

The cowherd boys are hungry

- ॐ The morning passed, and the cowherd boys were very hungry because they had not eaten breakfast.
- ॐ They immediately approached Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma and said, “Dear Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma, You are both all-powerful;
- ॐ You can kill many, many demons, but today we are much afflicted with hunger,
- ॐ this is disturbing us.
- ॐ Please arrange for something that will mitigate our hunger.”
- ॐ
- ॐ Requested in this way by Their friends, Lord Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma arranged to show compassion to certain wives of brāhmaṇas who were performing sacrifices.
- ॐ He said, “My dear friends, please go to the house of the brāhmaṇas nearby.
- ॐ They are now engaged in performing Vedic sacrifices known as Āṅgīrasa, for they desire elevation to the heavenly planets.
- ॐ All of you please go to them.
- ॐ These brāhmaṇas are not Vaiṣṇavas.
- ॐ They cannot even chant Our names, ‘Kṛṣṇa’ and ‘Balarāma.’
- ॐ They are very busy in chanting the Vedic hymns, although the purpose of Vedic knowledge is to find Me.
- ॐ But because they are not attracted by the names of Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma, you had better not ask them for anything in My name.
- ॐ Better ask for some charity in the name of Balarāma.”
- ॐ “But at least if you utter the name of Balarāma, they may prefer to give in charity to a kṣatriya rather than to Me,
- ॐ because I am only a vaiśya.”

The cowherd boys go begging

- ॐ Being thus ordered by the Supreme Personality of Godhead, all the boys went to the brāhmaṇas and began to ask for some charity.
- ॐ They approached them with folded hands and fell down on the ground to offer respect.
- ॐ “O earthly gods, kindly hear us, who are ordered by Lord Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma.
- ॐ We hope you know Them both very well, and we wish you all good fortune.
- ॐ Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma are tending cows nearby, and we have accompanied Them.
- ॐ We have come to ask for some food from you.
- ॐ You are all brāhmaṇas and knowers of religious principles,
- ॐ if you think that you should give us charity, then give us some food,
- ॐ we shall all eat along with Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma.

- ॐ You are the most respectable brāhmaṇas within the human society, and you are expected to know all the principles of religious procedure.”
- ॐ *Although the boys were village boys and were not expected to be learned in all the Vedic principles of religious ritual, they hinted that because of their association with Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma, they knew all those principles. By addressing the brāhmaṇas as “knowers of all religious principles,” the boys expressed the point of view that when the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma, were asking for food, the brāhmaṇas should immediately deliver some without hesitation because, as stated in the Bhagavad-gītā, one should perform yajña (sacrifices) only for the satisfaction of Viṣṇu.*
- ॐ The boys continued: “Lord Viṣṇu as Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma is standing waiting, and you should immediately deliver whatever food you have in your stock.”
- ॐ They also explained to the brāhmaṇas when food is to be accepted and when it is not to be accepted.
- ॐ The boys said, “We can take your food at the present stage of your ceremony, for now it will not be prohibited. So you can deliver us the food.”
- ॐ *Although the companions of Lord Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma were simple cowherd boys, they were in a position to dictate even to the high-class brāhmaṇas engaged in the Vedic rituals of sacrifice. But the smārta-brāhmaṇas, who were simply sacrificial-minded, could not understand the dictation of the transcendental devotees of the Lord. They could not even appreciate the begging of the Supreme Lord, Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma. Although they heard all the arguments on behalf of Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma, they did not care for them, and they refused to speak to the boys. Despite being highly elevated in the knowledge of Vedic sacrificial rites, all such nondevotee brāhmaṇas, although they think of themselves as very highly elevated, are ignorant, foolish persons. All their activities are childish because they do not know the purpose of the Vedas, as it is explained in the Bhagavad-gītā: to understand Kṛṣṇa. In spite of their advancement in Vedic knowledge and rituals, they do not understand Kṛṣṇa; therefore their knowledge of the Vedas is useless. Lord Caitanya, therefore, gave His valuable opinion that although a person may not be born in a brāhmaṇa family, if he knows Kṛṣṇa or the science of Kṛṣṇa consciousness he is more than a brāhmaṇa, and he is quite fit to become a spiritual master.*
- ॐ When the boys saw that the brāhmaṇas would not reply to them even with a simple yes or no, they became very much disappointed.
- ॐ They then returned to Lord Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma and explained everything that had happened.
- ॐ After hearing their statements, the Supreme Personality of Godhead smiled.
- ॐ He told them that they should not be sorry for being refused by the brāhmaṇas, because that is the way of begging.

- ॐ He convinced them that one who is engaged in collecting or begging should not think that he will be successful everywhere.
- ॐ He may be unsuccessful in some places, but that should not be cause for disappointment.
- ॐ Lord Kṛṣṇa then asked all the boys to go again, but this time to the wives of those brāhmaṇas engaged in sacrifices.
- ॐ He also informed them that these wives were great devotees.
- ॐ “They are always absorbed in thinking of Us.
- ॐ Go there and ask for some food in My name and the name of Balarāma, and I am sure that they will deliver you as much food as you desire.”

The boys beg from the wives

- ॐ Carrying out Kṛṣṇa’s order, the boys immediately went to the wives of the brāhmaṇas.
- ॐ They found the wives sitting inside the brāhmaṇas’ house.
- ॐ They were very beautifully decorated with ornaments.
- ॐ After offering them all respectful obeisances, the boys said,
- ॐ “Dear mothers, please accept our humble obeisances and hear our statement.
- ॐ May we inform you that Lord Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma are nearby.
- ॐ They have come here with the cows
- ॐ We have come here under Their instructions.
- ॐ All of us are very hungry;
- ॐ We have come to you for some food.
- ॐ Please give us something to eat for Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma and ourselves.”
- ॐ
- ॐ Immediately upon hearing this, the wives of the brāhmaṇas became anxious for Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma.
- ॐ These reactions were spontaneous.
- ॐ They did not have to be convinced of the importance of Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma; immediately upon hearing Their names, they became very eager to see Them.
- ॐ All the wives then became very busily engaged in filling up different pots with nice food.
- ॐ Due to the performance of the sacrifice, the various foods were all very palatable.
- ॐ After collecting a feast, they prepared to go to Kṛṣṇa, their most beloved object, exactly in the way rivers flow to the sea.
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- ॐ For a long time the wives had been eager to see Kṛṣṇa.

Kṛṣṇa Līlā notes – Chapter 23 (Delivering the Wives of the Brāhmaṇas Who Performed Sacrifices)

- ॐ However, when they were preparing to leave home to go see Him, their husbands, fathers, sons and relatives asked them not to go.
- ॐ But the wives did not comply.
- ॐ The women entered the forest of Vṛndāvana on the bank of the Yamunā, which was verdant with vegetation and newly grown vines and flowers.
- ॐ Within that forest they saw Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma engaged in tending the cows along with Their very affectionate boyfriends.
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- ॐ The brāhmaṇas' wives saw Kṛṣṇa with a blackish complexion, wearing a garment that glittered like gold.
- ॐ He wore a nice garland of forest flowers and a peacock feather on His head.
- ॐ He was also painted with the minerals found in Vṛndāvana,
- ॐ He looked exactly like a dancing actor on a theatrical stage.
- ॐ They saw Him resting one hand on the shoulder of His friend,
- ॐ in His other hand He was holding a lotus flower. His ears were decorated with lilies, He wore marks of tilaka,
- ॐ He was smiling charmingly.
- ॐ With their very eyes the wives of the brāhmaṇas saw the Supreme Personality of Godhead, of whom they had heard so much, who was so dear to them, and in whom their minds were always absorbed.
- ॐ Now they saw Him eye to eye and face to face, and Kṛṣṇa entered within their hearts through their eyes.
- ॐ Within themselves they began to embrace Kṛṣṇa to their hearts' content, and the distress of separation was mitigated immediately.
- ॐ They were just like great sages who, by their advancement of knowledge, merge into the existence of the Supreme.
- ॐ
- ॐ Kṛṣṇa welcomed them with the following words:
- ॐ “My dear wives of the brāhmaṇas, you are all very fortunate and are welcome here.
- ॐ Please let Me know what I can do for you.
- ॐ Your coming here to see Me, neglecting all the restrictions and hindrances of relatives, fathers, brothers and husbands, is completely befitting.
- ॐ One who does this actually knows his self-interest, because rendering transcendental loving service unto Me, without motive or restriction, is actually auspicious for the living entities.”
- ॐ “My dear wives of the brāhmaṇas,” Kṛṣṇa said, “you can now return to your homes.

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- ॐ Engage yourselves in sacrificial activities and in the service of your husbands and household affairs so that your husbands will be pleased with you and the sacrifice which they have begun will be properly executed.
- ॐ After all, your husbands are householders, and without your help how can they execute their prescribed duties?”
- ॐ
- ॐ The wives of the brāhmaṇas replied,
- ॐ “Dear Lord, this sort of instruction does not benefit You.
- ॐ Your eternal promise is that You will always protect Your devotees, and now You must fulfill this promise.
- ॐ Anyone who comes and surrenders unto You never goes back to the conditioned life of material existence.
- ॐ We expect that You will now fulfill Your promise.
- ॐ We have surrendered unto Your lotus feet, which are covered by tulasī leaves, so we have no desire to give up the shelter of Your lotus feet and return to the company of our so-called relatives, friends and society.
- ॐ And what shall we do if we return home?
- ॐ Our husbands, brothers, fathers, sons, mothers and friends will no longer accept us at home because we have already left them all.
- ॐ Therefore we have no shelter to return to. Please, therefore, do not ask us to return home, but arrange for our stay under Your lotus feet so that we can eternally live under Your protection.”
- ॐ
- ॐ The Supreme Personality of Godhead replied,
- ॐ “My dear wives of the brāhmaṇas, rest assured that your husbands will not neglect you on your return, nor will your brothers, sons or fathers refuse to accept you.
- ॐ Because you are My pure devotees, not only your relatives but also people in general, as well as the demigods, will be satisfied with you.”
- ॐ “Transcendental love for Me does not depend upon bodily connection,” Kṛṣṇa said further, “but anyone whose mind is always absorbed in Me will surely, very soon, come to Me for My eternal association.”
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- ॐ After being instructed by the Supreme Personality of Godhead, all the wives returned home to their respective husbands.
- ॐ Pleased to see their wives back home, the brāhmaṇas sat together with them and executed the performances of sacrifices, as enjoined in the śāstras.
- ॐ According to Vedic principle, religious rituals must be executed by the husband and wife together.

Kṛṣṇa Līlā notes – Chapter 23 (Delivering the Wives of the Brāhmaṇas Who Performed Sacrifices)

- ॐ When the brāhmaṇas' wives returned, the sacrifice was duly and nicely executed.
- ॐ One of the brāhmaṇas' wives, however, who had been forcibly checked from going to see Kṛṣṇa, began to remember Him as she heard of His bodily features.
- ॐ Being completely absorbed in His thought, she gave up her material body conditioned by the laws of nature.
- ॐ After the departure of the brāhmaṇas' wives, Śrī Govinda and His cowherd boyfriends enjoyed the food they had offered.
- ॐ In this way the ever-joyful Personality of Godhead exhibited His transcendental pastimes in the guise of an ordinary human being in order to attract the common people to Kṛṣṇa consciousness.
- ॐ With His words and beauty He attracted all the cows, cowherd boys and damsels in Vṛndāvana. All of them together enjoyed the pastimes of the Lord.

The Brāhmaṇas realize their error

- ॐ After the return of their wives from Kṛṣṇa, the brāhmaṇas engaged in the performance of sacrifices began to regret their sinful activities in refusing food to the Supreme Personality of Godhead.
- ॐ They could finally understand their mistake; engaged in the performance of Vedic rituals, they had neglected the Supreme Personality of Godhead, who had appeared just like an ordinary human being and asked for some food.
- ॐ They began to condemn themselves after seeing the faith and devotion of their wives.
- ॐ They regretted very much that, although their wives were elevated to the platform of pure devotional service, they themselves could not understand even a little bit of how to love and offer transcendental loving service to the Supreme Soul.
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- ॐ They began to talk among themselves: “To hell with our being born brāhmaṇas!
- ॐ To hell with our learning all the Vedic literatures!
- ॐ To hell with our performing great sacrifices and observing all the rules and regulations!
- ॐ To hell with our family!
- ॐ To hell with our expert service in performing the rituals exactly according to the description of the scriptures!
- ॐ To hell with it all, for we have not developed transcendental loving service to the Supreme Personality of Godhead, who is beyond the speculation of the mind, body and senses.”
- ॐ “The external energy of Kṛṣṇa is so strong that it can create illusion to overcome even the greatest mystic yogī.
- ॐ Although we expert brāhmaṇas are considered to be the teachers of all other sections of human society, we also have been illusioned by the external energy.
- ॐ Just see how fortunate these women are!

- ॐ They have so devotedly dedicated their lives to the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Kṛṣṇa, that they could easily do what is ordinarily so difficult: they gave up their family connections, which are just like a dark well for the continuation of material miseries.”
- ॐ “According to Vedic injunction, women are not allowed to undergo the purificatory process of initiation by the sacred thread,
- ॐ nor are they allowed to live as brahmacāriṇīs in the āśrama of the spiritual master,
- ॐ nor are they advised to undergo the strict disciplinary procedures,
- ॐ nor are they very expert in discussing the philosophy of self-realization.
- ॐ And by nature they are not very pure,
- ॐ nor are they very much attached to auspicious activities.
- ॐ Therefore, how wonderful it is that these women have developed transcendental love for Kṛṣṇa, the Lord of all mystic yogīs!
- ॐ They have surpassed all of us in firm faith and devotion unto Kṛṣṇa.
- ॐ Although we are considered to be masters in all purificatory processes, we did not actually know what their goal is because we are too much attached to the materialistic way of life.
- ॐ Even though we were reminded of Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma by the cowherd boys, we disregarded Them.
- ॐ We now think that the Supreme Personality of Godhead simply played a trick of mercy on us by sending His friends to beg food from us.
- ॐ Otherwise, He had no need to send them. He could have satisfied their hunger then and there just by willing to do so.”
- ॐ “Because He has appeared as a child in the dynasty of the Yadus, we were so foolish that we could not understand that He is the Supreme Personality of Godhead,” the brāhmaṇas said.
- ॐ “But on the other hand, we are very proud because we have such exalted wives who have developed pure transcendental service of the Lord without being shackled by our rigid opposition.
- ॐ Let us therefore offer our respectful obeisances unto the lotus feet of Lord Kṛṣṇa, under whose illusory energy, called māyā, we are absorbed in fruitive activities.
- ॐ We therefore pray to the Lord to be kind enough to excuse us because we are simply captivated by His external energy.
- ॐ We transgressed His order without knowing His transcendental glories.”
- ॐ
- ॐ The brāhmaṇas repented their sinful activities.
- ॐ They wanted to go personally to offer their obeisances unto Him,
- ॐ but being afraid of Kāmsa, they could not go to Kṛṣṇa and surrender unto Him.

ॐ *In other words, it is very difficult for one to surrender fully unto the Personality of Godhead without being purified by devotional service. The example of the learned brāhmaṇas and their wives is vivid. The wives of the brāhmaṇas, because they were inspired by pure devotional service, did not care for any kind of opposition. They immediately went to Kṛṣṇa. But the brāhmaṇas, although they had come to know the supremacy of the Lord and were repenting, were still afraid of King Karṇa because they were too much addicted to fruitive activities.*