citizen of this mundane sphere. We cannot commit offenses to devotees without great risk. Of course, it is not just by the outer dress of the devotee, but by his qualities and obvious practices as servant of the spiritual master, we should see how he is situated and treat him very carefully.

This purport about how no desire needs to be negated is very encouraging. But later on, Prabhupāda says that our attention is usually diverted to the service of something non-Godly. This would imply that not having to negate any desires would come at an advanced stage, after one has come to a practical awareness of how my "natural" conditional nature is to engage my desire in my

own non-Godly ambitions. Is this the correct understanding?

A devotee is *niṣkāma*, he has no desires. All others have some demands, and therefore they are not peaceful. There is no end to the *karmīs'* ambitions, always seeking more money for sense gratification in sex and other material so-called pleasures. Actually, their pleasures mostly give them suffering. In Vedic culture, material desires are fulfilled by praying to the demigods. If one wants a beautiful wife, he prays to the goddess Umā. If one wants sexual power, he prays to Indra. But even after attaining these ambitions, one cannot keep them for long. They wither in old age. So the path of following material desires is never recommended. The devotee has only one desire—to serve Kṛṣṇa. Therefore he chants, "O Rādhā, O Kṛṣṇa, please let me serve You." He has no other demand, and therefore he is satisfied. The concept of engaging desires in Kṛṣṇa's service is a form of devotional service and has to be dealt with carefully. In the beginning stages, it is always tainted with material desire. But the devotee is encouraged to "be himself" and work at his position for the service of Kṛṣṇa. Later, after experiencing the shortcomings of fulfilling his own ambitions and the sweetness of pure devotional service, he desires only to serve Kṛṣṇa under any condition.

Prabhupāda beautifully clarifies that "when Kuntīdevī wanted to cut off the family relation, she meant to cut off the relation of the skin." We may notice, though, that this subject matter is often misinterpreted or misapplied in ISKCON, thus causing much unnecessary misery in our society—"premature detachment syndrome." Kuntīdevī did not mean that she no longer wanted to associate with her wonderful relatives, the Pāṇḍavas, who were all pure devotees, or with her paternal family. But she did not want to be attached to them in a bodily or material way, or in any way that would leave her anyway but single-minded in her devotion to Kṛṣṇa. Devotion to Kṛṣṇa continues to exist in the company of pure devotees, so the desire to be without nondevotee association is not a wrong thing. Gradual detachment in family life is the *varṇāśrama* system, and if the husband and wife keep

up together in pure devotional service, there is no need for their becoming disinclined to each other or desiring separation for the purpose of worshiping Kṛṣṇa.

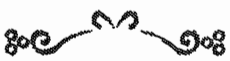
Queen Kuntī prays that her attraction be constantly drawn unto the Lord. To what extent have we the power of choosing to become attracted to Kṛṣṇa while in a conditioned state? Is it our decision, or is it Kṛṣṇa's mercy?

We are naturally drawn to Kṛṣṇa, like an iron filing is drawn to the magnet. But we have to bring ourselves close to Kṛṣṇa. That is done by associating with devotees, *śāstras,* and the holy name. Coming close to our free will's power of choosing to become attracted to Kṛṣṇa in the conditioned state. Sometimes we may not do it naturally, but we have to do it under rules and regulations: rising early, coming to Kṛṣṇa closely in the early hours and throughout the day, under the order of the spiritual master. But one way or other, our choice is exerted by coming close to Him, physically, mentally, and spiritually.

PERSONAL COMMENT

January 11. The clock lined up all ones; month 1, day 1, time 1:11.

"Your clock is all ones!" said N.G. "Make a wish!" I wished for a safe journey. But shouldn't that be left up to Kṛṣṇa? Someone wished me an uplifting journey. That's better. I've been having dreams that it's going to be a down-going journey, with people casting critical looks at me. "You are too hard on yourself," says N.G. "You have a fantasy that people are against you."



VERSE 43

śrī-kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa-sakha vṛṣṇy-ṛṣabhāvani-dhrug-
rājanya-vaṁśa-dahanānapavarga-vīrya
govinda go-dvija-surārti-harāvatāra
yogeśvarākhila-guro bhagavan namas te

"O Kṛṣṇa, O friend of Arjuna, O chief amongst the descendants of Vṛṣṇi, You are the destroyer of those political parties which are disturbing elements on this earth. Your prowess never deteriorates. You are the proprietor of the transcendental abode, and You descend to relieve the distresses of the cows, the brāhmaṇas and the devotees. You possess all mystic powers, and You are the preceptor of the entire universe. You are the almighty God, and I offer You my respectful obeisances."

COMMENT

Prabhupāda calls this verse a summary of the Supreme Lord. It describes a broad range of His activities as the proprietor of the transcendental abode, as the *avatāra* who descends to relieve the distresses of the cows, *brāhmaṇas*, and devotees. And Kṛṣṇa is the almighty God, to whom we offer our respectful obeisances.

It is interesting that Kuntīdevī begins by addressing Kṛṣṇa as *kṛṣṇa sakhā*—friend of Arjuna. Arjuna is her son and her subordinate, and yet she is worshiping his loving relationship with Kṛṣṇa.

One often wonders why the devotees in the *Bhāgavatam* choose to speak the particular praises they choose to speak. Sometimes the praise seems less intimate than their relationship with Kṛṣṇa would indicate. Kuntīdevī has so much opened her heart and expressed her fear of being separated from Him. She has spoken about what she knows about His relationship with Mother Yaśodā

and addressed Him in very loving ways. Yet here she talks about Him being all-powerful, the preceptor of the universe, possessor of all mystic powers, almighty God, and one who has come to alleviate the distress caused by the disturbing elements of the political parties. Is this actually a step back from the intimacy she has created in the earlier part of her prayers?

Having spoken as intimately as possible to Kṛṣṇa in pleading with Him to please stay with them, Kuntīdevī realizes that Kṛṣṇa's departure is inevitable. So she ends her prayers with a summary and a great glorification. This does not mean that she reverts in her tender feelings toward Śrī Kṛṣṇa in any way. But she is speaking according to time and place and person. She is speaking what she hopes will be most pleasing to the Lord at this moment. And what is most inspiring to her.

It is important for us to know these things about Kṛṣṇa, to know that He is fully powerful and does not deteriorate in potency. This knowledge give us great comfort. It is not the same as the comfort of Mother Yaśodā, who has Kṛṣṇa playing in her kitchen, but it is the comfort of all suffering souls in the material world who know that they have a supreme protector, that there is a benign controller, and that ultimately they need not fear the contemporary demons on the earth.

Nowadays there are many examples of political parties that are creating disturbances on the earth. Why is the Lord not destroying them, as mentioned in this verse?

The world is the prison house of existence. The bad elements are sent here, and to some degree, they're allowed to play out their malicious proclivities. That is why Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura used to say, "This world is no fit place for a gentleman." As Kali-yuga deteriorates, it becomes impossible to find peace and justice amidst this population of cheaters and quarrelers. So the Lord allows them to play to some extent in their nefarious ways. But when things reach the breaking point, He descends as one of the *avatāras*, like the Kalki *avatāra*, and wreaks wholesale destruction on the malicious population.

Kṛṣṇa descends to relieve the distresses of the cows, the

brāhmaṇas, and the devotees. But why, then, as soon as He leaves does the situation become much worse for all of the above, with the full onslaught of Kali-yuga?

The Supreme Lord has arranged that universal time revolves through the four stages, or *yugas*—going from better to worse, Satya, Tretā, Dvāpara, and Kali, until at the end of Kali-yuga there's almost no human standard of population. When the Lord descends in Tretā-yuga, He not only personally relieves the distresses of the cows, *brāhmaṇas*, and devotees but leaves strong instructions that this should be maintained by the *varṇāśrama* system even after His departure. But the personality of Kali moves in, and with his followers destroys these instructions, breaking the boundaries of religious codes, with the result that massive karma descends upon the people in the form of wars, pestilence, and famine. It is no joke when the Lord's desires are ignored and when His dear ones are abused.

Here is a statement from the *Laghu-bhāgavatāmṛta* (*Uttara-khanda*, 19) praising the superiority of the home of the Pāṇḍavas: "The Supreme Personality of Godhead did not personally remain in Prahlāda's home, although He stayed in the home of the Pāṇḍavas. Great sages did not travel to Prahlāda's home to see the Supreme Lord, but for this purpose they did visit the home of the Pāṇḍavas. The Supreme Lord did not become the intimate relative of Prahlāda Mahārāja, He was the material cousin of the Pāṇḍavas. He also did not personally express great pleasure at the daily activities of Prahlāda, as He did with the Pāṇḍavas. For all these reasons, Nārada Muni has said that the Pāṇḍavas were more fortunate than either himself or Prahlāda.

Is comparing devotees always an offense, or is it only sometimes an offense? If one says, "This devotee is not as fortunate as that devotee," is it an offense? In one English lecture, Bhakti-siddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura said that both judging others and thinking oneself great are manifestations of false ego. In which cases is self-judgment or comparing others acceptable?

In the quote from the *Laghu-bhāgavatāmṛta*, Prahlāda was trying to encourage the Pāṇḍavas, who may have thought themselves

inferior due to being householders. He pointed out their supreme fortune, in that Kṛṣṇa mixed with them regularly and praised their activities. All devotional service is absolute, and all pure devotees are as good as each other. But there is a question of perfect, most perfect, and superlatively perfect. Of all Kṛṣṇa's devotees, the Vrajavāsīs are most fortunate; and among them, the *gopīs* are most fortunate; and among all the *gopīs*, Śrīmatī Rādhārani is the supreme fortunate. This kind of comparison is never done in a relative way or to minimize any set or group of devotees. It is an analytical study of *bhakti*.

The Pāṇḍavas sometimes acted as exceptions to the rule. For example, Arjuna had several wives, Bhīma was married to a *Rakṣasi* and ate meat, etc. Prabhupāda was often strict, but then he would relax the strictures for particular persons. Should we be the same? Is this personal touch missing these days?

A devotee recalls, "One time, in Vṛndāvana, devotees had started singing *kīrtana* with harmonium during *ārati*. This did not please Śrīla Prabhupāda. Śrīla Prabhupāda could hear a devotee singing with the harmonium, and so he asked me to go tell the devotee to stop singing with harmonium. I went to the temple and saw it was Bharadvaja Prabhu singing. I approached him and told him that Prabhupāda did not want him to sing with harmonium. I then went back to Prabhupāda's quarters, and Śrīla Prabhupāda asked me, "Who was the devotee singing?"

I replied, "It was Bharadvaja Prabhu, Śrīla Prabhupāda."

Śrīla Prabhupāda then replied, "Oh, it was Bharadvaja? He can sing with harmonium."

In a similar example, recorded in Rādhā-Damodara's traveling *saṅkīrtana* party in Miami, Florida (February, 1974), two devotees were arguing about the use of harmonium. One quoted Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura as saying, "Harmonium is for sentimental women," but the other devotee said, "But our guru plays it while singing *bhajanas*, so we follow our guru's example." These anecdotes seem to give the answer to the question of different rules being applied to different persons. One has to follow his own spiritual master and take account of the all-important context of time, place, and person.

VERSE 44

sūta uvāca
pṛthayetthaṁ kala-padaiḥ pariṇūtākhilodayaḥ
mandaṁ jahāsa vaikuṇṭho mohayann iva māyayā

"Sūta Gosvāmī said: The Lord, thus hearing the prayers of Kuntīdevī, composed in choice words for His glorification, mildly smiled. That smile was as enchanting as His mystic power."

COMMENT

Kṛṣṇa accepted Kuntīdevī's prayer with a mild smile. "That smile was as chanting as His mystic power." What's nice about this purport is that Prabhupāda almost addresses Kuntī's attraction to Kṛṣṇa's smile, but doesn't quite naming the enchantment. "The conditioned souls, who are engaged in trying to lord it over the material world, are also enchanted by His mystic powers, but His devotees are enchanted in a different way by the glories of the Lord, and His merciful blessings are upon them." It would seem that one of Kṛṣṇa's glories is His mild smile. Kṛṣṇa's smiles are often enigmatic. Prabhupāda indicates in this purport and in several of his lectures on this verse that Kuntīdevī has pleased Him, and that's why He has smiled. But we also know that Kṛṣṇa smiles to indicate more than simply His pleasure; sometimes He smiles to indicate that He will fulfill the devotee's request, but in His own way and in His own time. Kuntīdevī's heartfelt request in these prayers has been to remain with Him always, even if it means she must sever ties with her family or suffer calamities again and again. Here Kṛṣṇa accepts her prayers with a mild smile, and in the next verse He again prepares to leave.

Prabhupāda writes, "Śrīmatī Kuntīdevī has prayed to the Lord just to enunciate a fragment of His glories. All His devotees worship Him in that way, by chosen words, therefore the Lord is

known as *uttamaśloka*. No amount of chosen words is sufficient to enumerate the Lord's glory, and yet He is satisfied by such prayers, as the father is satisfied even by the broken linguistic attempts of his growing child. The word *māyā* is used both in the sense of delusion and mercy."

We know the examples in *śāstra* of devotees offering their own heartfelt prayers to their Lord—Prahlāda being asked to pacify Nṛsiṁhadeva in the presence of his greatly respected seniors, such as Brahmā and Lakṣmīdevī; and Kolaveca Śrīdhara, who said he had no words to use to glorify Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu. In both cases, the Lord (or His representative) said, "Just speak some words and they will be glorification." We are told in *Caitanya-bhāgavata* that goddess Sarasvatī entered Kolāvecā Śrīdhara's mind and helped him to speak pleasing prayers. We know that Pṛśnigarbha touched child Dhruva on the head with His conch, and that empowered him to offer prayers. Brahmā encouraged Prahlāda.

From this we can understand that while the devotees offer Kṛṣṇa prayers in "choice words," it is not the content of the prayers that pleases Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa is *bhāva-grāhī janārdana*—He finds the least element of love and accepts that no matter what package it comes in. Prabhupāda said once that we could "just give any words" and that would be sufficient, because Kṛṣṇa is absolute. Every word is actually a glorification if it is pronounced with love.

Elements necessary to make a devotee's prayers acceptable to Kṛṣṇa are at least some elemental knowledge of who Kṛṣṇa is and sincere feeling in the heart. We can learn about Kṛṣṇa's position in *Bhagavad-gītā* and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and from the lotus lips of His beloved ones. We can see it in their every action, and it can infect us to be prayer-makers ourselves. We are also encouraged to speak in the words of the great Vaiṣṇavas, because then we are following perfect footsteps. Even if at first we cannot enter their complete mood or *bhāva*, it is good for us to pray the prayers of the *Brahmā-saṁhitā* and other exalted prayers and learn how to glorify Kṛṣṇa.

Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī and Śrīdhara Svāmī, in their respective *ṭīkās* on this verse, refer to *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 2.1.31: "The art of affection is His set of teeth, and the most alluring illusory material energy is His smile. This great ocean of material creation is but the casting of His glance over us." What is that smile, and what is He smiling about?

Ultimately, Kṛṣṇa is smiling about Śrīmatī Rādhārani's attraction for Him and His attraction for Her. It is also stated that the word *māyā* means illusory nature, the bewildering potency, as well as the Lord's attractive potency for His pure devotees. So His smile is inconceivable and means many different things to different *jīvas*.

A devotee writes, "Speaking of smiles, once a senior devotee and I were selling books in 1995 at the Māyāpura festival. He told me, 'I know why you are doing it, you just want the guru to give you a smile.' I had to confess he was right. Now, nobody does anything for my smile, but I can do anything for the guru's smile. What is it that makes a devotee want to please one's guru or superior? What is that magic ingredient? Is it just charisma, or is there something more to it?

A sincere devotee actually believes that his guru is his well-wisher, and so it naturally softens his heart to see his spiritual master pleased with his activities. He takes it that the guru is the medium to please Kṛṣṇa and that by pleasing guru, he is pleasing Kṛṣṇa. So he gets great satisfaction and an uncontrollable desire to see his spiritual master smile, and to smile himself when he is blessed with that smile. It is not just a superficial charisma but a deep movement of the heart. It is like the trust a little child feels for his beloved parent.

Śrīmatī Rādhārani is called *Candramukhi, chandra ca kṛṣṇa-vallabhā;* she is beautiful as a series of full moons. Rādhā's face is round and radiantly soothing, like a full moon. She is the very personification of the moon itself. Rādhā is the dearmost beloved of Lord Kṛṣṇa. Is Kṛṣṇa's smile meant for Rādhārani alone, or do Rādhārani's servants experience Her pleasure of receiving the smiles of Kṛṣṇa as well? How should one serve Kṛṣṇa to receive

His smile?

Rādhārani's junior assistants, the *gopī-manjaris*, feel the same pleasure that Rādhārani feels when Kṛṣṇa bestows His love on Her. They are compared to the creepers of the tree, and they feel the same feelings that She does when Kṛṣṇa touches the tree. So by serving the assistants of the *gopīs*, we can receive Kṛṣṇa's smiles.

As stated in the *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* (1.2.239), "My dear friend, if you are indeed attached to your worldly friends, do not look at the smiling face of Lord Govinda as He stands on the bank of the Yamunā at Keśīghāṭa. Casting sidelong glances, He places His flute to His lips, which seem like newly blossomed twigs. His transcendental body, bending in three places, appears very bright in the moonlight."

Another revealing passage from *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* (1.2.238) states, "The following five practices are the most powerful of all practices of *sādhana*: (1) serving the Deity; (2) tasting the *Bhāgavatam;* (3) associating with the devotees of Kṛṣṇa who have aspirations and personalities similar to one's own; (4) chanting Kṛṣṇa's name with love; and (5) residing in Mathurā or a holy place. These practices possess wondrous potencies that are almost irreconcilable (*durūha*). Why 'almost irreconcilable'?"

On the one hand, *bhāva-bhakti* is very difficult and rare to attain. Thousands of years of constant *sādhana* would not bring *bhāva* unless and until that *sādhana* develops to the stage of intense attachment (*āsakti*) to getting it. On the other hand, these five practices are said to bestow *bhāva* easily, even when just slightly contacted and even if the performer has not yet developed faith (*śraddhā dure astu*). Viśvanātha Cakravartī reconciles the apparent contradiction by pointing to the word *sat-dhiyā*. This word means good or pure-minded. It indicates that one's mental state is favorably inclined toward spiritual subjects and therefore is not averse or offensive to them. Viśvanātha Cakravartī states that a person who is not offensive can easily attain *bhāva* from these five practices. However, for a person plagued by offenses, *bhāva* is more difficult to achieve.

A devotee writes, "In the purport to verse 44, Śrīla Prabhupāda says, 'No amount of chosen words is sufficient to enumerate the Lord's glories. And yet He is satisfied by such prayers as the father is satisfied even by the broken linguistic attempts of the growing child.' This statement gives so much hope. I used to always wonder about what to pray for to the Lord. Devotees usually told me to pray what the previous *ācāryas* have prayed for. Some told me to repeat the prayers of different persons mentioned in the *Bhāgavatam*. But there was always something that separated me from these prayers composed by someone else. I somehow always felt foreign to the mood offered in these prayers. Today, as I read this, I felt reaffirmed that the Lord does not reject anyone's prayers and that He is satisfied even by my 'broken linguistic attempts.'"

We can only go on encouraging devotees to pray in this spirit. The sincere cry of their broken hearts, their downfallen nature, their tiny growing *bhakti*—and at the same time uplift their prayers by association with the *uttama-ślokas* contained in the glorious *śāstras*.

Is it worthy to pray to the Lord when we don't have feeling to do it?

It is always worthwhile to offer a prayer to Kṛṣṇa. The best prayers are those which seek His mercy in devotional service. But even if one has a prayer for material values, if he directs it to the Supreme Lord, he is doing better than the atheist who does not care for God. Lacking spontaneity, prayers are inferior, but nevertheless, they are steps in the right direction. If every day a poor man prays, the time will come when his prayers will reach perfection.

PERSONAL COMMENT

"I can't get out of it now," smiles Nārāyaṇa, "we're going." Of course, so many mechanical things have to go right as our little group of travelers moves through the night with our baggage

and reservations and hopes. Nitāi-Gaurāṅga is more breezy, younger—"I'll see you in Mumbai in three days." He's stopping off alone in Dubai just to get a glimpse of a superrich mideast country. I'm traveling in saffron. Nārāyaṇa is ironing my *kurtas*. Keeping your mind above turgid waters. "India is nice. Much more modern now." Bala reports from Chowpatty that we're staying in the temple compound where the city noise is unavoidable, but it's protected.

Getting unglued from these walls,
it's no longer like home.
Too close to leaving to rest
like before.

Besides, if health keeps up
you'll be traveling several
times throughout the year.

It depends on the carcass
and the upright mind.
Still, I love my yellow submarine
and writing here in peace.

VERSE 45

tāṁ bāḍham ity upāmantrya praviśya gajasāhvayam
striyaś ca sva-puraṁ yāsyan premṇā rājñā nivāritaḥ

"Thus accepting the prayers of Śrīmatī Kuntīdevī, the Lord subsequently informed other ladies of His departure by entering the palace of Hastināpura. But upon preparing to leave, He was stopped by King Yudhiṣṭhira, who implored Him lovingly."

COMMENT

The power of love is mentioned here. A devotee asks, "When I see in the eye of my mind the scene described in this verse, I am moved. I can imagine the intensity and sweetness of affectionate exchange between Yudhiṣṭhira Mahārāja and Kṛṣṇa. Maybe I'm not supposed to 'imagine' anything about the science of Kṛṣṇa, but I cannot help but feel connected and moved and enlivened in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Is this some kind of *sahajiyā* tendency?"

You should be heartened that your stone-like heart is actually melted by the dealings between Yudhiṣṭhira Mahārāja and Kṛṣṇa. It is not a false thing. It is not a mere imagination. The *śāstras* are meant to move us in this way. If not, what is their benefit? Your partaking in the exchange, even from a neophyte position, is commendable and a sign of good fortune.

VERSE 46

vyāsādyair īśvarehājñaiḥ kṛṣṇenādbhuta-karmaṇā
prabodhito 'pītihāsair nābudhyata śucārpitaḥ

"King Yudhiṣṭhira, who was much aggrieved, could not be convinced, despite instructions by great sages headed by Vyāsa and the Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself, the performer of superhuman feats, and despite all historical evidence."

COMMENT

Now the chapter takes a change of course. Lord Kṛṣṇa is finished with His intimate dealings with Queen Kuntī, and He turns His attention to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, who implores Him to turn

His attention to a grievous matter that weighs heavily on his heart. King Yudhiṣṭhira was mortified because of the massacre of human beings on the battlefield of Kurukṣetra, which he saw as occurring on his account. No one could console his conscience, not even Vyāsa or Lord Kṛṣṇa, "the performer of superhuman feats." The Lord's secret plan in this was that Yudhiṣṭhira should be eventually satisfied in his mind by the dying Bhīṣma, who was in a different place, lying on a bed of arrows.

This text is interesting in that Kṛṣṇa accepts the prayers of one devotee to never be separated from him by leaving, and "the simple request" of another devotee, who also wishes Him not to leave, by staying "for a few days more." How is it that Kṛṣṇa deals so individually with each soul? Prabhupāda writes that Kṛṣṇa could not deny the power of King Yudhiṣṭhira's loving affection. Was He denying the power of Kuntīdevī's loving affection, or was something else going on?

Kṛṣṇa was turning His mind toward a different state of affairs. He felt He had dealt sufficiently with Queen Kuntīdevī, and now King Yudhiṣṭhira's great grievance had to be tended to.

Prabhupāda also writes that while Kṛṣṇa is fully dependent in all His dealings, He "voluntarily accepts obligations by the loving affection of His pure devotees." This too is an interesting point, and it reminds us of things from other *śāstras*. For example, in his *Śrī Mādhava-mahotsava*, Jīva Gosvāmī describes a benediction Śrīmatī Rādhārani offers to the world after she has been crowned Vrajeśvari: "May every creature become free." Jīva Gosvāmī explains the paradox of Kṛṣṇa being given His freedom and consequently becoming more bound up by the love of his devotees. That is, it is His free choice to become bound in this way; it is also an expression of His supreme independence.

This also reminds us of something in the *Laghu-bhāgavatāmṛta*, where Rūpa Gosvāmī explains that although we usually hear that Jaya and Vijaya were cursed by the Kumāras by Lord Nārāyaṇa's will, it was actually their will that induced them to fall from the spiritual world. They had heard bards singing Lord Nārāyaṇa's glories in the Vaikuṇṭha planets and particularly praising His

great strength and His ability not to be conquered in a fight. Having never witnessed this sight of their Lord, they decided to see Him displaying these glories. It then became Lord Nārāyaṇa's will that they be cursed to fall and become demons with whom He could fight. Then Rūpa Gosvāmī adds, "The Lord always shapes His desires around the desires of His pure devotees."

In a lecture on this verse (*Bhāg.* 1.8.45) given in Māyāpura on October 25, 1974, Śrīla Prabhupāda said, "Generally, the *karmīs*, they do not know what is the perfection of life. Therefore it is said *manuṣyāṇāṁ sahasreṣu kaścid yatati siddhaye.* They are being carried away by the waves of material nature. Therefore Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura is warning, 'My dear friends, why are you being carried away by the waves of this material ocean?' This is the Vaiṣṇava's desire: *vaiṣṇava para-duḥkha-dukhī.*" Why do some practicing devotees become carried away on the waves of the material ocean and, just like Yudhiṣṭhira, can only lament post-factum?

Actually, as we read this episode, we learn that King Yudhiṣṭhira was not actually to blame for the slaughter of the persons in the battle of Kurukṣetra. Bhīṣmadeva explains it to him as being due to the inscrutable nature of providence or time. But at this point in the narration, Prabhupāda places the blame on Yudhiṣṭhira and his guilty heart. As for practicing devotees who actually are carried away on the waves of the material ocean, we are in a lamentable situation because of our misdeeds. We should join with the devotees who are working in the *para-duḥkha-dukhī* spirit and try to help others who are unfortunate. Then our own misfortune will change. We will become free from the things we are guilty of.

In his lecture on this verse given in Los Angeles on May 8, 1973, Śrīla Prabhupāda said, "Actually, the kingdom belonged to Bhīṣmadeva, the kingdom. But he promised... His father wanted to marry Satyavatī. At that time his father was old enough. Bhīṣmadeva was grown-up boy, twenty, twenty-two years. But nature, his father wanted to marry again. Bhīṣmadeva is the son of mother Ganges. Bhīṣmadeva's father married the

predominating deity mother Ganges, of the Ganges water. So she was very beautiful. So she agreed to marry Bhīṣmadeva's father on one condition. What is that condition? That all the children that will be begotten, they will be thrown in the Ganges water. This was the condition. If the king agreed, then she would marry. So when a man becomes mad after woman. . . So he agreed, "Yes, I shall throw all the children. Never mind. (laughter) Come on." *Māyā-mohita. Māyā-sukhāyā bharam udvahato vimūḍhān* (*Bhāg.* 7.9.43). This whole world, rascal world, they are captivated by this woman. Woman is captivated by man, man is captivated by woman." Somehow by his *brahmacārī tejas*, only Bhīṣma among the Pāṇḍavas was able to avoid the entanglement of marriage.

In a lecture on this verse given in Māyāpura, Śrīla Prabhupāda said, "In the cities, as soon as there is some misunderstanding between you and me, we go to the court, either criminal court or civil court, to settle up, and it takes years to settle up the business. It goes on. I have seen for generation. One generation passed another generation; the fighting is going on in the court. But if people are Kṛṣṇa conscious, it could be settled within few minutes. Still among the villagers the system is current in India: when there is some fighting, they go to a saintly person or in a temple to settle up. Just like when Sanātana Gosvāmī was there in Vṛndāvana, so in that area, whenever there was some fighting between two parties, they would come to Sanātana Gosvāmī: *bābā, ap isko phars lakharji. Bābā* means saintly person. So they would come to Sanātana Gosvāmī, and they would ask him to become mediator, arbitrator, to settle up. And whatever verdict or judgment he will give, they will accept that "Bābā has said. That's all right." Therefore Śrīnivāsa Ācārya has prayed the Gosvāmīs, *dhīrādhīra. Kṛṣṇotkīrtana-gāna-nartana-parau, dhīradhīra-priyau.*"

In his lecture given in Māyāpura, Prabhupāda gives his view on democracy: "So this monarchy is different. People now, they have taken to democracy. Democracy is also mentioned in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, that in the Kali-yuga there will be no more monarchy or the kingdom ruled by the *kṣatriyas*, but amongst the people who will be tricky, some way or other get the votes of the

people, he will be seated on the throne. That is stated. Some way or other. So therefore, people are in trouble because so many rascals, they somehow or other manage to get some vote and become the president and minister and... So what they know? They do not know how to govern, how to bring peace in the country."

In his lecture in Māyāpura, Śrīla Prabhupāda also said the following: "But this monarchy, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, just see. Because for the sake of his personal interest so many have been killed, he was sorry. Just see. Not that some way or other, you divide India: 'Let me become Prime Minister, that's all.' We have got political information that in India when it was..., the proposal was for partition, Gandhi was completely against this partition. He said, 'Better I will have no independence; still, I shall not allow the country to be divided.' He was stubborn on this point. But he was absent, and in the meantime our, the big Prime Minister signed it, agreed, partition because he wanted to be prime minister anyway, some way or other. 'Let the country go to hell.' This is politician, going on... Yudhiṣṭhira is not like that: 'Let... Somehow or other, let me become King. Let so many people be killed. Never mind.' No. He was so sorry, so sorry that he could not be solaced even by the instruction of Kṛṣṇa and saintly person like Vyāsadeva. He was so sorry."

Yudhiṣṭhira is distraught because he feels that many people were killed simply to place him on the throne. Prabhupāda uses the phrase "mass massacre" to describe the destruction. This verse made me think of an article I read recently in the *New York Times* describing the plight of widows and orphans in Iraq. So many men have been killed over the years that Iraqi society is quite burdened by widows and their children. Because of religious and social rules, these women are unable to work to support their children and are often reduced to poverty almost instantly upon their husband's death. Neither can they legally inherit their husband's property. I tend to think it was the same during Yudhiṣṭhira's time, because women's safety was tied to the protection by their male relatives, and there was no real government welfare system in place. When we read *śāstra*, we

must use the imagination to bring the stories it contains into our contemporary experience and to make them relevant. This seems necessary in order to pull out the spiritual implications and all the subtleties of the *rasa* between Kṛṣṇa and His devotees. Along the way, though, we tend to idealize the culture in which the stories took place. Obviously ISKCON devotees are not alone in idealizing the parent culture of their religion; Christians and Muslims do it too, and quite often aspire to recreate a world that existed thousands of years ago—as if we could freeze-frame an absolute formulation and apply it intact in a world that has long wandered off that course. Was Vedic culture perfect? Would we actually want to reinstate it? Thinking about the plight of these widows and orphans in Yudhiṣṭhira's time, this is a serious question. Are we better off now in our social and political systems? Is it necessary to our faith to idealize Vedic culture? Is it ever possible to transplant a spiritual culture from the past into today's world? Even if we could do it, could we expect it to thrive? And would we be able to accept its tenets, such as those tenets concerning monarchy and the social divisions of *varṇa* and *āśrama* and the place of women in society?

It does not seem that Vedic culture is perfect in the sense that it can be brought back wholesale and applied in Kali Yuga. There are no qualified monarchs or *brāhmaṇas*, nor is there a possibility of erecting the *varṇāśrama* system, which is so essential to good society. With illicit sex, intoxication, meat eating, and gambling being the standard for human behavior, we can hardly expect people to act kindly toward one another and enact anything but horrific karma. Yet avoidance of these sins was the hallmark of Vedic culture. Vedic culture *was* perfect in its time, with all of its ideal qualifications set in place.

Nowadays we have to work with the tools of Lord Caitanya's *saṅkīrtana* movement, which He set in place five hundred years ago. Despite the degradation of all values even since then, we can still chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra widely and enact Kṛṣṇa consciousness practices in the modern age. The Society for Krishna Consciousness is attempting this on a small scale, and it can

become more potent as it purifies itself and begins to counteract the evil influences of the age. In the age of Kali, there is no other way, there is no other way, there is no other way but the chanting of Hare Kṛṣṇa. Chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa and leading the clean life as given us in recent years by His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda give a ray of hope in the abyss of darkness that increases in Kali.

That Kṛṣṇa "did not allow the king to be convinced" is a little shocking. Kṛṣṇa wanted Yudhiṣṭhira to continue his lamenting until he heard from Bhīṣma. This seems to indicate that the Lord can allow His devotee to suffer in order to achieve another goal not yet known to anyone else. The goal Kṛṣṇa had in mind was to glorify the instructional power of Bhīṣmadeva as superior to something that even He could give. This is the way the Lord praises His own devotee. It goes without question that Kṛṣṇa could Himself have given solace to Yudhiṣṭhira if He desired so.

"But Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira would not be satisfied, even though he was instructed by the greatest personalities of the time." Prabhupāda clarifies this by giving an esoteric and philosophical explanation. But what if a similar situation occurs to us? What if nothing and no one is able to change our mind and conviction? Aware that we are no Yudhiṣṭhira whatsoever, do we just accept our designated authority, even if we do not feel satisfied by his way and instructions? What if we just pursue our convictions? Is this lack of humility, pride, *māyā* on our part?

Yudhiṣṭhira was finally satisfied by Bhīṣma. He was no mere designated authority. He was actually able to inspire and uplift Yudhiṣṭhira by his erudite instructions on all matters. Yudhiṣṭhira felt changed in heart and relieved. If there is no equivalent person who actually satisfies our mind or our heart in a difficult situation, then we should be humble and wait and seek out the proper guide or inspiration. We may have to go within ourselves by intense chanting and prayer to Kṛṣṇa to reveal Himself. We can consult those devotees whom we do respect, not just designated authorities. Go to the feet of learned persons and hear from them with an open heart. When you are in a desperate situation, you

should take all measures to alleviate the problem in your heart and seek the right solution that will satisfy you. Otherwise, if you stubbornly stick to your own convictions, it might be, as you say, a lack of humility or *māyā* on our part.

When reading about the massacre that took place at Kurukṣetra, modern people could compare it to the world wars in present times. They may consider that to commit violence in the name of religion is not a good proposal. What would your answer to these challenges be?

In the majority of cases, we would agree that violence in the name of religion is not a good proposal. Such wars are actually political arrangements by fanatics who claim to be religionists and do not understand the scriptures and have no direct guidance by God. Committing violence in the name of religion is not a good proposal. Only under extraordinary conditions, such as took place on the battlefield of Kurukṣetra, when Kṛṣṇa was directly present, instigating Arjuna, is it a valid affair.

PERSONAL COMMENT

A Poor Man Reads the Bhāgavatam, Volume 4, has been with me for a long time, and now it is coming in for a landing. It has sustained my life when I was bereft of writing inspiration; it has brought me back to the scriptures. I am very grateful to the devotees who have supplied me questions. And I am very grateful to have been able to exercise myself in the question-and-answer exchange. For many of the initial pages, I was too shy to embark on personal comments, but I hope they will be interesting just because we are speaking pure *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, at least on the level I can understand it and repeat it according to Śrīla Prabhupāda's instructions.

Fortunately, the personal comments picked up, even as I entered a troubled time in my life, and I trust my readers will not find these comments about the actual life of a struggling devotee to be a distraction. I personally found the personal comments

most enlivening and looked forward to them as they occurred between the regular *Bhāgavatam kathā*. We have a few verses yet to go; land is in sight. I hope you enjoyed the flight. And I pray we can continue with another volume of the book before too long.



VERSE 47

āha rājā dharma-sutaś cintayan suhṛdāṁ vadham
prākṛtenātmanā viprāḥ sneha-moha-vaśaṁ gataḥ

"King Yudhiṣṭhira, son of Dharma, overwhelmed by the death of his friends, was aggrieved just like a common, materialistic man. O sages, thus deluded by affection, he began to speak."

VERSE 48

aho me paśyatājñānaṁ hṛdi rūḍhaṁ durātmanaḥ
pārakyasyaiva dehasya bahvyo me 'kṣauhiṇīr hatāḥ

"King Yudhiṣṭhira said: O my lot! I am the most sinful man! Just see my heart, which is full of ignorance! This body, which is ultimately meant for others, has killed many, many phalanxes of men."

VERSE 49

bāla-dvija-suhṛn-mitra-pitṛ-bhrātṛ-guru-druhaḥ
na me syān nirayān mokṣo hy api varṣāyutāyutaiḥ

"I have killed many boys, brāhmaṇas, well-wishers, friends, parents, preceptors and brothers. Though I live millions of years, I will not be relieved from the hell that awaits me for all these sins."

VERSE 50

naino rājñaḥ prajā-bhartur dharma-yuddhe vadho dviṣām
iti me na tu bodhāya kalpate śāsanaṁ vacaḥ

"There is no sin for a king who kills for the right cause, who is engaged in maintaining his citizens. But this injunction is not applicable to me."

VERSE 51

strīṇāṁ mad-dhata-bandhūnāṁ droho yo 'sāv ihotthitaḥ
karmabhir gṛhamedhīyair nāhaṁ kalpo vyapohitum

"I have killed many friends of women, and I have thus caused enmity to such an extent that it is not possible to undo it by material welfare work."

VERSE 52

yathā paṅkena paṅkāmbhaḥ surayā vā surākṛtam
bhūta-hatyāṁ tathaivaikāṁ na yajñair mārṣṭum arhati

"As it is not possible to filter muddy water through mud, or purify a wine-stained pot with wine, it is not possible to counteract the killing of men by sacrificing animals."

COMMENT

The last questions submitted to me for this volume of *A Poor Man Reads the Bhāgavatam*, concerning King Yudhiṣṭhira's feelings of guilt and his actual involvement in the slaughter of millions of soldiers are too difficult for me to answer except in a summary way. In one sense, the author deals with him as he describes Arjuna in the beginning of *Bhagavad-gītā*, wrong, cowardly, and yet a soft, pure-hearted devotee. Śrīla Prabhupāda looks at Arjuna

in different ways in different purports. He does the same thing in his treatment of Yudhiṣṭhira Mahārāja. He blames him for the slaughter, puts the guilt on his shoulders. Yudhiṣṭhira feels appalled, and Śrīla Prabhupāda seems to say it is proper that he feels so for being involved in such a slaughter. Or he criticizes him for not being *dhīra* and understanding that he had to commit these acts because he was so ordered by Kṛṣṇa.

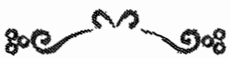
But then Śrīla Prabhupāda suddenly lifts the veil in the purport to verse 47: "King Yudhiṣṭhira, though he was not expected to become aggrieved like a common man, became deluded by worldly affection by the will of the Lord (just as Arjuna was apparently deluded). A man who sees knows well that the living entity is neither the body nor the mind but is transcendental to the material conception of life. The common man thinks of violence and nonviolence in terms of the body, but that is a kind of delusion. Everyone is duty-bound according to one's occupational duties. A *kṣatriya* is bound to fight for the right cause, regardless of the opposite party. In such discharge of duty, one should not be disturbed by annihilation of the material body, which is only an external dress of the living soul. All this was perfectly known to Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira, but by the will of the Lord he became just like a common man because there was another great idea behind this delusion: the King would be instructed by Bhīṣma as Arjuna was instructed by the Lord Himself."

This is only the introduction to the topic of Yudhiṣṭhira's agony in his attempt to get relief from the horrendous karma of the slaughter. The subject is taken up fully in Chapter 9, "The Passing Away of Bhīṣma in the Presence of Lord Kṛṣṇa." There, Bhīṣmadeva delves much more deeply into the subject than is given here at the end of the eighth chapter, and he gives the understanding of why these things happen and why Yudhiṣṭhira should not even try to make sense of it in ordinary terms. Bhīṣmadeva says to Yudhiṣṭhira, "O King, no one can know the plan of the Lord (Śrī Kṛṣṇa). Even though great philosophers inquire exhaustively, they are bewildered." (*Bhāg.* 1.9.16) In his purport to this verse, Prabhupāda states that Bhīṣma wanted to

impress upon Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira that since time immemorial, no one, including such demigods as Śiva and Brahmā, could ascertain the real plan of the Lord. So what can we understand about it? It is also useless to inquire about it.

In verse 1.9.17, Bhīṣmadeva concludes, "Oh best among the descendants of Bharata (Yudhiṣṭhira), I maintain, therefore, that all this is within the plan of the Lord. Accepting the inconceivable plan of the Lord, you must follow it. You are now the appointed administrative head, and, my lord, you should now take care of those subjects who are now rendered helpless."

We hope to cover all the esoteric subject matter in the next volume, if Śrīla Prabhupāda and the Supreme Personality of Godhead allow a poor man to discuss this most elevated, transcendental philosophy, which can bring solace to the souls of all suffering *jīvas*.



Sanskrit Terms Glossary

Spelling used in this book (shown in brackets) complies with ISO 15919:2001 an international standard for "Transliteration of Devanagari and related Indic scripts into Latin characters."

A

Abhidheya (abhidheya)—the stage of performing regulated activities to revive one's relationship with the Lord.

Abhijna (abhijña)—self-knowing, or fully cognizant.

Abhisheka (abhiṣekaḥ)—the sacred bathing ceremony of the Deity.

Acharya (ācārya)—a spiritual master who teaches by his personal behavior.

Achintya (acintya)—inconceivable.

Adhikari (adhikārī)—qualified.

Adhira (adhīra)—one who is not sober or whose senses are not controlled.

Adhokshaja (adhokṣaja)—a name of Lord Viṣṇu, meaning "He who is beyond the reach of the material senses."

Adi-lila (Ādi-līlā)—initial, early pastimes. Refers specifically here to the first twenty-four years of Lord Caitanya's pastimes; the portion of the Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta recounting those pastimes.

Adi-rasa (ādi-rasa)—the supreme relationship with Kṛṣṇa, the relationship of conjugal love.—Sanskrit for "I am spirit."

Ahimsa (ahiṁsā)—nonviolence.

Ajnata-sukriti (ajñāta-sukṛti)—devotional service unknown to the performer.

Akinchana (akiñcanā)—without material desires.

Akrura (akrūra)—Kṛṣṇa's uncle..

Amala-purana (amala-purāṇa)—lit., "spotless Purāṇa"; refers to Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam.s.

Anartha (anartha)—unwanted thing; material desire.

Aparadha (aparādha)—offense.

Apsara (apsarā)—a celestial dancer.

Arati (ārati)—a ceremony of worshiping the Lord by the offering of various auspicious articles, such as incense, flowers, water, fans, ghee lamp, etc.

Archa-vigraha (arcā-vigraha)—Deity.

Arjuna (arjuna)—one of the five Pāṇḍavas. Kṛṣṇa spoke the Bhagavad-gītā to him on the Battlefield of Kurukṣetra.

Asana (āsana)—a yogic posture; a seat.

Ashram (āśrama)—a spiritual order: brahmacārī (celibate student), gṛhastha (householder), vānaprastha (retired), sannyāsī (renunciate); living quarters for those engaged in spiritual practices.

Ashraya (āśrayā)—shelter.

Ashtanga-yoga (aṣṭāṅga-yoga)—the mystic eightfold yoga system propounded by Patañjali.

Ashvatthama (aśvatthāmā)—the son of the Pāṇḍavas' guru, Droṇacarya, who fought against them in the Battle of Kurukṣetra.

Asura (asura)—demon or ungodly person.

Asuric (asuric)—demoniac.

Atmarama (ātmārāma)—those who find their pleasure in experiencing the self; name of the associated verse.

Avatar (avatāra)—lit., "one who descends." An incarnation of the Lord.

Avidya (avidyā)—ignorance.

B

Baladeva Vidyabhushana (baladeva vidyābhūṣaṇa)—a great Vaiṣṇava scholar, philosopher, and writer who wrote the first Vaiṣṇava commentary on the Vedānta-sutra, known as Govinda-bhāṣya.

Baladeva (baladeva)—Kṛṣṇa's elder brother and His first plenary expansion; also a common name.

Balaram (balarāma)—Kṛṣṇa's elder brother and His first plenary expansion.

Bhagavad-gita (bhagavad-gītā)—lit., "song of God." The discourse between Lord Kṛṣṇa and His devotee Arjuna, expounding devotional service as both the principal means and the ultimate end of spiritual perfection.

Bhagavan (bhagavān)—lit., one who possesses all opulence; Supreme Lord.

Bhagavatam (bhāgavatam)—see Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam.

Bhagavat (bhāgavat)—anything related to Bhagavān, especially the Lord's devotee and the scripture, Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam.

Bhajan (bhajana)—devotional activities; a devotional song.

Bhajannandi (bhajanānandī)—a devotee who is satisfied to cultivate devotional service for himself.

Bhakta (bhakta)—a devotee of Kṛṣṇa.

Bhakta-vatsala (bhakta-vatsala)—a description of Kṛṣṇa's quality of loving kindness shown toward His devotees.

Bhakti (bhakti)—devotional service to the Supreme Lord.

Bhakti-lata (bhakti-latā)—lit., "the creeper of devotional service." A term used to liken the stages of a devotee's growth in devotional service to the growth of a creeper growing upward.

Bhakti-rasamrita-sindhu (bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu)—lit., "The Ocean of the Pure Nectar of Devotional Service"; a treatise on the science of devotional service (bhakti), written by Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī.

Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur (bhaktisiddhānta sarasvatī ṭhākura)—the spiritual master of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda; an ācārya in the Gaudiya Vaiṣṇava sampradāya.

Bhakti-vaibhava (bhakti-vaibhava)—understanding Kṛṣṇa's manifesta-

tions by devotional service; secondary devotional degree awarded by Vaiṣṇava institutions.

Bhaktivinoda Thakur (bhaktivinoda ṭhākura)—an ācārya in the Gaudiya Vaiṣṇava disciplic succession; the father of Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura.

Bhaktivedanta (bhakti-vedānta)—a title conferred upon Śrīla Prabhupāda, meaning "one who has understood that the conclusion of Vedic scripture is bhakti (devotional service)."

Bhava (bhāva)—the stage of transcendental ecstasy experienced after transcendental affection.

Bhishma (bhīṣma)—the most powerful and oldest warrior in the Battle of Kurukṣetra and one of the chief authorities on devotional service to the Lord.

Bhumi (bhūmi)—the name given to both the Earth planet and the presiding demigoddess of the Earth.

Brahma-bandhu (brahma-bandhu)—one born in a brāhmaṇa family but lacking brahminical qualification.

Brahmachari (brahmacārī)—a celibate student.

Brahmacharini (brahmacārīni)—feminine variant of Brahmacārī.

Brahmajyoti (brahma-jyoti)—the bodily effulgence of the Supreme Lord, which constitutes the brilliant illumination of the spiritual sky.

Brahma-samhita (brahma-saṁhitā)—Lord Brahma's prayers glorifying the Supreme Lord.

Brahmastra (brahmāstra)—a nuclear weapon invoked by mantra.

Brahma (brahmā)—the first created living being and the secondary creator of the material universe.

Brijbasi—(see:Vrajavasi). A resident of Vṛndāvana. This spelling also generally refers to the company that produces the typical religious posters and calendar art seen everywhere in India.

C

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (caitanya mahāprabhu)—Kṛṣṇa in the form of a devotee, Who appeared to teach love of God through the saṅkīrtana movement.

Chaitanya-charitamrita (caitanya-caritāmṛta)—the biography and philosophy of Caitanya Mahāprabhu, written by Śrīla Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī.

Chanakya Pandit (cāṇakya paṇḍita)—a legendary advisor to the Hindu king, Chandragupta, renowned through history for his social and political wisdom.

D

Daitya (daitya)—demon.

Daksha (dakṣa)—a son of Brahma and chief forefather of the universal population.

Dal (dāhl)—a spiced bean soup.

Damodar (dāmodara)—a name for Kṛṣṇa in His pastime of being bound with a rope by Mother Yashoda.

Danda (daṇḍa)—a staff carried by sannyāsīs.

Darshan (darśana)—vision; audience; philosophical system.

Dasa (dāsa)—lit., "servant" (masculine). An appellation that, along with a name of Kṛṣṇa or one of His devotees, is given to a devotee at the time of initiation.

Deva (demigod) (devā)—a celestial being, superior to humans, deputed by the Lord to manage one or more aspects of the material universe.

Devaki (devakī)—Kṛṣṇa's mother in Mathurā.

Dhama (dhāma)—abode; the Lord's place of residence.

Dharma (dharma)—the duties prescribed by one's nature and social position; ultimately, dharma means devotional service to the Supreme Lord.

Dhritarashtra (dhṛtarāṣṭra)—the uncle of the Pāṇḍavas. His attempt to usurp their kingdom for his sons resulted in the Kurukṣetra war.

Diksha-guru (dīkṣā-guru)—the spiritual master who initiates the disciple into the chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra.

Divya-mada (divya-mada)—transcendental madness in separation from Kṛṣṇa.

Duryodhana (duryodhana)—the eldest son of Dhritarashtra and chief rival of the Pāṇḍavas.

Dvija-bandhu (dvija-bandhu)—one born in a brāhmaṇa family but lacking in brahminical qualification.

G

Ganges (Ganga) (gaṅgā)—a sacred river in India that washed the lotus feet of Lord Viṣṇu.

Gaudiya Math (gauḍīya maṭha)—the preaching institution originally established by Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura.

Gaudiya Vaishnava (gauḍīya vaiṣṇava)—a follower of Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu.

Gaurakishora dasa Babaji (gaurakiśora dāsa bābājī)—the spiritual master of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura.

Gita-nagari (gītā-nagarī)—a spiritual farm community established by Śrīla Prabhupāda in central Pennsylvania.

Gokula (gokula)—the manifestation of Goloka in the material world.

Goloka (goloka)—Kṛṣṇaloka, the eternal abode of Lord Kṛṣṇa.

Gopi (gopī)—a cowherd girl; one of Kṛṣṇa's most confidential servitors.

Goshtyanandi (goṣṭhī-ānandi)—a devotee who desires to preach the glories of the holy name.

Goswami (gosvāmī)—one who controls his mind and senses; title of one in the renounced order of life. May refer specifically to the Six Gosvāmīs of Vṛndāvana, who are direct followers of Lord Caitanya in a disciplic succession and who systematically presented His teachings.

Govardhan (Hill) (govardhana)—a hill in Vraja, the site of many of Kṛṣṇa's pastimes.

Govinda (go-vinda)—a name of Kṛṣṇa, meaning "one who gives pleasure (vinda) to the cows (go) and senses (also go)"; may also refer to Lord Caitanya's personal servant.

Grihastha (gṛhastha)—a married person living according to the Vedic social system.

Guru Maharaja (guru mahārāja)—title of respect given to one's own spiritual master.

Guru-puja (guru-pūjā)—worship of the spiritual master.

Gurvashtakam (gurvaṣṭakam)—a prayer, composed by Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura in praise of the spiritual master.

H

Haridas Thakur (haridāsa ṭhākura)—a great devotee of Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu; known as the nāmācārya, the master who taught the chanting of the holy names by his own example.

Hari-nama (hari-nāma)—lit., "the name of the Lord."

Hastinapura (hastināpura)—the ancient capital of the Pāṇḍavas, now the site of Old Delhi.

Hatha-yoga (haṭha-yoga)—the system of practicing sitting postures for sense control.

Hiranyakashipu (hiraṇyakaśipu)—a demoniac king killed by Lord Nṛsiṁhadeva.

Hladini-shakti (hlādinī-śakti)—Kṛṣṇa's internal, pleasure potency.

I

Ishopanishad (īśopaniṣad)—one of the 108 principal Vedic scriptures known as the Upaniṣads.

J

Jagannatha Puri (jagannātha purī)—place of pilgrimage on the east coast of India where the Deity of Jagannatha is worshiped.

Janmashtami (janmāṣṭamī)—the festival of Kṛṣṇa's birth.

Japa (japa)—individual chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra while counting on beads.

Jiva Goswami (jīva gosvāmī)—one of the Six Gosvāmīs of Vṛndāvana.

Jiva (jīva)—the individual, eternal soul or living entity; part of the Supreme Lord.

Jnana-bhakti (jñāna-bhakti)—devotional service mixed with the impure desire to enjoy transcendental knowledge.

Jnana (jñāna)—the process of approaching the Supreme by the cultivation of knowledge.

Jnani (jñānī)—one who approaches the Supreme by cultivation of knowledge.

K

Kishora (kiśora)—a youth between the ages of eleven and fifteen.

Kali-yuga (kali-yuga)—the present age, which is characterized by quarrel and hypocrisy.

Kama (kāma)—sense gratification; lust.

Kamsa (kaṁsa)—a demoniac king who tried to kill Kṛṣṇa during His childhood pastimes.

Kanishtha (kaniṣṭha)—neophyte.

Karma (karma)—the cycle of action and reaction which binds one to the material universe.

Karmi (karmī)—one engaged in karma (fruitive activity); a materialist.

Karna (karṇa)—the first son of queen Kunti by the sun-god, whom she abandoned at his birth, and who later sided with Duryodhana against his brothers, the Pāṇḍavas, in the battle of Kuruksetra.

Karttika (kārtika)—the Vedic month corresponding to October–November, in which Lord Damodar is worshiped.

Kaurava (kaurava)—the descendants of Kuru who fought against the Pāṇḍavas in the battle of Kuruksetra.

Kaviraja (Kavirāja)—an Ayurvedic doctor; honorific title.

Kirtan (kīrtana)—chanting of the Lord's holy names.

Krishnadasa Kaviraja (kṛṣṇadāsa kavirāja)—the author of Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta and Śrī Govinda-līlāmṛta.

Krishna-lila (kṛṣṇa-līlā)—Kṛṣṇa's pastimes.

Krishna-prema (kṛṣṇa-prema)—love of Kṛṣṇa.

Krishna (kṛṣṇa)—the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

Kshatriya (kṣatriya)—administrative or warrior class; the second Vedic social order.

Kunti (kuntī)—the mother of the Pāṇḍavas and aunt of Lord Kṛṣṇa.

Kurma (kūrma)—the tortoise incarnation of the Lord.

Kurta (kurtā)—a tuniclike men's shirt commonly worn in India.

Kurukshetra (kurukṣetra)—a holy place where the war between the Pāṇḍavas and the Kurus took place and where Lord Kṛṣṇa spoke the Bhagavad-gītā to Arjuna.

Kuru (kuru)—the founder of the dynasty in which the Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas appeared.

L

Lakshmi(devi) (lakṣmī)—the goddess of fortune; money.
Lila (līlā)—pastimes.
Loka (loka)—planet; celestial plane.

M

Madhavendra Puri (mādhavendra purī)—the spiritual master of Īśvara Purī.
Madhurya-lila (mādhurya-līlā)—the sweet conjugal pastimes of Kṛṣṇa and the gopīs.
Madhvacharya (also Madhva) (madhvācārya)—a thirteenth-century Vaiṣṇava ācārya who preached the theistic philosophy of pure dualism.
Madhya-lila (madhya-līlā)—the pastimes Lord Caitanya performed during the middle part of His manifest presence, while He was traveling throughout India; the portion of Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta recounting those pastimes.
Madhyama-adhikari (madhyama-adhikārī)—a devotee whose advancement in spiritual life is midway between the neophyte (kaniṣṭha) and advanced (uttama) levels.
Maha-mantra (mahā-mantra)—the great chant for deliverance: Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare/ Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare.
Mahaprabhu (mahāprabhu)—supreme master of all masters; refers to Lord Caitanya.
Maharaja (mahārāja)—great king. Also used as a title of respect for a sannyāsī.
Maha-vakya (mahā-vākya)—a principal Vedic mantra or verse.
Mandir (mandira)—temple.
Marga (mārga)—path.
Math (maṭha)—a religious institution.
Matsya (matsya)—Lord Kṛṣṇa's fish incarnation.
Mayapur (māyāpura)—a town in West Bengal, India, where Lord

Caitanya appeared.

Maya (māyā)—the external, illusory energy of the Lord, comprising this material world; forgetfulness of one's relationship with Kṛṣṇa.

Mayavada (māyāvāda)—a philosophy that states that the Absolute Truth is formless and without personality.

Mayavadi (māyāvādī)—an impersonalist or voidist who believes that God is ultimately formless and without personality.

Mukti (mukti)—liberation.

Muni (muni)—a sage or self-realized soul.

Murti (mūrti)—a form, usually referring to a deity.

N

Naimisharanya (naimiṣāraṇya)—a sacred forest in central India, considered to be the hub of the universe.

Nama-aparadha (nāma-aparādha)—offense to the holy name.

Nama (nāma)—the holy name.

Nanda (nanda)—Kṛṣṇa's father in Vṛndāvana.

Narada Muni (nārada muni)—a great devotee of Lord Kṛṣṇa who travels throughout the spiritual and material worlds singing the Lord's glories and preaching the path of devotional service.

Narada-bhakti Sutra (nārada bhakti-sūtra)—instructions on the science of devotional service, written by Nārada Muni.

Narayana (nārāyaṇa)—the four-handed expansion of Lord Kṛṣṇa.

Narottama dasa Thakur (narottama dāsa ṭhākura)—a Vaiṣṇava spiritual master in the disciplic succession from Lord Caitanya and writer of many standard Vaiṣṇava hymns.

Navadwipa (navadvīpa)— lit., "nine islands." The province in West Bengal where Lord Caitanya exhibited His early pastimes.

Nishtha (niṣṭhā)—faith.

Nitya-baddha (nitya-baddha)—eternally conditioned.

Nityananda (nityānanda)—the incarnation of Lord Balarāma who is a principal associate of Lord Caitanya.

Nrisimha(deva) (nṛsiṁhadeva)—the half-man, half-lion incarnation of Lord Kṛṣṇa who appeared to save Prahlāda Mahārāja from Hiraṇyakaśipu.

P

Pancha-tattva (pañca-tattva)—Kṛṣṇa as manifested in five different features in the pastimes of Lord Caitanya: The Lord—Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya; His plenary portion—Śrī Nityānanda Prabhu; His incarnation—Śrī Advaita Ācārya; His energy—Śrī Gadādhara Prabhu; and His devotee—Śrīvāsa Prabhu.

Pandavas (pāṇḍavas)—the five warrior-brothers, sons of King Pāṇḍu, and intimate friends of Lord Kṛṣṇa.

Pandit (paṇḍita)—a scholar.

Paramatma (paramātmā)—Kṛṣṇa's expansion as the all-pervading Supersoul.

Parampara (paramparā)—the disciplic succession of bona fide spiritual masters.

Prabhu (prabhu)—lit., "master." Added to a devotee's name by another devotee to show respect.

Prabhupada, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami (prabhupāda)—founder-ācārya of ISKCON and foremost preacher of Kṛṣṇa consciousness in the Western world.

Prabhupadanuga (prabhupādānuga)—one who follows the teachings of Śrīla Prabhupāda.

Prahlada Maharaja (prahlāda mahārāja)—a great devotee who was persecuted by his demoniac father, but who was protected and saved by Lord Narasiṁha.

Prajalpa (prajalpa)—foolish, idle, or mundane speech. Talks unrelated to Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

Prakrita-sahajiya (prākṛta-sahajiyā)—a class of pseudo-devotees who take the conjugal pastimes of Kṛṣṇa and the gopīs cheaply and do not follow the proper regulations of bhakti.

Pranamas (praṇamām)—an offering of respect shown by joining ones hands.

Pranayama (prāṇāyama)—control of the breathing process as practiced in aṣṭāṅga-yoga.

Prasadam (prasadam)—lit., "mercy." Food that has been spiritualized by offering it to Kṛṣṇa and that helps purify the living entity.

Prema (prema)—love of Kṛṣṇa.

Pujari (pūjārī)—a priest, specifically one engaged in temple Deity worship.

Purana (purāṇa)—Vedic histories of the universe in relation to the

Supreme Lord and His devotees. The phrase "spotless Purāṇa" refers to the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam.

Puri—(see: Jagannatha Puri)

Purusha (puruṣa)—the enjoyer, or male, referring either to the living entity or the Supreme Lord; Viṣṇu, the incarnation of the Lord for material creation; the male or controlling principle.

Putana (pūtanā)—an evil witch sent by King Kaṁsa to kill baby Kṛṣṇa, but who was killed by Him and thus achieved liberation.

R

Radha(rani) (rādhā-rāṇī)—the eternal consort and spiritual potency of Lord Kṛṣṇa.

Radha-kunda (rādhā-kuṇḍa)—the bathing place of Śrīmatī Rādhārani, a sacred pond near Govardhana Hill in Vṛndāvana that was created by Rādhārani and her gopī companions.

Radhashtami (rādhāṣṭamī)—the festival celebrating Rādhārani's birth.

Radhika (rādhikā) —(see: Rādhārani)

Raga (rāga)—attachment; traditional Indian melodies.

Raganuga-bhakti (rāgānuga-bhakti)—devotional service following the spontaneous loving service of the inhabitants of Vṛndāvana.

Raghunath dasa Goswami (raghunātha dāsa gosvāmī)—one of the Six Gosvāmīs of Vṛndāvana.

Rakshasa (rākṣasa)—a man-eating demon.

Rama (rāma)—as part of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mahā-mantra, refers to the highest eternal pleasure of Lord Kṛṣṇa; may also refer to Lord Balarāma or Lord Rāmachandra.

Ramachandra, Lord (rāmacandra)—the avatar of Kṛṣṇa who appeared as the perfect king and whose full history can be found in Vālmīki's Rāmāyaṇa.

Ramayana (rāmāyaṇa)—the epic history of Lord Rāmachandra, written by Vālmīki's Muni.

Rasa (rāsa)—the spiritual essence of a personal relationship with the Supreme Lord.

Rasika (rasika)—person or thing absorbed in rasa.

Ratha-yatra (ratha-yātrā)—an annual chariot festival celebrating Kṛṣṇa's return to Vṛndāvana in which the Deity of Lord Jagannatha is pulled

in procession on a ratha (chariot).

Ravana (rāvaṇa)—a demonic king killed by Lord Rāmachandra.

Rishabhadeva (ṛṣabhadeva)—an incarnation of Kṛṣṇa appearing as a great devotee king, known for His spiritual instructions to His sons and His subsequent renunciation of His kingdom for a life of severe austerity.

Rishi (ṛṣi)—sage.

Ruci (ruci)—lit., "taste." A stage in the practice of Kṛṣṇa consciousness in which one develops a natural attraction or "taste" for the activities of devotional service.

Rupa Goswami (rūpa gosvāmī)—one of the Six Gosvāmīs of Vṛndāvana.

S

Sabda (brahma) (śabda)—transcendental sound, considered by Vedic philosophy to be self-evident proof of knowledge.

Sadhaka (sādhaka)—one who practices regulated devotional service.

Sadhana (sādhana)—regulated spiritual activities meant to increase one's attachment to Kṛṣṇa.

Sadhu (sādhu)—saintly person.

Sahajiya (sahajiyā)—a class of pseudo-devotees who take the conjugal pastimes of Kṛṣṇa and the gopīs cheaply and who do not follow the proper regulations of vaidhī-bhakti.

Sakhi (sakhī)—girlfriend; refers to Srimati Rādhārani's intimate girlfriends, who assist Her in Her service to Kṛṣṇa.

Sakti (śakti)—potency.

Sakuni (śakuni)—Duryodhana's uncle who gambled with the Pāṇḍavas on Duryodhana's behalf, forcing the Pāṇḍavas into exile.

Samadhi (samādhi)—trance or absorption in the service of the Lord; also refers to the tomb of an ācārya.

Sampradaya (sampradāya)—a chain of disciplic succession through which spiritual knowledge is transmitted.

Samsara (saṁsāra)—cycle of repeated birth and death.

Sanatana Goswami (sanātana gosvāmī)—one of the Six Gosvāmīs of Vṛndāvana.

Sandarbha (sandarbhas)—treatises on the Vedic scriptures, written by Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī.

Sankaracharya (śaṅkarācārya)—an incarnation of Lord Śiva who, ordered by the Supreme Lord, propagated the impersonal Māyāvādī philosophy, which negates the distinction between God and the living entity.

Sankirtan (saṅkīrtana)—the congregational chanting of the holy name, fame, and pastimes of the Lord; preaching.

Sannyasa (sannyāsa)—renounced life; the fourth order of Vedic spiritual life.

Sannyasi (sannyāsī)—one in the renounced order of life.

Sattva (sattva)—goodness.

Shastra (śāstra)—revealed scripture.

Shyama(-sundara) (śyāma-sundara)—a name of Kṛṣṇa, meaning "blackish" and "beautiful" (sundara).

Siddha-deha (siddha-deha)—the spiritual body.

Siddhanta (siddhānta)—the perfect conclusion according to Vedic scriptures.

Siddha-svarupa (siddha svarūpa)—the perfection of one's original spiritual characteristics.

Siksha (śikṣā)—instruction.

Siksha-guru (śikṣā-guru)—an instructing spiritual master.

Sikshashtakam (Śikṣāṣṭaka)—eight verses of instruction in devotional service written by Lord Caitanya.

Siva (Śiva)—the personality in charge of the mode of ignorance, the greatest devotee of Lord Kṛṣṇa.

Six Goswamis (ṣaḍ-gosvāmi)—six great disciples of Lord Caitanya who wrote many books on devotional service and who established the major temples in Vṛndāvana.

Sloka (śloka)—a stanza of Sanskrit verse.

Sraddha (śraddhā)—firm faith and confidence.

Sri (śrī)—a prefix used as an honorific.

Srila (śrīla)—a term of respect given to a spiritual master.

Srimad-Bhagavatam (śrīmad-bhāgavatam)—the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, written by Śrīla Vyāsadeva, which specifically points to the path of devotional love of God.

Srimati (śrīmatī)—a term of respect given to women or female Deities.

Sruti (śruti)—the original Vedic literatures: the four Vedas and the Upaniṣads; scripture received directly from God.

Suddha-sattva (śuddha-sattva)—the transcendental state of pure goodness, uncontaminated by the modes of material nature.

Sudra (śūdra)—a laborer; one of the four Vedic social orders.

Sukadeva Goswami (śukadeva gosvāmī)—the sage who originally spoke the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam to King Parīkṣit just prior to the king's death.

Suta Goswami (sūta gosvāmī)—the sage who recounted the discourses between Mahārāja Parīkṣit and Śukadeva Gosvāmī to the sages assembled at Naimiṣāraṇya.

Sutra (sūtra)—a Vedic aphorism.

Svarupa-siddhi (svarūpa-siddhi)—the perfection of one's eternal relationship with Lord Kṛṣṇa.

T

Tamal tree (tamāl)—a tree sacred to Vaiṣṇavas due to its blackish color, which resembles Kṛṣṇa's complexion, and because it is featured in many of the pastimes of Kṛṣṇa and His associates.

Tattva-sandarbha (tattva sandarbha)—one of the seven sandarbhas written by Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī as his commentary on Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam.

Tika (ṭīkā)—commentary.

Tilak (tilaka)—auspicious clay markings that sanctify a devotee's body as a temple of the Lord.

Tirtha (tīrtha)—holy place of pilgrimage.

Tridanda (tridaṇḍa)—lit., "three sticks." The daṇḍa, or staff, composed of three long sticks tied together, carried by Vaiṣṇava sannyāsīs.

Tulasi (tulasī)—a great devotee in the form of a plant; her leaves are always offered to the lotus feet of the Lord.

U

Uddhava (uddhava)—a confidential friend of Śrī Kṛṣṇa in Dvārakā.

Upanishads (upaniṣads)—108 philosophical treatises that appear within the Vedas.

Uttama-adhikari (uttama-adhikārī)—a topmost devotee.

Uttamashloka (uttamaśloka)—a name of Kṛṣṇa; "He who is praised with transcendental songs or poetry."

Uttama (uttama)—topmost or highest.

V

Vaidhi-bhakti (vaidhī-bhakti)—the process of following the regulative principles of devotional service under the guidance of a spiritual master, in accordance with revealed scriptures.

Vaikuntha (vaikuṇṭha)—the spiritual world.

Vaishnava (vaiṣṇava)—one who is a devotee of Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa.

Vanaprastha (vānaprastha)—retired life, in which one leaves home and travels to holy places in order to prepare for renounced life; one of the four Vedic social divisions.

Vasudeva (vasudeva)—the father of Lord Kṛṣṇa.

Vasudeva (vāsudeva)—the son of Vasudeva, or Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself.

Vatsalya (vātsalya)—devotional service to Kṛṣṇa in the mood of parental love.

Vedanta-sutra (vedānta-sūtra)—Śrīla Vyāsadeva's summary of all Vedic literatures explained in short aphorisms.

Vedanta (vedānta)—the conclusion of Vedic philosophy.

Vedas (veda)—the original revealed scriptures.

Vijnana (vijñāna)—practical realization of spiritual knowledge.

Vishnu (viṣṇu)—a fully empowered expansion of Kṛṣṇa.

Visvanatha Cakravarti Thakur (viśvanātha cakravartī ṭhākura)—a great Vaiṣṇava ācārya and scholar.

Vrajavasi (vrajavāsī)—a resident of Vṛndāvana.

Vraja (vraja)—Vṛndāvana.

Vrindavan (vṛndāvan)—Kṛṣṇa's personal abode, where He fully manifests His personal qualities.

Vyasadeva (vyāsadeva)—the original compiler of the Vedas, and the author of the Vedānta-sutra, Mahābhārata, and Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam.

Vyasa-puja (vyāsa-pūjā)—worship of the spiritual master, who

represents Śrīla Vyāsadeva, on his appearance day.

Vyasasana (vyāsāsana)—a special, elevated seat reserved for the speaker of Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam.

Y

Yadu (dynasty) (yadu)—the dynasty in which Lord Kṛṣṇa appeared.

Yajna (yajña)—sacrifice.

Yaksha (yakṣa)—ghostly follower of Kuvera.

Yamaraja (yamarāja)—the superintendent of death and karmic justice.

Yamuna (yamunā)—a sacred river in India, which Lord Kṛṣṇa made famous by performing pastimes there.

Yashoda (yaśodā)—Kṛṣṇa's mother in Vṛndāvana.

Yavana (yavana)—one of the lower classes of men, generally meat-eaters.

Yogamaya (yogamāyā)—the internal spiritual potency of the Lord.

Yoga-nidra (yoga-nidrā)—the mystic slumber of Lord Viṣṇu.

Yogi (yogī)—one who practices sense control with the aim of spiritual realization.

Yudhishthira (yudhiṣṭhira)—the eldest Pāṇḍava, whom Lord Kṛṣṇa established as emperor.

Yuga (yuga)—an age. There are four yugas, which cycle perpetually: Satya-yuga, Tretā-yuga, Dvāpara-yuga, and Kali-yuga.

Yuga-dharma (yuga-dharma)—specific practice of self-realization recommended in the Vedas for a particular yuga.

Yugala-kishora (yugala kiśora)—the Divine Couple, Śrī Śrī Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa.

Yukta-vairagya (yukta-vairāgya)—real renunciation by using everything in the service of God.

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A Poor Man Reads the Bhāgavatam is not intended to be an imitation of the Bhaktivedanta purports. They are the writings of a disciple of Śrīla Prabhupāda who answers questions on the *Bhāgavatam* submitted to him by other devotees. He writes whatever he has recalled his spiritual master taught on each question, and then he becomes silent. He doesn't know more than what Prabhupāda has taught him. Why even write such "student notes" when we already have the complete Bhaktivedanta purports? Because Śrīla Prabhupāda encouraged me to write. He encouraged all his disciples to do so. The subject matter is not static, he said. Even though one is speaking the same thing, the *Bhāgavatam* is so special, so capacious, that new insights are brought out. Especially relevant here is that new, easy access to the *Bhāgavatam* may be brought by the student of the spiritual master. The personal comments and reflections may give a reader more access into the Bhaktivedanta purports, and they prove interesting in themselves.

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