Hare Krishna • Hare Krishna • Krishna Krishna • Hare Hare

WHEN COMPASSION CRIED SO LOUD THAT LORD APPEARED

The Glories of Sri Advaita Acharya

By His Holiness

SRILA RADHANATH SWAMI MAHARAJ

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Sri Radha Rasbihari Temple

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A Place of Pilgrimage

Notes from the class on Sri Advaita Acharya's appearance day

It is truly an honor and a blessing to be among all of you this evening. This temple of Radha Rasbihari is truly a place of pilgrimage — for wherever devotees carry the Lord in their hearts with pure love, and wherever they perform their loving service, that place becomes a place of pilgrimage.

More than almost any other place on earth, after Srila Prabhupada began his mission he spent time here, at the Radha Rasbihari temple in Mumbai. Even though Prabhupada had many fine temples in other places, with beautiful facilities and many supporters, he came to this place where there was nothing — where there was so much austerity, so many challenges and struggles — because Prabhupada understood how important this part of the world was.

Although devotees today like to speak of Prabhupada's struggles here, hardly anyone was willing to actually go through them with him. One of the very few who did, from the very beginning until the great and culminating victory, was His Holiness Giriraj Swami Maharaj.

Hearing and Chanting: The Foundation of Bhakti

One of the beautiful truths of bhakti is this: when we appreciate the surrender, love, and service of other devotees — *srnvatam sva-katha krsnah* — Krishna in our heart is pleased, and He gives us similar blessings even for what we ourselves did not do, simply because we genuinely and without envy celebrate the glorious devotional offerings of others.

Sravanam kirtanam vishnoh is the foundational principle of bhakti, and the very essence of sanatana-dharma: to hear and chant the glories of the Lord. The Bhagavad Gita holds the essential truth at the heart of all religion, and when Krishna speaks through Arjuna, He speaks to you and to me. This is what Prabhupada and the great acharyas throughout history have taught: we should not see the Gita only as an ancient philosophical masterpiece, but feel that in every verse, Krishna is present in our own heart. He knows everything about us — our past, present, and future, every thought, word, and action, in this birth and every birth to come.

The Krishna who spoke the Bhagavad Gita to Arjuna is the same Krishna speaking within our own heart even now. If we take this personally, we feel a real responsibility to follow what He says. It is said that of one to whom much has been given, much is expected. And according to how seriously we take this, and how earnestly we try to apply it in our lives, we can truly make progress in bhakti and attain prema-bhakti.

Ye yatha mam prapadyante — according to the sincerity, eagerness, and intention with which we surrender, and with which we reciprocate the mercy we receive from the Lord, Krishna reveals Himself accordingly. Whether we are giving a scholarly lecture on the Gita or simply caring for a little baby at home, if we genuinely try to take Krishna's teachings personally and apply them in our life, He reveals Himself to us, and we experience real realization and transformation.

The Mark of a True Sadhu

In Srimad-Bhagavatam it is said: *titiksavah karunikah suhrdah sarva-dehinam* — one who is tolerant and forgiving, who is genuinely merciful and compassionate, who feels the suffering of others and tries to make a difference, who sees everyone with equal vision on behalf of the Lord and is a well-wisher of all living beings — such a person, peaceful in this spirit, is a true sadhu, and receives the mercy of the Lord.

The Five Features of the Lord's Appearance

On the appearance day of Advaita Acharya, Chaitanya Charitamrita and so many writings of the Gaudiya parampara glorify him. Originally, he is Krishna Himself — *panca-tattvatmakam krishnam*, the Lord appearing in five features.

One of these features is the incarnation who takes the role of a devotee. Advaita is God Himself, taking the role of an acharya and devotee, teaching by word and example how people in this world can become free from the grip of egoism, envy, and passion, and attain the pure, undivided state of unalloyed bhakti.

In his *tattva*, Advaita Acharya is the combined form of Maha-Vishnu, Garbhodakashayi Vishnu, and Sadashiva — Sadashiva being the original personality of Lord Shiva in the spiritual world, and Maha-Vishnu the first purusha-avatara who creates the entire cosmic manifestation. From Maha-Vishnu expand Garbhodakashayi Vishnu and Kshirodakashayi Vishnu, and from these all the incarnations and avataras manifest. *Krsnas tu bhagavan svayam* — Maha-Vishnu is a plenary portion of a portion of a portion of Govinda, the original Supreme Personality, who eternally resides in Vaikuntha and in Goloka Vrindavan.

The Bell That Reminds Us of Time

The temple bell reminds us of what Krishna says in the Bhagavad Gita — that He is time itself. This bell rings every hour as a reminder from Krishna. With every hour, the entire creation moves one hour closer to its end, and at the same time, one hour closer to the Lord.

Srimad-Bhagavatam says that with every rising and setting of the sun, each of us — whoever we are, whatever we have or have not done — moves one day closer to death. But one who has developed a taste for hearing and chanting the glories of the Lord celebrates those glories life after life, and for such a person, every rising and setting of the sun brings them one day closer to eternal life. This is how Krishna reciprocates, and whether we grow closer to Him or drift further with each ringing of the bell at Radha Rasbihari temple is our own choice. The bell is calling us to come and be with the Lord, with Radharani and Rasbihari.

Advaita Acharya's Early Life

Maha-Vishnu and Sadashiva incarnated in this world especially to bring Lord Chaitanya here. Advaita Acharya was born in a village named Nabagram. When he was young, his parents — Kuvera Pandit and his wife, both brahmins and great, pure devotees of the Lord — departed from this world. He went to Gaya to perform their shraddha, and for some years afterward undertook pilgrimage to the holy places of India. During this time he lived in Vrindavan, where the Deity of Madan Gopal was revealed to him.

Advaita Acharya was then called by the Lord to return and settle on the banks of the Ganges, where he made his home in Shantipur. He married Sita Thakurani, an incarnation of the goddess of fortune.

Madhavendra Puri: Love Beyond Description

Our shastras contain many beautiful and enlightening stories of Advaita Acharya's life. While he was living in Shantipur, Krishna sent to him one of the greatest devotees ever to walk this world — Madhavendra Puri, who knew the inner secrets of Radha and Krishna's pastimes in the spiritual world and lived immersed in the feeling of love and separation from Krishna.

Chaitanya Charitamrita reveals that the intensity, completeness, and depth of Madhavendra Puri's ecstatic love could be understood by only three: Srimati Radharani, Lord Chaitanya, and Madhavendra Puri himself — no one else. In this ecstasy of love, seeing how people in this world were living and thinking, his heart broke with deep compassion for them.

Chaitanya Bhagavata tells us he traveled to all the holy places of pilgrimage, for when one truly loves Krishna, one's greatest joy is to be in the company of others who also love Krishna. As Prabhupada explains, in Goloka Vrindavan, Krishna is never alone, and Radha is never alone — They are always surrounded by loving association: the cows, the trees, and every fully conscious, self-realized, ecstatic lover of Krishna appearing in the forms of flowers, trees, birds, and gopas and gopis.

Searching for a Vaishnava

Wherever he went, Madhavendra Puri searched for a Vaishnava, yet practically no one in the world even knew what a Vaishnava truly was. He could not simply find one — he could barely find anyone who understood the meaning of the word. A Vaishnava is one who offers body, mind, words, and life in harmony, in the loving service of the Supreme Lord.

Advaita Acharya, too, longed and yearned for the company of devotees with whom to hear and chant. One day Madhavendra Puri came to his home, and the two spent the entire day and night praising each other's devotion, weeping and crying in ecstatic happiness while speaking the glories of Krishna and Radharani, sharing teachings, and chanting the holy names.

Although Advaita Acharya is Sadashiva Himself, he accepted Madhavendra Puri as his guru, receiving both siksha and diksha from him. And Madhavendra Puri, recognizing Advaita Acharya's true position as a devotee and lover of God, nonetheless offered him instruction, for the sake of the Lord's pastimes. Together they lived a life of great happiness.

Haridas Thakur and the Highest Honor

In time, because of their exalted qualities, Advaita Acharya and Sita Thakurani were unanimously recognized as leaders of the entire brahmin and Vaishnava community — pure, learned, compassionate, and empowered.

Haridas Thakur came to visit Advaita Acharya's home. Haridas Thakur was more humble than a blade of grass and more tolerant than a tree, respecting every being while never expecting any respect for himself, constantly chanting the holy name of the Lord and freely sharing that holy name with anyone who came to him. When Advaita Acharya welcomed and honored him, Haridas Thakur wondered how such an exalted leader and scholar could honor someone he considered a mere outcast. Yet they lived together in friendship.

When Advaita Acharya was performing shraddha for his ancestors — he, the very king of the brahmins — at the summit of that public ceremony, when the highest honor of receiving the first remnants was to be given to the most exalted person present, Advaita Acharya gave that honor to Haridas Thakur. Why does this event still matter so much today, remembered in Chaitanya Bhagavata and Chaitanya Charitamrita? Because it was utterly radical — a person of Advaita Acharya's position proclaiming the highest truth beyond all mundane, sectarian, and superficial conceptions of status, and giving the highest honor above all other brahmins to Haridas Thakur. This is because Advaita Acharya is *saragrahi* — one who sees only the essence.

Just as Krishna sees the essence of bhakti within us, just as Lord Ramachandra gave the highest honor to Hanuman, and Narayana gave the highest liberation to Gajendra, and later Lord Chaitanya and Nityananda gave the highest blessing to Jagai and Madhai — in every case, the Lord and His devotees were seeing the sincerity of surrender.

Advaita Acharya considered Haridas Thakur the Namacharya — the supreme teacher for the whole world, for all time to come, of how to attain the highest perfection through chanting the holy names of the Lord. Once, in the village of Phuliya, Haridas Thakur was offered the choice to chant the holy names privately, since chanting publicly would bring torture and death. He replied that he would rather have his body cut into a thousand pieces — for every piece of that body would still be glorifying the path of loving devotional service.

Compassion for Every Suffering Soul

Advaita Acharya lived in a beautiful home with a beautiful family, the most respected person of his community, experiencing the very highest ananda and the full potential of a soul's love in the role of a devotee. And yet, *para-duhkha-duhkhi* — this is the very nature of a soul with deep ecstatic love for Krishna: to feel every living being as dear as one's own child, for every soul in every species of life is the beloved child of Krishna.

Seeing people suffering, and being Sadashiva himself, Advaita Acharya perceived not only the suffering of every living being of his own time, but the suffering of every living being throughout the world, even today and tomorrow, in this age of Kali.

Death is inevitable for everyone, whether saint or otherwise — that is simply the nature of the body. But for Advaita Acharya, even those who were prosperous, healthy, and enjoying the very best of life stirred the same sorrow in his heart, because he knew it was only a matter of time before they too would suffer, deprived as they already were of the true happiness of the soul. Spiritually, he saw, we are all impoverished without love for Krishna.

We may be famous, with countless admirers, with power and wealth and remarkable intellect and skill — like Hiranyakashipu himself — yet none of these things can give even the slightest hint of happiness to the soul. Those who understand that we are eternal spiritual souls, who have tasted the sweetness of bhakti, are not envious of those who have more, nor arrogant toward those who have less.

Suhrdam sarva-bhutanam — one who realizes the soul beyond the ego, and who loves the Lord, becomes the well-wisher of everyone, meaning the well-wisher of every soul. Devotees never neglect the body and mind of others, but always in connection with the soul — that is where real help begins.

Seeing great scholars and poets, Advaita Acharya wept at their pitiable condition, bereft as they were of the soul's love for Krishna. His feeling was not only this — he longed to give the love of Krishna in this age of Kali, to spread the glories of the holy names, and to offer the very path by which the residents of Vrindavan love Krishna, a gift that only Radha and Krishna themselves could give.

The Fast and the Tears at the Ganges

Haridas Thakur would chant three hundred thousand names of Krishna each day, crying out for the Lord. Advaita Acharya would say that when someone offers water from Mother Ganges with a tulasi leaf, the Lord hears their prayer. So day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year, he sat on the banks of the Ganges in Shantipur with a Shalagram Shila, offering tulasi leaves and Ganges water, endless tears pouring from his eyes, crying out for Krishna to come. He fasted, vowing that until Krishna came to this world, he would continue fasting and begging the Lord, through the holy names, to appear.

The friendship, respect, and love between an outcast and the king of the brahmins — between Haridas Thakur and Advaita Acharya — became the very cause of Sri Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's descent into this world as the most munificent and magnificent of all incarnations: *namo maha-vadanyaya krsna-prema-pradaya te*.

The Appearance of Lord Chaitanya

When Lord Chaitanya appeared on Gaura Purnima, Advaita Acharya and Haridas Thakur together felt the special ecstasy of a prayer at last fulfilled.

It is a beautiful thing to remember, here at Radha Rasbihari temple, that when Srila Prabhupada was a little boy, he practiced for many months in a drama performed by his friends and classmates on the life of Lord Chaitanya. Prabhupada played the part of Advaita Acharya, crying and praying for Lord Chaitanya to appear in this world, weeping for the suffering of conditioned souls in this material existence. He played the role with such emotion that everyone in the audience wept along with him.

Prabhupada's Prayer on the Jaladuta

When Prabhupada was aboard the Jaladuta, with no disciples and no movement yet begun, he wrote a beautiful prayer in his diary — a prayer in the very spirit of Advaita Acharya and all the acharyas descending through our parampara. He had left Vrindavan for no other reason than the mission of Lord Chaitanya and Nityananda, and it was Advaita Acharya's prayers that form the very foundation of the prayers invoking that mission. Prabhupada prayed that Krishna would bring him His words, speak

through him, and give him the ability and the understanding to save people caught completely in the clutches of passion and ignorance — praying simply that everyone be happy.

We say “happy birthday,” and we are not against happiness — we are only identifying what real happiness actually is. A truly happy birthday is one in which we understand the very purpose of taking birth in this human form of life.

Advaita Acharya fasted, cried, and performed tapasya for our sake. In the same spirit, Prabhupada performed great tapasya for us in the Western world, driven by pure compassion and prayer, with complete faith in the words of his own guru maharaj to carry the teachings of Lord Chaitanya to the West, and complete faith that the holy name of Krishna has the power to give everyone the love of Krishna.

The Temple Built From Compassion

When His Holiness Giriraj Swami Maharaj was here with Prabhupada, Radha Rasbihari temple was a simple shed — so simple that even the poorest people of India had better accommodation — and it faced so many attacks and struggles. Yet out of his deep, profound, and personal compassion for us, Prabhupada prayed for a beautiful temple to be built here, to share the message of Lord Chaitanya and Lord Nityananda, and to offer the highest rasas of Vrindavan Dham through sadhu-sanga and the chanting of the holy names.

On the single day each year of Advaita Acharya's appearance, devotees throughout our sampradaya remember, glorify, worship, and meditate upon his supreme compassion.

Lord Shiva: The Example of the Greatest Vaishnava

Vaishnavanam yatha shambhuh — Lord Shiva is glorified as the greatest of all the Vaishnavas. During the churning of the ocean of milk, a deadly poison arose, so powerful that none of the demigods or demons could do anything about it. They approached Lord Vishnu, who said, “Let us go together to Mahadev, Lord Shiva” — for the Lord loves to see His devotee glorified.

Sukadeva Goswami says that the greatest service one can offer the Supreme Lord is the willingness to accept even suffering oneself in order to show compassion to others, and that the greatest compassion of all is to liberate a soul from the bondage of birth and death, offering everyone the unconditional prema and love of Krishna. Because of Lord Shiva's unconditional compassion and his willingness to make sacrifices for the well-being of others, he is considered the greatest Vaishnava.

Advaita Acharya is that very Sadashiva — the original personality from whom Lord Shiva incarnates — who worshipped the Lord for years with vratas, tulasi devi, and the waters of Mother Ganges. Advaita Acharya is the source of both Maha-Vishnu and Sadashiva, and Lord Shiva humbly takes on the role of the devotee Advaita Acharya, crying out to Radha and Krishna, who then come in the form of Gauranga Mahaprabhu. In the very same way, Prabhupada has manifested this same spirit of Advaita Acharya, and we are fortunate to receive it through him.

We also remember that same spirit of the great acharyas and Vedacharyas who have truly made this land of India transcendentally great. The knowledge, love, and compassion that flow from the hearts of India's avataras and saints is the true glory of India. May Advaita Acharya's mercy, love, and compassion bless us all, and may we receive it with a grateful heart.

"Where there is the greatest need, there is the greatest opportunity to serve — and where compassion cries loud enough, the Lord Himself appears."

Source: Evening class, 26th January 2025 — ISKCON Juhu, Sri Radha Rasbihari Temple, Mumbai

Thank you very much. Hare Krishna.