



तव कथामृतं तप्तजिवनम्
tava kathāmṛtaṁ tapta-jīvanam

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Highlights

- ADDRESSING THE DEVOTEES PROPERLY
His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada
- THE PRISTINE CHARACTER OF JADA-BHARAT, PART 3
From the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, canto 2, Chapters 13 and 14
- THE QUALIFICATION TO HEAR



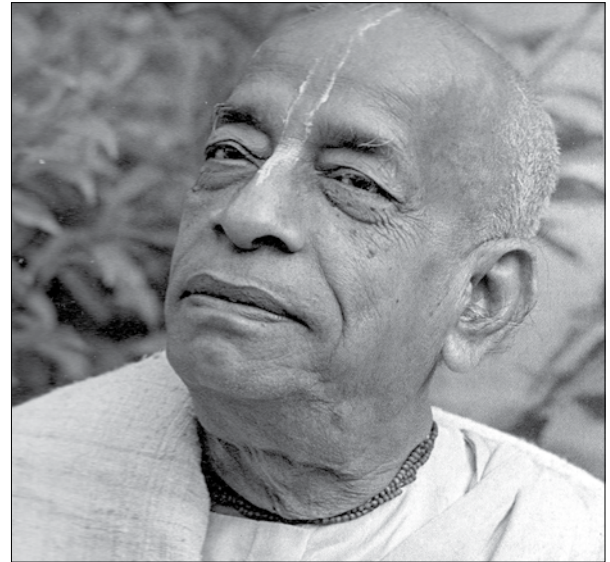
ADDRESSING THE DEVOTEES PROPERLY

*His Divine Grace A. C.
Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada*

I am very sorry that he has assumed such an air of importance. We should always remember that we are on the path of perfection but we are not perfect. If he or anyone thinks that he has attained perfection he will be wrongly directed. I have asked you all to address your godbrothers as *prabhu*. This *prabhu* means boss. If every one of us thinks of his fellow workers as boss then there is no question of misunderstanding. The mistake is that being addressed as boss or *prabhu* one thinks himself as exactly *prabhu* or the boss. One should not forget himself as a humble servant even though he is addressed as *prabhu*.

The spiritual master is offered respect as respects are offered to the Supreme Lord. Unfortunately if the spiritual master thinks that he has become the Supreme Lord then he is doomed. A bona fide spiritual master always thinks of himself as a servant of the Lord. One should never forget to be humble in dealings. If every one of us would conduct our business in that spirit of *prabhu* and servant then there is very little chance of being misunderstood. Sometimes misunderstandings may take place, but it should be adjusted in the spirit of service attitude to the *prabhu*. (Letter to Nandarani, 28 November 1967.)

I do not know why our students who are supposed to be the leaders of this movement will fight amongst themselves for supremacy. Our whole process is of surrendering. We are taught to address others as *prabhu*.



His Divine Grace

A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

Prabhu means master, and the leader of the masters is called *prabhupāda*. So if the *prabhus* have surrendered to the *prabhupāda* why shall there be such mentality of occupying the superior position? This is contradictory. Kindly stop this unnecessary misunderstanding. (Letter to Bali Mardan and Upendra, 10 May 1970.)

Advanced devotees never disobey or disrespect another devotee. Disrespect to another devotee is a great offense. *Vaiṣṇava-aparādha* is a very serious offense. Therefore we teach to address amongst the devotees, "such and such *Prabhu*". This should not be simply spoken by the lips. It should be realized. Everyone should think of the other devotee as his *prabhu*, master. (Lecture on *Nectar of Devotion*, 23 October 1972.)

THE PRISTINE CHARACTER OF JADA-BHARAT, PART 3

From the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, Canto 2, Chapters 13 and 14

Hearing these instructions, the king requested Jada-bharat to explain in more detail. With humility, the king said to the brahmin Jada-bharat, “O lord! The spiritual instructions that you have just imparted has caused some confusion to my mental disposition. I am confident that the single non-dual ingredient beyond material nature which pervades all living entities is none other than *brahman*.

My mind is eager to know what you just said about you not being the carrier of the palanquin and about your body being different from yourself. You said that the living entities are inclined to perform material activity only by the influence of the three modes of material nature. So how, then, can I be considered the doer? Please tell me, for by listening to your talks my mind has become extremely eager to inquire about the highest spiritual goals of life.

O twice born! I am already en route to meet Kapila Muni in order to ask him about benefits that can be obtained by souls in the human form of life in this material world. However, in the middle of my journey, your words have attracted my mind towards you for hearing of the absolute truth. O twice born! This Kapila Muni is none other than the expansion of the all-pervading Supreme Lord. In order to rid the world of its illusion, he has accepted this form on earth. However, by listening to you speak such words to me, I feel that the same Lord Kapila has appeared in your form for my benefit. Therefore, O twice born! Please tell me what will be to my benefit, for you appear to be a great ocean of all sciences.”

Jada Bharat replied, “O King! Do you wish to ask about material benefits or the absolute truth? O ruler of earth! Material benefits are all devoid of spirituality. For the man who worships the demigods and desires sons, wealth and resources, the ultimate benefit for him are these objects. According to the Vedas, performing sacrifices to attain the heavenly planets is also the goal of life. However, the real welfare of the soul lies in not desiring the fruits of such actions. Therefore, O King, those who practice yoga should meditate on the Supersoul, who is beyond the material nature, for meeting the Supersoul is the ultimate aim of life.

There are many so-called goals of life, but they are not the ultimate goals. Now listen to me as to what

the ultimate goal is. If wealth is the ultimate goal, then why is it recommended to give it up in charity while performing acts of *dharma*? Why is wealth spent on obtaining one’s desired goals? Therefore, earning wealth cannot be the highest goal of life.

O King among men! If obtaining a son is considered the goal of life, then that is equally applicable to the father, for the father is also a son to another father, who is also a son to another father and so on. Thus this too is not the goal of life.

If the attainment of a great kingdom is considered the goal of life, sometimes it may be obtained and at other times it may be lost. Therefore the goal of life will also be transitory. Therefore, this too cannot be the ultimate goal.

One may consider the sacrifices conducted according to the *Ṛk*, *Yajus* and *Sāma-veda* as the goal of life. Then just as an object made out of mud is ultimately mud, similarly any sacrifice performed with temporary ingredients like wood, ghee, straw, etc., as used in such sacrifices, will also lead to temporary fruits.

Regulated duties devoid of fruitive desires (*niṣkāma-karma*) cannot be the goal of life, for such duties are only a means (*sādhana*) and never the goal (*sādhya*). Meditating on the difference between the soul and other temporary objects also cannot be the goal of life, for the ultimate goal has no duality.

The union of the soul and the Supersoul cannot be the goal of life, for if they are different then there can never be a union, and if they are the same then there cannot be any separation.

Therefore, O King, listen from me as to what is the ultimate goal of life. The soul is singular, all-pervading, equipoised, pure, devoid of material qualities, and beyond the scope of material nature. It is beyond birth, growth, dwindling, etc., and it is all pervading as well as immutable. It is full of knowledge. It has never come in contact with any material objects and will never come into such contact. That soul, although present in the different bodies of animals and humans, is essentially one. This special knowledge is actually the goal of life. Those who are dualists are unable to understand this ultimate goal of life.

Just as the same wind passes through different holes of the flute and produces the seven basic notes of music, similarly the same all-pervading soul appears to take on many forms [e.g. humans, demigods, etc.]. These different forms of the soul have occurred due to differences in inclination towards material activity. When these designations such as demigod, human, etc., cease to

exist, the soul exhibits its pure nature. The domain of the material is only as long as ignorance pervades.”

After this, seeing that the king was deep in philosophical thought, Jada Bharat narrated to him an ancient history regarding the great sage Ribhu and Nidagha to dispel his illusion. Thus, on hearing these instructions and narrations, the king became liberated in that very life. One who listens to this narration faithfully becomes eligible to be liberated in all situations. 🙏

— Translated adapted by Hari Parshad Das from the Hindi Translation published by Motilal Jalan, Gita Press, Gorakhpur.

THE QUALIFICATION TO HEAR

Śrīmad Bhāgavatam 2.8.4 describes:

*śṛṇvataḥ śraddhayā nityam grṇataś ca sva-ceṣṭitam
kālena nātīdirgheṇa bhagavān viśate hṛdi*

Persons who hear *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* regularly and are always taking the matter very seriously will have the Personality of Godhead Sri Krishna manifested in their hearts within a short time.

One may ask, however, “Why is it that some people easily understand after hearing something while others don’t?” What is the qualification to hear? If one contemplates on the matter, one will understand that gaining divine knowledge through hearing is not a cheap, easy thing. In his *Prema-bhakti-candrikā* (2.8), Srila Narottam Das Thakur writes, *śunile nā śuna kāna* — hearing, but the sound doesn’t enter the ear.

In this age of instant communication, we expect immediate answers to our questions. From nearly anywhere in the world we can google from our cell phones and in seconds find out whatever facts we are interested in. Moreover, there are hundreds of translations of *vaiṣṇava* literatures available today, including descriptions of intimate and esoteric pastimes of Krishna and the *gopīs*. The temptation is there to dive into such literatures, thinking, “Simply by reading these books I can gain some entrance into the *līlās* and/or become famous as a learned preacher.” However, there is a difference between information and realized knowledge. Knowledge without realization simply brings pride.

After the disappearance of Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakur, his dear son, Srila Saraswati Thakur, saw that some persons were trying to gain spiritual understanding by empiric reading of the writings of his father. To correct their misunderstanding he compiled an article entitled, “*Thakur Bhaktivinoda*” which was published in the December 1931 issue of the *Harmonist* magazine. The following is a short excerpt:

There have, however, already arisen serious misunderstandings regarding the proper interpretation of the life and teachings of Srila Thakur Bhaktivinoda. Those who suppose they understand the meaning of his message without securing the guiding grace of the *ācārya* are disposed to unduly favor the methods of empiric study of his writings.

... It is not empiric wisdom that is the object of quest of the devotee. Those who read the scriptures for gathering empiric wisdom will be pursuing the wild goose chase. There are not a few dupes of their empiric scriptural erudition. These dupes have their admiring under-dupes. But the mutual admiration society of dupes does not escape, by the mere weight of their number, the misfortunes due to the deliberate pursuit of the wrong course in accordance with the suggestions of our lower selves.

In the *Bhagavad-gītā*, 4.34, Krishna explains to Arjuna what is *śravaṇa-adhikāra*, the qualification to hear:

*tad viddhi praṇipātena pariprasnena sevayā
upadekṣyanti te jñānam jñāninas tattva-darśinaḥ*

Just try to learn the truth by approaching a spiritual master. Inquire from him submissively and render service unto him. The self-realized souls can impart knowledge unto you because they have seen the truth.

Srila Ramanujacharya comments on this verse: *praṇipāta-pariprasna-sevādibhir viśadākāram jñānibhyo viddhi* — “You will learn this divine knowledge from wise men by *praṇipāta*, offering obeisances to them, *pariprasna*, submissively inquiring from them, and by *sevā* — serving them.” These three items are required for one to have *śravaṇa ādhikāra*, the qualification to hear and deeply understand.

In his *Sārārtha-varṣiṇī ṭīkā* on the same *Gītā* verse, Srila Viswanath Chakravarti Thakur offers a similar explanation:

*taj-jñāna-prāptaye prakāram āha tad iti. praṇipātena
jñānopadeṣṭari gurau daṇḍavan-namaskāreṇa. bhagavan! kuto
'yam me saṁsāraḥ? katham nivartisyate? iti pariprasnena ca.
sevayā tat-paricaryayā ca*

“This verse speaks of the method for attaining divine knowledge. It is gained by offering respects, bowing down to the guru, and by asking questions such as, ‘O master! Why am I in this world of misery? How will I be relieved from this world of birth and death?’ That knowledge is attained by service to the guru.”

Knowledge of the spirit soul and the Lord is not the same as ordinary mundane knowledge we acquire in the university. At the university we master a book, but in spiritual life we must serve the book — the *Bhagavad-gītā* and *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* are direct manifestations of the Lord. In *Caitanya-bhāgavata*



Yudhisthir hears from Bhishmadev

(antya 3.532) Srila Vrindavan Das Thakur has written, *dui sthāne bhāgavata-nāma śuni-mātra* — there are two *bhāgavatas*, the book *Bhāgavata* and the *bhakta*, devotee *bhāgavata*. We serve the book *Bhāgavata* by hearing from the *bhakta-bhāgavata*. Krishna tells Arjuna in the *Ādi Purāṇa* (quoted in *Cc. madhya* 11.28):

*ye me bhakta-janāḥ pārtha na me bhaktās ca te janāḥ
mad-bhaktānām ca ye bhaktās te me bhakta-tamā matāḥ*

“Those who are my direct devotees are actually not my devotees, but those who are devotees of my servant are factually my devotees.”

Kuresh, the famous, intimate disciple of Srila Ramanujacharya once asked his guru the meaning of the well-known *Bhagavad-gītā* verse 18.66:

*sarva-dharmān parityajya mām ekaṁ śaraṇam vraja
ahaṁ tvā sarva-pāpēbhyo mokṣayiṣyāmi mā śucaḥ*

“Abandon all varieties of religion and just surrender unto me. I will deliver you from all sinful reactions. Do not fear.”

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Ramanuja replied to him, “A person who gives up all independent desires and serves his guru absolutely for an entire year can fully understand the meaning of this verse, and no one else.”

“But life is so uncertain,” said Kuresh, “How can I know whether or not I will live for another year? Please bestow your mercy upon me by making the meaning of the verse manifest in my heart even now.”

Ramanuja considered his request for a while and then replied, “If you live for one month by begging alms from door to door, without knowing where your next meal will come from, then you will begin to realize the meaning of full surrender. At that time, I will instruct you in all the meanings of this glorious verse.”

For one month Kuresh lived as his guru had instructed. When the month had passed, he gained realized knowledge from Ramanuja about the nature of surrender to Krishna.

We should understand the difference between information collection and gaining realized knowledge. The latter only comes through offering respect, submissive inquiries, and rendering service to a devotee and not by mere reading. Srila Prabhupada once described:

Just like some rascals say, “What is the use of accepting a guru?” Of course, they have got very bad experience. ...It is not that, “If I like I can go to a guru, and if I don’t like I can study books at home and learn everything.” No, that is not possible. It is practical. Just like if you purchase a medical book, study at home, and then begin to practice, you will be called a quack. The government will not recognize you. ...Similarly, someone may say, “I have read *Bhagavad-gītā* a hundred times.” But if you ask him what is Krishna he cannot say because he has not approached the *ācārya*. This is the difficulty. He might have read *Bhagavad-gītā* a thousand times but he will not understand a single word because he has not approached. (From a lecture in Mumbai on 5 October 1973.) — MD

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