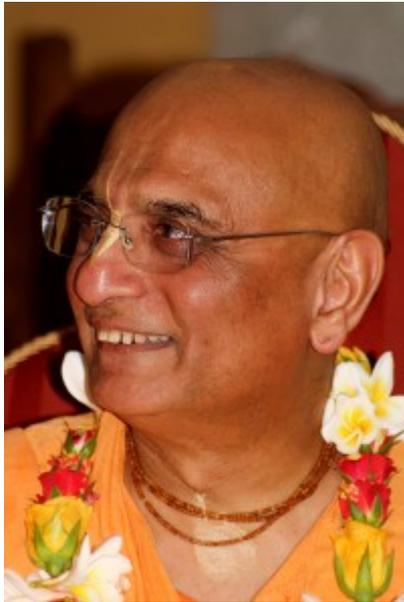


History Of Our Vaishnava Heritage Part 7

THE FOLLOWING LECTURE GIVEN BY HIS HOLINESS BHAKTI CHARU SWAMI IN ISKCON RADHADESH BELGIUM, 2004, IS THE SEVENTH OUT OF NINE IN A SERIES ON THE HISTORY OF VAISHNAVA HERITAGE.



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Spiritual life begins with submission to the laws given by the Lord, which is known as religion. Religion means the laws given by the Supreme Personality of Godhead. We see that initially one abides by the laws of the Lord because he sees that by becoming religious he can have better material facilities. That is karma kanda. Enjoyment in the material nature is not the real object of spiritual life. Even liberation from material bondage is not the goal.

These are just some secondary effects of spiritual life which have been described in the Vedas as dharma, artha, kama and moksha. In dharma, one leads a religious life. As a result of that he gets artha, material benefits. By getting material benefits, he can fulfill his desires, kama. And finally, when he sees that in spite of fulfilling all his desires he is not really getting what he is hankering for, he considers that the goal of life is to get out of the material world because it is filled with miseries. Moksha is the common understanding of spiritual life.

When we approach Srimad Bhagavatam, we get an understanding of what actual spiritual life is. And from Chaitanya Charitamrita, we get an even deeper understanding that material desire, enjoyment in the material nature, and also aspiring for liberation from material bondage are detrimental to spiritual advancement. They are considered like two pots of poison. Material enjoyment as well as liberation are not the goal. The goal is to become elevated to the spiritual sky.

In order to become elevated to the spiritual world, one has to become a devotee of the Lord. Unless and until one becomes a devotee of the Lord, one cannot go back to the spiritual world. That is the preliminary understanding. Then we find that there are different levels of elevation among the devotees, as we saw in the first part of Brhad Bhagavatmrta.

These understandings are very important to become fully aware of our heritage: what we are following, what actually is Krishna consciousness movement? Is this just another religion or another fad? Many people have that misconception. Even I had. When I saw ISKCON devotees from a distance, I used to think they were just a bunch of American boys and girls who found a new fad: shaving their heads and wearing saffron, chanting Hare Krishna. When I joined ISKCON, many people thought the same way that why I am joining ISKCON? There are so many spiritual institutions in India, why I had to join this movement which is apparently an American thing? Those days, there were very few Indians in ISKCON, even in India, it was mostly Americans. That is the basic misconception about this movement.

We should have the proper understanding of what this movement actually stands for. What are we actually pursuing ? Our conclusion should be that unless this is the best, we should not settle for this. Our approach should be that if there is anything better than ISKCON, then we should go there. If we are after some spiritual achievement, then isn't it natural that we should go for the best ? Sometimes people settle for sentiment, "Oh, my grandfather was initiated by this group, so I should also go in this." So many missions, so many spiritual organizations are gathering their following just on sentiment. They do not settle for any spiritual understanding; they just go for sentimental reasons. That should not be the case with us. If we are really intelligent, if we are really serious about our spiritual life, then our attitude should be that we go for the best.

If there is anything better than ISKCON, Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's movement, then yes, we should go for that. I can say that yes, I will go there, but in the last twenty-three years I have not found anything better. On the other hand, the more I am probing inside this philosophy and the spiritual understanding, and even our inner feelings and realizations, I am becoming more and more convinced that this is the best. That is why I can announce that if there is anything better, we are ready to accept because we know that there is nothing better than this.

Now here, through this discussion of the history of our Vaishnava heritage, this is what we are trying to establish. What Chaitanya Mahaprabhu gave is the highest. It is not a sentimental claim, but the verdict of the scriptures. Also, when we want to analyze it and verify it, then we get to see that this is the highest spiritual achievement. A part of it we discussed yesterday, that who is the greatest devotee, what is the highest form of devotion? Narada Muni is very systematically experiencing that. Sanatana Goswami is describing Narada Muni's search for the greatest devotee. We are seeing the gradual elevation of one's devotional profundity.

Today we will be discussing the second part of Brhad Bhagavatamrta. The second part of Brhad Bhagavatmrta is actually describing a devotee's journey back to Godhead. The story begins with a cowherd boy named Gopakumara. Gopakumar is born in Govardhana in a family of Vaishyas, a cowherd family. Like other cowherd boys, Gopakumar used to tend the cows in the forest of Vrindavana.

Gopakumar used to see one person who was very strange. He used to behave like a madman. Sometimes they would see him laughing, sometimes crying, sometimes rolling on the ground. In this way, this person was behaving like a mad man, but this person was very affectionate towards these cowherd boys. When he would see them, he would pour out the affection of his heart on them. And the cowherd boys were also very affectionate towards him. They would offer the milk of the cows. In this way, he had a very nice relationship with the cowherd boys.

One day, when Gopakumar was alone, he came across this person on the bank of Yamuna. That person told him to go take a bath in Yamuna and he would give him a mantra. He gave him the ten-syllable Gopal Mantra. He told him that this mantra is very powerful, a very precious spiritual wealth. He asked Gopakumar to cultivate it very carefully and keep it protected with a lot of care and attention. After that he fainted.

Since Gopakumar received this mantra and he was told that this was the most precious mantra, he started to chant the mantra. Gopakumar lost interest in everything else. All he wanted to do was chant. He felt that everything else is just a hindrance. His friends, his family, his duty to tend the cows in the forest, he felt they were all a hindrance to his meditating on the mantra.

One day, Gopakumar decided to leave his place in Vrindavana. He just left and started to wander alone. He would find some solitary place and just chant the mantra. He was deriving great joy from doing that. One day, he came to prayag, the confluence of Ganga and Yamuna. We have to understand that Gopakumar was traveling along the Yamuna river and in this way, he came to Prayag.

In Prayag, he saw one Brahmin worshiping the Salagrama Sila. So, Gopakumar became curious and asked the Brahmin what he was doing. The Brahmin told him, "I am worshiping Krishna, the Supreme Personality of Godhead." Gopakumar was very thrilled to see that the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Whose mantra he is chanting, here is that Personality. He became very excited.

The brahmana put the salagrama sila in a small box and closed the box. When he did that, Gopakumar started to cry. He said, "See, he put the Supreme Personality of Godhead in such a small box. What will He do if He feels hungry or wants something? No one will be able to hear Him."

When the brahmana saw Gopakumar crying like that, he said, "My boy, I am just a poor brahmana, I cannot afford a very gorgeous worship of the Lord. Therefore, this is how I have to worship and carry Him. If you really want to see some grand worship of the Lord, go to such and such place. You will see that the King there is really worshiping the Lord with so much grandeur."

Gopakumar went there and saw the Lord was really being worshiped in such a gorgeous temple. He was very, very happy to be there. He was happily spending his time living in the temple, associating with the Lord, chanting His name. At night, he would just sleep in one corner of the temple.

One day, the king of that kingdom died and he did not have any successor for the throne. The ministers started to look for a suitable person to ascend to the throne. They found in the

person of Gopakumar all the signs of a king. They made him the king. Although Gopakumar became the king, he was not interested in anything but promoting the Lord's service and worship. All his time was dedicated in serving the Lord.

Still, Gopakumar would feel bad when people would waste the Mahaprasad of the Lord and consider it stale or old and not take the Prasad. When Gopakumar became morose about that attitude of the people there, then Gopakumar got to know that in Nilachala on the bank of the salt water ocean in the East, there is a temple of Lord Niladripati, Lord Jagannatha. There, no one considers the Lord's Prasadam stale or rotten. They always consider the Prasadam of Lord Jagannatha as spiritual. They would carry the Prasadam to a distant place and honor the Prasadam.

In this way, Gopakumar became interested in Jagannatha Puri. He left his kingdom and went there. Gopakumar started to live very happily in the presence of Lord Jagannatha. He saw that Jagannatha's Prasadam was considered to be non-different from the Lord Himself. There also, when the king died, the king's son did not want to assume the responsibility of the king. Therefore, they made Gopakumar the king. Gopakumar started to take care of Lord Jagannatha's service.

One day, Gopakumar was feeling very bad about Vrindavana. Then, Lord Jagannatha appeared to him in a dream and told him, "This place and Mathura are non-different. The Lord there is also non-different than Me, so why don't you go back to Vrindavana?" In Vrindavana, he used to just live in the forest, chanting, and from time to time, he would have the darshan of the Lord. In this way, he was spending his time.

Around that time, he got to know about the grand worship of the Lord as it was performed by Indra. Gopakumar desired to see how Indra worshiped the Lord.

We notice that whatever Gopakumar desired, by the potency of this mantra, he would get that. That mantra, just like a desire tree, fulfills the desire of one who chants. Therefore, one should be very careful what he desires when he chants this mantra because if one has material desires, watch out! Krishna will fulfill those desires. Gopakumar's desire was always spiritual.

Gopakumar desired to go to the heavenly planets and he was elevated there. There, after a while, Indra ran away from swarga loka because he was afraid of being cursed by a Brahmin. The throne of heaven was empty, so Brhaspati advised that Gopakumar be named the king. So Gopakumar got the position of Indra. Although Gopakumar became the king of heaven, he was not at all interested in any kind of sense gratification. In G's nature we see that he was not attracted to sense gratification or to women and he was free from all anarthas. That is the sign of a sincere devotee.

Then, one day some very powerful personalities came to the heavenly planets. Gopakumar was very surprised to see them. They seemed to be as brilliant as the sun. Brhaspati told him that they are the sages from Maharloka, the place that is above swarga loka: Bhur, Bhuvah, Svar, and then, Maharloka. Gopakumar then wanted to go to Maharloka. He was elevated to Maharloka. There he was associating with the sages who were performing sacrifices. There, from the sacrificial fire, Lord Yogeshwara appears. In this way, Gopakumar saw the Lord in His Yogeshwara form. He was spending time in the association of very exalted personalities.

Then Gopakumar got to know about Janaloka, where there are some even more powerful sages. He desired to go there, so he was elevated there. Then he was elevated to Tapoloka, then Satyaloka, the place of Lord Brahma. There, Gopakumar was spending his time in the association of exalted personalities.

Once, Lord Brahma left Satyaloka, so Gopakumar was made Brahma. Here also we see that the devotees are given these very exalted positions and devotees do not refuse them, but they accept with a mood of service. They see that by assuming these positions, they can execute more service to the Lord.

There, Gopakumar met his spiritual master. His spiritual master advised him to go back to Vrindavan and chant the Holy Name of the Lord. So Gopakumar came back to Vrindavan. He stayed in Brahma loka for such a long time that you can imagine what happened to the Earth planet in such a time. He saw that the Earth planet had changed so much in that time. It was not at all like what he saw it last time. Although the entire Earth planet had changed, Vrindavan was still the same. This way, we get to know that time doesn't affect Vrindavan and Mayapur, they are the spiritual abode of the Lord. They always remain the same. May be on the surface there are some cosmetic differences, but the places are the same.

Although Vrindavan was the same, none of his old friends or acquaintances were there. Not that Gopakumar actually cared for that, he was not at all interested, but still, he noticed that none of those people from before were there. There, Gopakumar started to chant the mantra.

One day, he found himself traveling in a very fast moving vehicle, a space ship. It was moving so fast that in a very short time, all the seven planetary systems, including Brahmaloaka disappeared from his vision. The whole universe gradually disappeared from his vision. Then he came to the covering of the universe.

The first covering is the covering of earth. This is the causal form of earth. This earth is the effectual earth, which is the causal earth. All that happens on the earth platform has already happened there. There, Mother Earth personified worships Varahadeva. The place was so opulent that it cannot be described. He spent some time there and saw the grand worship of Earth personified, the way she was worshipping Varahadeva. Then, he came to the water layer. There he saw water personified worshipping the Lord in His Mina incarnation. Then he came to the fire layer. There he was the Lord being worshipped as Vaishwanara. Then he went to the air layer, then mind. In the mind layer, Aniruddha was being worshipped. Then, in the false ego layer, Lord Sankarshana was being worshiped. Finally he came to the covering of the material nature herself. There, material nature personified was worshipping the Mohini Murti of the Lord, in the form that He enchanted Lord Shiva.

At that point, material nature personified, Maya herself, was asking him why he was leaving. She was inviting him to stay and enjoy. Gopakumar addressed her as the sister of his worshipable Lord and begged her to help him approach her brother. Mahamaya is also Yogamaya and Yogamaya is Subhadra Devi. He begged her to help him approach the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

In this way, he came out of the final layer, the covering of the material nature, and for the first time he became bewildered. He came to Brahma Jyoti. There he could not find the Lord. Previously, wherever he went, he could find the Lord being worshiped in some form or

another, but here he could not find the Lord. Only there were some flashes of the Supersoul in that brilliant, blinding, glaring light of Brahmajyoti.

He started to pray to Lord Jagannatha. All of a sudden, he heard the sound of Sankirtan. He saw a personality whose complexion was as white as camphor riding on a bull and he was surrounded by his devotees. He was coming down. He wondered who he was. He was told by one of the associates of Lord Shiva that it was Lord Shiva. He invited him to also join the party. But Gopakumar begged his forgiveness and went forward.

Then Gopakumar came to the gate of Vaikuntha. At the gate he saw the Supreme Personality of Godhead with His four arms carrying the disc, lotus, mace and conch shell. When he saw Him, he immediately offered obeisances and started saying, "O my Lord, O Supreme Personality of Godhead." But that person, as soon as he heard that, covered his ears and started saying, "I am not the Lord! I am not the Lord!" Saying that, he just covered his ears and ran inside. Then Gopakumar saw another personality in a spaceship and he just landed there. He thought him to be the Lord and started to offer prayers. That person also became very embarrassed and ran inside.

Finally, some person took pity on Gopakumar and took him to see the Lord. But when he saw Narayana, Gopakumar was so overwhelmed with emotion that he fainted. Lakshmi Devi came down from the throne and nursed him like her own child and brought him back to his senses. In this way, Lakshmi Devi and Narayan showered their affection upon Gopakumar.

So Gopakumar was staying in Vaikuntha, but still he was maintaining his cowherd boy identity. Some of the residents once told him, "You are in Vaikuntha. You should assume the Vaikuntha form now, the four armed swarupa of the Lord." Gopakumar declined that proposal.

Then Gopakumar got to know about Lord Ramachandra in Ayodhya. So Gopakumar went to Ayodhya and received a lot of mercy from Lord Ramachandra and Sita Devi. Then, by the mercy of Lord Ramachandra, he was elevated to Dwaraka. In Dwaraka, he was having the association of the Lord. The Lord was showering all of His affection on him.

One day, Narada Muni detected that Gopakumar was still unhappy. He told him, "Gopakumar, you are in Dvaraka, having the association of the Lord, why is your heart still not fully satisfied?"

Gopakumar told him that he knows that he is extremely fortunate to be having the association of the Supreme Personality of Godhead and he is receiving so much mercy not only from Him, but also from the queens. But his heart is hankering for a cowherd boy who wears a peacock feather and plays a flute on the bank of a river. His heart is somehow just drawn towards Him. So much so that even despite being in Dwaraka and having the association of the Lord, his heart is still discontent.

Narada Muni then told him, "I can see that your attraction is actually for Krishna in Vrindavana, but to go to Vrindavana, you have to go back to Vrindavana on the Earth planet. There you have to chant the name of the Lord with all of your heart. That is called Sankirtana. You perform Sankirtana in Vrindavana and by doing that only you will have access to Goloka Vrindavana."

According to Narada Muni's advice, Gopakumara went back to Vrindavana and there, he started to perform Sankirtana in the forest. He was alone and he used to chant, call out the Lord by His name with all the love of his heart: "He Mukunda, he Gopala, he Nandanandana!" While he would sing, all the trees and birds also would sing with him. That is how it became Sankirtana. The trees would not echo but literally sing. To a mundane ear it may appear that the trees were actually echoing his chanting.

In this way, Gopakumar was spending his time in Vrindavana chanting the names of the Lord with all the love of his heart. Then, one day, he saw Krishna. As soon as he saw Krishna, he just ran to catch Him. He almost caught Him. He caught the end of His cloth, but Krishna moved swiftly from there and the cloth slipped from his hand. From there, Krishna went swiftly behind a bush and Gopakumar could not see Him. His feeling at that time was like a very poor man who all of a sudden received a lot of wealth and just after receiving it, lost that wealth. Gopakumar became so heartbroken that he fainted and his body rolled down into Yamuna.

When Gopakumar came back to his senses, he found himself traveling in a spaceship at an incredible speed. He found himself in Vrindavana. When he arrived in Vrindavana, it was afternoon there. He found some young girls picking flowers and they were all speaking about Krishna, but when Gopakumar asked, "Where is Krishna?", he did not get any answer.

Then, one elderly person told him that Krishna has gone to the forest to tend the cows. He would be coming back soon. He saw that everyone was eagerly looking towards a certain direction. He looked at that direction and saw that in the horizon, the dust was flying. Then he heard the sound of laughter and the mooing of cows. Then he saw Krishna and Balarama are coming with the cowherd boys along with the cows.

When Gopakumar saw Krishna, he just ran to meet Krishna. Krishna also saw Gopakumar and He also ran to meet with Gopakumar. when they met, they just embraced each other. Krishna, in a delirious way, started to tell him, "My dear friend, where have you been?" He was expressing how much He missed him. While speaking like that Krishna fainted and Gopakumar also fainted. When the cowherd girls saw Krishna fainting like that, they all started to cry. They felt that this must be one of Kamsa's demons that Kamsa sent to harm Krishna.

Balarama came running. Seeing Krishna's condition, he could see what actually happened. So, he brought Gopakumar back to his senses and told Gopakumar to chant Krishna's name to His ear. When Gopakumar started to chant Krishna's name to His ear, then Krishna came back to His senses.

Then Krishna invited Gopakumar to come along with Him to His house. So Gopakumar went with Krishna and Balarama. Just when they entered the house from the porch, Krishna bid all His friends good-bye and said, "I will see you all tomorrow morning." Some of the boys went back to their house. Some of the boys did not even go back to their house, they just laid down under some tree with some animals from the forest like deer and peacocks, just waiting for the next morning when they would get to see Krishna again.

In this way Sanatan Goswami describes how this cowherd boy Gopakumar went back to Goloka Vrindavana.

Q. What is that mantra that can fulfill our desires?

A. Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare / Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare. Mahaprabhu said, “prabhu kahe kahilam ei mahamantra yaha saba japo giya koriya nirbandha... iha hoite sarva siddhi hoibe tomar.” So Mahaprabhu said, “I gave you this mantra. Now you chant this mantra with full conviction.”

Q. But wasn't there a mantra that fulfilled Gopakumar's desires?

A: But this is an even better mantra.

Q. But what was that mantra?

A: That mantra is dasakshara gopala mantra. Generally the mantras are not uttered in public. Actually, we have an eighteen-syllable mantra and a twelve-syllable Krishna mantra. The twelve-syllable mantra is called Krishna Gayatri and the eighteen syllable mantra is called Kama Gayatri. Above all the mantras is the Hare Krishna Maha-mantra. Nothing can match or equal the Hare Krishna Maha-mantra.

Q. If the Hare Krishna Maha-mantra is the most powerful, why do we say it out loud and not the Gayatri?

A. Because Mahaprabhu gave us the Maha-mantra and gave us the permission to chant loudly and give it to anybody. Whereas the Gayatri Mantra, by nature, is a secret. That is why it is better not to transgress the scriptural injunctions.

Q. When Gopakumar went to Vrindavana, why wouldn't anyone tell him where is Krishna?

A. Because they are so absorbed in thoughts of Krishna that they did not have any external consciousness.

Q. Was it because Gopakumar was a special personality that Krishna embraced him? You said yesterday that we should not expect Krishna to embrace us.

A. When the living entity goes back, Krishna may embrace him or her, but that does not become their constant position with Krishna. Say, in the Rasa dance, Krishna does not dance the Rasa dance with everybody, only with the sakhis. The others only assist the sakhis with their dealings with Krishna. They do not aspire to assume their position. They are happy just being their maidservants. Even Nanda Maharaja or Mother Yasoda, it is not that anybody will assume that position, but they will become servants of Nanda Maharaja or Mother Yasoda, subordinate to them. That is how one enters into Vrindavana, by following a resident of Vrindavana. The residents of Vrindavana are those intimate devotees of Krishna. Krishna may give His embrace to a devotee sometimes but that does not give them that exclusive position.