



Sri Krishna Kathamrita

Bindu

तव कथामृतं तसजीवनम्
tava kathāmṛtam tapta-jīvanam

Fortnightly email mini-magazine from Gopal Jiu Publications

Issue No. 27

23 April 2002

Śrī Kāmadā Ekādaśī, 26 Vishnu, 516 Gaurābda

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FOLLOW GURU; DON'T SPECULATE

Srila Gour Govinda Swami Maharaja

Whatever the guru has said, one should just execute it as it is, with no speculation. Not that, "Gurudeva has said this, and that's all right. But I may do like this, or it may be done in another way." No, no, no. Just do exactly what he said, as it is, with no speculation. There should be no addition and no subtraction. Execute it as it is, and then you can get the mercy of guru. Otherwise you cannot get his mercy. Disciple means under strict discipline. There is no slackness. It is very serious. The guru will inflict very strict discipline upon you. He will test you to see if you are a real disciple. Just as there are bona fide sadhus and gurus as well as bogus sadhus and gurus, similarly there are also bona fide and bogus disciples. Whoever does not strictly follow the instructions and directions of the guru, as it is, is a bogus disciple. He is a speculator. No matter how strict and severe the discipline inflicted by guru may be, one should ungrudgingly accept it, at any cost, even at the cost of your life. The guru will put you in such a test: "Let us see whether he is a bona fide disciple or a bogus disciple. Is he serious to get the mercy and understand Krishna, or not?" Strict discipline will be inflicted. The guru tests the disciple. Whenever a disciple approaches a guru, the guru will first say, "No, no, no. Get out! Get out! I don't accept disciples." Or he may say, "No, I cannot accept you. Go somewhere else." This is the guru's test.

If someone is serious, then what should he do in the face of such a test? He should not leave. He should stay with leech-like tenacity.

In the *Mahābhārata* there is the story of Ekalavya. Dronacharya was teaching archery. Ekalavya once approached him requesting to be his disciple. Ekalavya did not belong to a royal family. He was from a tribal family. When he requested, Dronacharya said, "No, no, no. You are not allowed. Get out of here." Ekalavya left, but he had the desire, "I must learn this thing." Dronacharya's dear disciple was Arjuna. Arjuna had received the full mercy of Dronacharya. Dronacharya promised that no one would be able to surpass Arjuna in archery. Arjuna was also a devotee of Lord Krishna. One who is a devotee of the Lord naturally gets the mercy of guru. And, *yasya prasādād bhagavat-prasādo* — one who gets the mercy of guru also gets the mercy of the Supreme Lord. Since Arjuna was a devotee he had both the mercy of his guru, Dronacharya, as well as of Krishna.

Because of the blessings of guru, it was not possible for anyone to surpass Arjuna. But Ekalavya thought, "No. I must excel him." So Ekalavya returned to the jungle and made a deity of Dronacharya out of clay. He established the deity and said, "This is my guru." He knew that without guru one cannot learn, so he made a deity of Dronacharya.

Ekalavya was a very expert person. He had some good material qualities, but mere material qualities are not qualities at all:

yasyāsti bhaktir bhagavaty akiñcanā
 sarvair guṇais tatra samāsate surāḥ
 harāv abhaktasya kuto mahad-guṇā
 manorathenāsati dhāvato bahiḥ

Śrīmad Bhāgavatam (5.18.12) says, “Automatically all good qualities manifest in that person who has developed unalloyed devotion unto Krishna. Even all the demigods manifest in his person. However, *harāv abhaktasya kuto mahad-guṇā* — one who is not a devotee of Hari has no good qualities at all.” By the material angle of vision he may have some good qualities, but they are not actually good qualities. He may appear to be a very expert person, but his so-called expertise is actually only speculation. *manorathenāsati dhāvato bahiḥ* — He is simply wandering here and there on a chariot of speculation concocted in the mind.

Ekalavya was like that. He was very expert, but he was speculating. Ekalavya stayed in the jungle, one *yojana*, eight miles, away from Hastinapura where Dronacharya was teaching archery to the Kauravas and Pandavas. Ekalavya cleared the trees from the jungle. He had such clear eyesight that from eight miles away he could see what Dronacharya was teaching and he would follow it. He became a great archer. He achieved such ability that he even surpassed Arjuna. Once, Dronacharya asked his disciples, the Kauravas and Pandavas, to go to the forest for hunting. Sometimes *kṣatriyas* go hunting. While out in the forest there was one dog who was going ahead of them. The dog disappeared for some time. Suddenly they saw the dog. He had seven arrows simultaneously pierced through his mouth. They thought, “Who has done this?” Then they met Ekalavya. It was he who had shot the arrows into the dog’s mouth. Arjuna could understand, “Oh, he is such a great archer! I could not have done this. He has surpassed me! But my guru has said that no one will be able to surpass me!” Then they asked Ekalavya, “Who is your guru?” He told them, “Dronacharya is my guru.” Arjuna then went back and informed Dronacharya that although Ekalavya was refused by you, he came to the jungle and has made a deity of you from clay and has learned such expert archery that he has shot seven arrows into the mouth of this dog. Dronacharya went there.

Ekalavya saw that his Gurudeva had come. He offered his obeisances and Dronacharya asked him, “Whose disciple are you?”

“I am your disciple.”

Dronacharya said, “All right. If you are my disciple, then give me *guru-dakṣinā* [a disciple’s gift to the guru, the traditional payment for the guru’s gift of knowledge].”

“I will give. What *guru-dakṣinā* do you want?”

“Cut off the thumb of your right hand and give it to me. That is the *dakṣinā*.” Immediately Ekalavya cut off the thumb of his right hand and gave it.

It seems that Ekalavya must be a great devotee of his guru. What the guru asked, he immediately gave. With his right thumb cut off he could not shoot arrows, so he could not surpass Arjuna. One may thus think, “Oh, this is Dronacharya’s partiality. He did this in order to make his dear disciple great.” One may also consider this to be due to the jealousy of Arjuna. He informed Dronacharya about this so Dronacharya came and asked for Ekalavya’s thumb as *dakṣinā*. One may think that this is enviousness on the part of Arjuna.

Such thinking is not good. This is the material consideration. But how is it that Ekalavya got such skill and how is it that a devotee like Arjuna became jealous? Is this bona fide? Is what’s been done correct or incorrect? If Ekalavya had no right to learn this skill, then how could he get it? That is not the issue. The point is that if Ekalavya had such *guru-bhakti*, and if he had the mercy of guru, then quite naturally he would also have the mercy of Krishna. But later on Ekalavya was killed by Krishna. How was it that he was killed by Krishna? The demons who are killed by Krishna get *sāyujya-mukti* [impersonal liberation]. Ekalavya got *sāyujya-mukti*. That means that Krishna was not pleased with him and Drona was not pleased. Nobody was pleased with him.

According to material calculation, one would say there is nothing wrong with Ekalavya. He was very devoted to his guru. When Dronacharya asked him to cut off his thumb for *dakṣinā*, he immediately gave it. Materialistic people cite this example and say, “We will become like Ekalavya. We will sit at home and make a *mūrti* of guru and get everything. Why should we go and get it directly from the guru’s lips? Why should we hear? This mentality is



Painting entitled: ekalavyera guru-dakṣiṇā, from a late 19th century Bengali edition of Mahābhārata. Left to right: Ekalavya, deity of Dronacharya, Dronacharya, Arjuna.

developing. Then speculation will develop, *nirviśeṣa-vāda*, impersonalism, will develop. This is the wrong in Ekalavya's behavior. How can a speculator become victorious? Ekalavya had no devotion, therefore Dronacharya told him, "Cut off your thumb." Dronacharya did this so that *nirviśeṣa-vāda* would not develop and become victorious.

Ekalavya had no devotion. Nobody can surpass a devotee. Arjuna is a devotee, but Ekalavya was not a devotee at all. When the fight took place between the Kauravas and the Pandavas, Ekalavya took the side of the Kauravas. He didn't take the side of the Pandavas, where Krishna was. So although he was not a devotee, he was posing as a devotee. Posing as a very devoted disciple. But inside he had the intention, "I will surpass Arjuna. I'll be greater than him. Dronacharya has refused me, but I will show him that I can surpass his dear disciple Arjuna." He had this pride, *ativādī*. Thinking themselves very great, this is *ativādī*. Therefore the *ativādī-sampradāya* is an *apa-sampradāya* [a non-bona fide disciplic line].

Nobody was pleased with Ekalavya. His guru was not pleased. He was killed by

Krishna so he got *sāyujya-mukti*. One who wants to surpass a *vaiṣṇava* commits an offense. Ekalavya had committed an offense and by cutting off his thumb this *nirviśeṣa-vāda* was checked. This is our *paramārthikavicāra* [spiritual consideration]. In the material field, everyone glorifies Ekalavya. However, he could not get the mercy of Dronacharya or Krishna. If you don't get the mercy of guru, how can you get the mercy of Krishna and how can you overcome *māyā*? You cannot. Never, never. Therefore one should serve the guru, please him, and get his mercy. Then you can overcome *māyā*. Then you can understand and approach Krishna. Otherwise you cannot.॥

— From a class on *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* 8.5.30 in Bhubaneswar. 20 April 1991.

EKALAVYA'S FAULT

Prabhupada Srila Saraswati Thakur

In his book of essays entitled Upākhyāne-upadeśa, "Instructions in Stories", Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur gives the following commentary on the story of Ekalavya. The translation from the original Bengali is by Sri Srimad Bhakti-caru Swami.

To many people, Ekalavya's devotion to his guru is ideal, but there is a special consideration. What was Ekalavya's fault? That should be considered. Wearing the mask of *guru-bhakti*, devotion to the guru, Ekalavya actually revolted against his guru. Whether his guru was actually considering him to be disqualified by birth in a low-class family, or was simply testing him — for whatever reason, when his gurudeva refused to teach him the art of *Dhanur-veda* [the scripture dealing with the science of warfare] it was Ekalavya's duty to accept the instruction of his spiritual master. But Ekalavya did not like that. He wanted to become great. Externally, without a guru his work would not be considered bona fide, or perhaps it was not possible to become great without accepting a guru. It was with these considerations that Ekalavya formed an imaginary or clay material form of the guru.

Actually, his main intention was to learn *Dhanur-veda* and become great. In this way he wanted to satisfy his own senses. He did not want to sacrifice himself to the will of his guru. That was not his honest desire.

Some may say that ultimately Ekalavya accepted the cruel order of his guru without a protest. But if we consider this issue more carefully and deeply we can see that Ekalavya considered mundane morality to be greater than transcendental devotion. It is a moral code that when the guru wants some *dakṣinā* one must offer it to him, and this sense of morality inspired Ekalavya to cut off his thumb. He did not offer it with spontaneous devotion. Otherwise he would have accepted the guru's first order.

The natural characteristic of devotion is that it is simple and spontaneous. If Ekalavya had unconditional and natural devotion for Hari, guru, and *vaiṣṇava*, then the guru, Dronacarya, the best of *vaiṣṇavas*, Arjuna, and Lord Hari, the Supreme Personality of Godhead Krishna, would not have been disappointed with his behavior. Ekalavya's endeavor to learn *Dhanur-veda* and his desire to become great were not accepted by his guru. In the core of Ekalavya's heart, he desired to become better than the best of *vaiṣṇavas*, Arjuna. The desire to become greater than the *vaiṣṇavas* is not devotion. It is non-devotional, and this is the principle of the *sahajyā-sampradāya*.

By mundane consideration, this kind of desire to become great is a good desire. But devotion is the effort to remain behind and

श्री कृष्णकथामूल बिन्दु॥

submissive to the *vaiṣṇavas*. Ekalavya wanted his skill to be greater than that acquired by learning the Vedic wisdom directly from a bona fide spiritual master. By reporting Ekalavya's skill to Drona, Arjuna showed Ekalavya his wrong approach to learning the Vedic science. If Arjuna had not mercifully pointed that out to him, then the glories of impersonalism would have prevailed. People would have created their imaginary, mundane, unconscious gurus, and learned different sciences and devotions, instead of approaching a bona fide guru.

So Arjuna took care that such an atheistic principle was not established. Therefore, Arjuna was not envious of Ekalavya. It was actually a manifestation of his causeless mercy toward Ekalavya and the whole world. If Ekalavya had been an unalloyed devotee of his guru, then Krishna would not have destroyed such an earnest disciple. Krishna always protects His devotees. But finally Ekalavya was killed by the hand of Krishna. Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu said that we cannot judge a devotee just by seeing his external austerities. The demons also perform austerities. Even demigods cannot perform austerities as much as the demons. [Cb. madhya 23.46]

Ekalavya wanted to become greater than a *vaiṣṇava*, against his guru's desire. That is why he was killed by Krishna and ultimately attained impersonal liberation. Only the demons are killed by Krishna. Devotees are always protected by Him. Hiranyakasipu and Prahlada are the proof. Therefore we should never try to become greater than *vaiṣṇavas* and thus, wearing a mask of *guru-bhakti*, actually become impersonalists. That is what we should learn from the example of Ekalavya. Proficiency in performing activities is not a symptom of devotion to the guru, or *guru-bhakti*. *Bhakti* means to remain subordinate and submissive to the Lord's loving servants, the *vaiṣṇavas*.

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a free bi-monthly service provided by:

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