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GOPASHTAMI

The Perfection of Pleasing Krishna Through Cow Protection and Vraja-Bhakti

Morning Bhagavatam Class · ■r■mad-Bh■gavatam 10.15.1

By His Holiness

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At ISKCON Vrindavan Temple

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The Day Prabhupada's Desire Was Honored

Notes from the class on ■r■mad-Bh■gavatam 10.15.1

On the holy day of Gopashtami, forty-eight years ago, the deity of Srila Prabhupada was brought on parikrama of Govardhan Hill. The devotees present that day in 1977 will never forget it. The day Prabhupada disappeared from this world was the deepest, most unforgettable moment for his disciples all over the world.

It had been Prabhupada's own desire to circle Govardhan Hill, but due to his health it was thought to be impossible. Yet a few days later, on the very day of Gopashtami, Prabhupada's desire was honored — the devotees carried him on Govardhan parikrama themselves.

Gopashtami has always been the happiest day in Vrindavan. *Samsiddhir hari toshanam* — whatever our occupation or status in life, our true happiness and success lie in pleasing Krishna.

Pleasing Krishna: The Root of All Success

Prabhupada often quoted from Srimad-Bhagavatam that when you water the root of a tree, every part of the tree is nourished. *Aham sarvasya prabhavah* — Krishna is the root and source of everything and everyone that exists. When Krishna is not pleased by our efforts and our intentions, nothing we do can truly succeed.

In the world of forgetfulness, or avidya, we carry the misconception that pleasing the senses, body, and mind will satisfy us. Conditioned souls become addicted to this pursuit of happiness, and in chasing it we become endlessly entangled in the laws of karma.

Prabhupada placed so much emphasis on hearing from his books, and on the conclusions and words of our great acharyas, so that we could have the faith that the only real value of life is how we please Krishna.

Giriraj Govardhan: The Best of Devotees

In Srimad-Bhagavatam there is a beautiful verse in which Giriraj Govardhan is glorified as *haridasa-varya* — the best of all devotees — because he gives the greatest pleasure to Krishna by pleasing those whom Krishna loves.

According to the acharyas, this verse is spoken by Radharani herself, the ultimate fountainhead of love and the supreme authority on prema. She declares that Govardhan is so expert in pleasing the gopas and

the cows that Krishna is pleased by him above all others.

Krishna Becomes Govinda

When Indra, in his pride, began to destroy Vrajabhumi, Krishna lifted Govardhan Hill and held it aloft for seven days and seven nights. Indra's ego was crushed; his devotion was restored, and he surrendered to Krishna. He then called all the great demigods to perform an abhishekam, and together they proclaimed Krishna as the Supreme Absolute Lord of all lords, giving Him the name Govinda — He who gives pleasure to the cows and to the senses of all living beings.

Krishna's supreme abode is Goloka, the planet of the cows, and Gokula is likewise a place of cows. His eternal name Gopal means the protector of cows, and He takes the very form of Govardhan because of the great service Govardhan renders to the cows.

Radharani is eternally the supreme gopi; Krishna and Balaram are eternally gopas within a cowherd community. During the abhishekam, just as we bathe the Deity of Krishna each morning to give Him happiness, we offer *panchagavya* and *panchamrita* — the milk, yogurt, ghee, and even the dung and urine of the cows.

The First Day Krishna Herded the Cows

On this day of Gopashtami, Prabhupada gave us entrance into a very special pastime — the first day that Krishna was given permission to herd the cows. From that day, Lord Vasudeva served as a cowherd, whereas before He had only tended the calves.

Vishvanath Chakravarti Thakur and the other great acharyas explain that Krishna and Balaram took the greatest care of the cows even from Krishna's infancy — when as a small child He defeated Putana, then Shakatasura, then Trinavarta, and revealed the entire universe within His mouth to Mother Yashoda. In the Damodara-lila He uprooted the twin yamala-arjuna trees, and later, moving through Vrindavan, He liberated Vatsasura.

There is a profound psychology in this: even the demons knew that Krishna held such special affection for cows and calves that a horrible monster would take the very form of a calf, hoping to win Krishna's love and affection so that it could attack Him by surprise.

The calf was so beautiful that Krishna told Balaram this little calf was in fact a demon in disguise, come to deceive Him. Krishna reciprocated all the same — He approached from behind so the calf would not notice Him, seized it, and threw it, revealing its true, hideous demon form. All the gopas saw it lying dead, high up in a tree.

Bakasura came in the form of a great bird and swallowed Krishna whole. Yashoda and Nanda Maharaj, witnessing Krishna's incredible power, still saw Him only with parental love, as their helpless, dependent child — and Krishna, in His pastimes, inspires exactly that love. When He is afraid, He jumps into the arms of His mother and father.

Krishna began to treat His parents with a new respect, and Nanda Maharaj's brothers said this was because Krishna and Balaram now wished to take care of the cows themselves.

Krishna's Personal Love for Every Cow

Krishna would call each of the nine hundred thousand cows by name, personally and simultaneously, and every cow felt, “Krishna is glancing at me, Krishna is smiling at me.” It is the same when Krishna takes lunch with the gopas on the banks of the Yamuna: thousands of gopas sit circled around Him like the petals of a lotus, and each one feels, “Krishna is smiling at me, Krishna is speaking with me.” Krishna is *rasa-vihari*, the supreme lover and the supreme object of love, and He makes every cow feel that He is personally and constantly remembering her.

When Krishna plays His flute, each cow feels that He is playing her favorite song just for her — the love of Krishna's heart flows out through the holes of His flute with His very breath. Each gopa and gopi feels personally called and personally delighted, and each cow feels the very same, answering Him in her own way, with a loving “moo.” Krishna hears every one of these loving expressions, glorified in the language of the cows, and personally reciprocates with each of them.

Srimad-Bhagavatam describes one of the most beautiful sights for the residents of Vrindavan: Krishna returning home after herding the cows, His body covered in the dust raised by their hooves. This gives Krishna such pleasure that the vrajavasis feel their own lives perfected simply by seeing Him this way — for they know that the dust of the cows delights both Krishna and Balaram.

Cow Protection: Dharma Made Visible

In the beautiful verse *namo brahmanya-devaya*, recited by Advaita Acharya in worship of the Lord, Krishna is glorified as one who is dearly beloved to the cows. Krishna arranged the world so that the very principle of dharma is represented by the bull, and the principle of innocence and purity by the cow. Srila Prabhupada, an eternal resident of Vrindavan Dham, was deeply compassionate in establishing cow protection throughout the world — for without it, real compassion and dharma can never be fully lived out in society.

The love that Krishna and Radha hold for the cows and bulls is such that these animals themselves become a living symbol of morality and dharma within the material world.

The first farm community Prabhupada established was New Vrindaban, meant from the very beginning as an example of cow protection for the world. When Prabhupada spoke of cow protection, he did not mean simply refraining from killing cows — he meant doing everything possible to keep them healthy and happy. He named one of the very first cows at New Vrindaban Kaliya, and he was truly pleased whenever devotees cared for the cows, because this is exactly what pleases Krishna.

How Govindaji Was Found

The presiding Deity of all Vrindavan is Govindaji, originally installed by Vajranabha. When Rupa Goswami came to Vrindavan with Sanatana Goswami, they searched for this original Deity, long lost, so that a beautiful temple could be built and the world could be taught how to worship Him. Rupa Goswami excavated many places and wrote extensive Vaishnava shastra spreading Vraja-bhakti, yet nowhere could Govinda be found.

One day, sitting on the banks of the Yamuna and lamenting that he had not found Govindadev, a little gopa boy approached Rupa Goswami and asked why he was sad. “I know where Govinda is,” the boy said. Nearby stood a cow, and milk was pouring from her udder onto the ground of its own accord. The boy explained that this cow came every day to give her milk to Govindaji, and told Rupa Goswami to gather the vrajavasis and dig at that very spot. There they found the Deity — revealed not simply by a cow, but by a cow's love for Krishna.

When Indra committed his great offense against Vrindavan, even his own guru Brihaspati and Lord Brahma said it was beyond their power to help him, and that only Surabhi, the cow, could help him — because the cows hold such love for Krishna, and Krishna holds such love for the cows.

The Forests of Vrindavan

When Krishna, Balaram, and the gopas herded the cows, nearly the entire Tenth Canto unfolds around this pastime. They would play endless games amid the beauty of Vrindavan — dancing peacocks, singing birds, and blossoming flowers, everything arranged for Krishna's pleasure.

Even while playing with His friends, Krishna was constantly engaged in bringing the cows, calves, and bulls to places of fresh water and fresh grass. This is why Govardhan is so dear to Radharani and Shyamsundar — its soft, delicious grass and nectarean waters were exactly what the cows loved, and Krishna and Balaram would lead them from one such place to another throughout the forests of

Vrindavan.

The Highest Gift: Gopa and Gopi Bhava

This day of Gopashtami is celebrated in every home and temple in Vrindavan, and by the grace of Prabhupada, it is recognized not only as a loving pastime of Krishna but also as an essential instruction for human society on how to please Him.

In Dwaraka, Krishna is a great king with the goddess of fortune as His queen; in Vaikuntha, He is Lord Narayana, surrounded eternally by pure devotees in worship. Yet everyone recognizes that the highest pleasure, the highest gift of all, is found in the pastimes of the gopas and gopis.

We may ask a simple question about the Absolute Truth: why is God so completely identified with a gopa, and Radharani with a gopi? Because that is Their own supreme will.

By the order of Srila Prabhupada's own guru maharaj, and by the mercy of the six Goswamis, Prabhupada carried the culture of Vrindavan and Gokula to the whole world. He described Vrindavan as his own eternal home, and entrusted to all of us the Deities he installed — Krishna and Balaram, Radha-Shyamsundar — along with his own worshipable goshala. How fortunate, and how purifying, to be here on this Gopashtami: the very day Krishna and Balaram anticipated with so much joy, knowing they would finally be allowed to herd the cows.

An Entrance Into Radha and Krishna's Hearts

Let us take seriously this culture of knowledge and divine grace that Prabhupada has given us. In Vrindavan, the ultimate sanctification comes from cow dung — Krishna Himself bathes with it, and Prabhupada even told us that the finest cooking is done over a fire of dry cow dung. In every way, let us thank Prabhupada for giving us entrance into the hearts of Radha and Krishna, by giving us an appreciation for protecting, loving, and serving Their cows.

When we chant *Hare*, we are praying for the service of Sri Radha, the supreme gopi. When we call out *Rama* and *Krishna*, we are crying out with the desire to serve and please Krishna. This is the very essence of our sankirtan movement — the chanting of the holy names of the Lord.

“Whatever our occupation or status in life, our true happiness and success lie only in pleasing Krishna.”

Source: Morning Bhagavatam class, 30th October 2025 — ISKCON Vrindavan Temple

Thank you very much. Hare Krishna.