

# *Upākhyāne Upadeśa*

*Vol - 2*



Instructive Stories with Purports by

Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura

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## Introduction

Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura wrote a book of essays in Bengali that was published in 1936 by the Gaudiya Mission. The book was entitled *Upākhyāne Upadeśa Vol - 2* which translates as “Instructions in Stories Vol - 2.” This booklet contains a selection of those stories, which have been translated into English.

The editors of this booklet have taken some creative liberty to embellish the stories for one or both of the following purposes: (i) to provide a brief summary of the backstory where it seemed relevant for readers that may not be familiar with the Mahabharata or other popular Vedic references; (ii) to offer a seamless flow of language that a literal translation from Bengali did not always afford. In either case, however, care has been taken not to deviate from the purport of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura.

We hope that the readers of this booklet will find these stories inspiring and instructive, coming directly from the lion guru, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura.

# 1. “I am Great” Vs. “I am Good”

A terrible fight once ensued between the demigods and the demons. When the demigods finally defeated the demons, they were greatly elated. It was with the influence of the energy of the Supreme Lord that the demigods had won the battle against the demons. However, the demigods became forgetful of the mercy of the Supreme Lord and began to feel proud of their victory. They began to think that they had won the battle by virtue of their own strength and military skill. Soon, they started to embezzle the honor and glory bestowed upon them by the common mass.

The Supreme Personality of Godhead decided to dispel their pride and appeared before them. When the demigods saw the Lord, they could understand that this was a great personality. However, they failed to recognize the Lord even though He was standing right in front of them.

The demigods decided amongst themselves that Agni<sup>1</sup> would represent them in front of this great personality. They requested Agni, “Please go and ask about the identity of this great personality who is present before us.” Agni agreed and approached the great personality, who asked him, “Who are you?” Agni replied, “I am Agni. I am the renowned Jātaveda.” The Supreme Lord asked Agni, “What power do you possess?” With great pride, Agni replied, “I can turn anything in this world into ashes in an instant.” Hearing this, the Lord placed a blade of grass in front of the fire god and said to him, “Burn this.” Agni looked at the grass and applied his full strength. Amazingly, the blade of grass failed to burn at all! Disheartened, Agni returned to the demigods and said to them, “I was not able to find out who this great personality is.”

Next, the demigods sent Vāyu, the wind God, to the Great Personality. When Vāyu came before the Lord, the Lord asked him, “Who are you?” Vāyu replied, “I am Matriśva.” The Lord asked Vāyu, “What power do you possess?” Vāyu responded proudly, “I can blow and take away anything in this world.” The Lord then placed a blade of grass near Vāyu and told him to take it. The wind God, with all his might, blew and blew but he could not even budge the blade of grass by the width of a single hair. Distraught, Vāyu returned to the demigods and said to them despondently, “I was not able to find out who this great man is.”

After this, the demigods decided to send Devarāja<sup>2</sup> to inquire about the identity of this Great Personality. As soon as Indra approached the Great Personality, He disappeared. Indra then saw the most beautiful Umādevī appear in the sky. Indra approached her and asked, “My dear goddess Umādevī, who is that most splendid personality that was just here?” Umādevī replied, “That is (Para)Brahman. In His victory, you have been glorified. It is He who empowers

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<sup>1</sup> Demigod of fire

<sup>2</sup> Indra, the King of heaven

you to do everything. When He withdraws His empowerment, all of you become powerless. The Supreme Brahman is the original proprietor of all your prowess and skill, heroism and ability. He is the orchestrator and you are only His instruments. Whenever you think that you are doing everything on your own strength, He takes away all your might.”

Śrī Hari-*Guru-Vaiṣṇava* withdraw the ability and skills of those who disregard the power of *Guru* and Kṛṣṇa, and embezzle their material gain, worship, or establishment. When the living entity engages his skills and ability in the service of the Lord, he is enlightened by abundant mercy. Whenever they cherish pride against *Guru* and *Vaiṣṇava*, then the living entity faces destruction. The Supreme Personality of Godhead is the exclusive source of all energy and therefore deserves all the manifestation of any opulence, along with gain, worship and honors.

*pratiṣṭhāśā-taru, jaḍa-māyā-maru,  
nā pela 'rāvaṇa' yujhiyā 'rāghava'  
vaiṣṇavī pratiṣṭhā, tāte koro niṣṭhā,  
tāhā nā bhajile labhibe raurava*

—Duṣṭa-Mana, Verse 3

Rāvaṇa was so enamored with fame that he wanted to occupy the seat of Lord Rāmacandra. He was so audacious that he thought he would defeat Lord Rāmacandra in a fight. But rather than meeting with a glorious end, he perished instead. When a living entity becomes proud of his skill, ignoring the power of the Lord, he gets such a reward. Therefore, by offering all gains, worship and honors at the lotus feet of Śrī Hari-Guru-Vaiṣṇava, without usurping them, one should engage in devotional service toward Guru and Kṛṣṇa as a menial servant. In this way, one can best utilize the abilities given to him by the Lord.

Reciting this anecdote, Jagadguru Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura Goswāmī Mahārāja advises us to always cherish such sincere feelings in the heart, “I am a menial servant, an insignificant living entity, completely depended upon the mercy of Guru and Kṛṣṇa. They are the controller and I am a mere instrument. When one renounces the idea of 'great-I-ness'—that is, 'I am the doer, I am the enjoyer, I can do everything on my own account'—one will attain the position of 'I am good'. Independent mindedness and arrogance itself are 'great-I-ness'. On the contrary, carefully placing oneself under the constant guidance of the disciplic succession with the sincerest desire for showers of mercy, while endeavoring for self-purification, is 'good-I-ness'.

## 2. Lord Brahmā, Indra, and Virocana

Lord Brahmā was once glorifying a self-realized person. He said, “The soul is a substance beyond sin, piety, old age, grief, hunger, thirst, *saṅkalpa*, or *vikalpa*. Only one who searches for the soul—in accordance with the scriptures and instructions of a bonafide acharya—realizes

the soul. Such a person is glorified by all glories. Unlimited universes pursue him with all opulence to serve him.”

Both the demigods and the demons heard, directly or indirectly, Lord Brahmā’s glories of a self-realized person and began discussing it amongst themselves. They considered, “Lord Brahmā said that all opulences wait to serve one who realizes the soul. So, what is the harm in searching after that soul?” Contemplating in this way, Indra amongst the demigods and Virocana from the demons set out to meet Lord Brahmā.

Although they were both traveling to Lord Brahmā’s abode with the same goal, they began to envy one another rather than becoming congenial with each other. Finally, they both reached Lord Brahmā’s abode and, with firewood in their hand, came before him. Both of them began to observe a strict vow of celibacy for thirty-two years while they stayed in the house of their *guru*, Lord Brahmā. One day, Lord Brahmā asked them, “Why are you staying here?” They replied, “You had once said, ‘All opulence comes under the control of one who experiences the soul in the lotus of one's heart.’ Hearing this great glorification from you, we have come to you to find that immortal soul”.

Lord Brahmā said to them, “Giving up lust and desire to enjoy matter, great yogīs view the Personality in their eyes. He is that soul. He is that Supreme Person who is free from grief and who is the repository of fearlessness and immortality.” Not understanding the instruction of Lord Brahmā, Indra and Virocana asked, “Oh Gurudeva! Which reflection of us is the soul? Is it our reflection in the water or in the mirror?” Lord Brahmā then deliberately said, “That soul can be searched inside matter. After seeing your respective souls by looking into a pot filled with water, you can ask me whatever it is that you do not still understand.”

Indra and Virocana each looked into a pot filled with water with concentrated minds. Neither of them asked Lord Brahmā anything. Then, Lord Brahmā asked them, “What are you seeing?” They replied, “Gurudeva, we are seeing the soul and its replica from hair to nails.” Lord Brahmā then said, “By decorating yourselves with excellent divine clothing and ornaments, and after cutting your hair and nails, look into the pot filled with water again.” Each of them followed Lord Brahmā’s instructions. Again, neither of them asked anything. Then Lord Brahmā asked them, “What are you seeing now?” They answered, “We are seeing the replica of a soul whose hair and nails are cut off and it is nicely decorated with clothes and ornaments.” Hearing their response, Lord Brahmā could understand that they were not able to realize the truth about the soul. They would be able to realize the soul in due course of time. Thinking in this way, Lord Brahmā said to them, “He himself is the soul. He is an immortal, fearless Brahman”. Hearing Lord Brahmā’s explanation, Indra and Virocana prepared to leave for their respective homes. As they were leaving, Lord Brahmā said, “Both of you are leaving without realizing the soul. Whoever learns the truth about soul from either of you, whether demigods or demons, will deviate from the real path.”

Virocana, the king of the demons, went home to them with a peaceful heart. There, he taught the demons, “This body is a soul. In this world, this body is worshipable. Serving this

body alone is enough. One can achieve this world and the world beyond this world by serving the body.” This kind of adverse doctrine that ‘materialism is the purpose of all scriptures’ has been propagated based on Virocana’s advice, and this philosophy continues to persist to date. Demonic people are indoctrinated with such misconceptions. They think, “If the corpse of a deceased person is decorated with perfume, garland and ‘divine’ clothing, he becomes happy in the next world.”

On the other hand, when Indra was returning home to heaven, he was contemplating Lord Brahmā’s words again and again. He reasoned, “There must be a secret in the instructions of Lord Brahmā. He must have instructed us in a particular way to make us understand that the reflection in that pot of water is not the real and eternal substance. Therefore, to search for the eternal substance, I must exclusively surrender unto him and hear his instructions again.”

Thinking in this way, Indra returned to Lord Brahmā with firewood in his hand. Lord Brahmā said, “Oh Indra! You left with Virocana just a while ago with a satisfied heart. Why have you come back again?” Indra said, “O Master! After cutting the hair and nails and after decorating the body with divine clothing, the reflection looked the same. If the body is blind or if the hands and legs of a body are amputated, then the reflection also looks like that. If the body is sick, the reflection will also look sick. If the body is destroyed, then the reflection will also be destroyed. Therefore, there is no benefit of knowing this reflection or shadow. That reflection can never be the soul. I am considering these aspects.” Lord Brahmā said, “Hey Indra! Whatever you have said is correct. I will teach you the knowledge of the soul. You could not understand the significance of this knowledge earlier. Therefore, stay here for another thirty-two years and continue hearing.”

Indra took up the vow of staying in his *guru*’s house. After thirty-two years, Lord Brahmā instructed Indra, “He who roams around getting worshiped in a dream is the soul. He is the destroyer of all fear. He is immortal or Brahman”. Hearing this instruction from Lord Brahmā, Indra departed with a happy heart. However, on his way to heaven, he began reasoning in his mind, “If someone is blind while awake and then sees himself in a dream, then is such a seeing true? What is the benefit of knowing a personality as a soul in a dream?” Confused, Indra returned to Lord Brahmā again, with firewood in his hand. He told Lord Brahmā about his contemplations. Lord Brahmā again instructed Indra to stay with him for another thirty-two years and hear from him. At the end of those thirty-two years, Lord Brahmā said to Indra, “The soul which reveals itself at the time of dormancy, He is the vanquisher of all fear. He is immortal or Brahman.” Indra was satisfied by Lord Brahmā’s words and began returning to heaven. Again, he began thinking about Lord Brahmā’s statement on his way home and a doubt arose in his mind. He again came before Lord Brahmā with firewood in hand and said, “*Gurudeva*, at the time of dormancy, if he who becomes effulgent by his own glory is the soul, then, why does the sense of “I”—which otherwise exists eternally—get blocked in the awakened and dreaming state? You have said that the soul has its own eternal form.” Lord Brahmā then instructed Indra to stay for yet another five years. At the end of those five years, Lord Brahmā instructed Indra as follows, “The soul, in reality, is embodied. A body with five

gross elements and another dreamlike body called the *liṅga-śarīr*<sup>3</sup>—these are the two coverings of the soul.”

*evam evaiṣa samprasādo'smāc charīrāt  
samutthāya paraṁ jyoti-rūpa-sampadya  
svena rūpenābhiniṣpadyate sa uttamaḥ puruṣaḥ  
sa tatra paryeti jakṣan kṛīdan ramamāṇaḥ*

—Chāndogya Upaniṣad, 8.12.3

*"The jīva, upon attaining liberation, elevates himself out of his gross and subtle material bodies and shining with transcendental brilliance obtains his own supramundane, spiritual form. Such a liberated soul is the best among men. He relishes his presence in the spiritual realm, enjoying transcendental activities and absorbing himself in divine bliss."*

Since he was fully surrendered, Indra stayed in the house of his *guru*, Lord Brahmā, and heard the instructions from his *guru*. In this way, he could realize the truth and became successful.

This anecdote from the Upaniṣad demonstrates that even after approaching a bonafide *guru* like Lord Brahmā—who is the first spiritual master of the world—two different disciples who harbor different material desires can realize the purport of a bonafide *guru*'s instructions in two completely different ways. The king of the demons, Virocana, without understanding the real meaning of the instructions of Lord Brahmā, promoted a false doctrine on the name of his *guru* in the garb of ‘opinion of *guru*’ or ‘opinion of scriptures.’ This is diametrically opposed to the real teaching. Many demons accepted his opinion and it is still happening today.

Indra, on the other hand was patient with a spirit of submission, enquiry, and service, and in this way, practiced the truth of self-realization. Until the time that he had completely heard the truth from Lord Brahmā, he did not mistakenly think, ‘I have understood everything that my *Gurudeva* has said.’ With this mindset, he was not very eager to lord it over the demoniac society. Only that disciple who has surrendered to the lotus feet of *guru* can actually realize the truth of the self. Even after approaching a bonafide spiritual master, showing acts of surrender, making enquiries, and carrying firewood in hand as a symbol of service, if one harbors material desires in the heart, then one can become a promoter of a doctrine that is actually opposed to what a *guru* instructs. A mango tree and a neem tree may be situated in the same bank of the river Gaṅgā, and drink the same water from the Gaṅgā. Yet, a mango tree produces sweet fruit while a neem tree produces bitter fruit. In either case, there is no fault on the part of the Gaṅgā water; there is no miserliness in her charity. Based on the qualification of the receptacle, different kinds of fruits are produced. Similarly, the same bonafide *guru* may have some disciples who become genuine learned transcendentalists, and knowers of the truth of Kṛṣṇa. And yet, some of the same *guru*'s disciples may become promoters of doctrines opposed to his teachings, and who may try to destroy the conclusion of pure devotional service.

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<sup>3</sup> Subtle body

Both Śrīla Īśvara Purī and Rāmacandra Purī came to Śrīla Mādhavendra Purī Goswāmī, who is the root of the desire tree of love of the Supreme God. Both of them got *sannyāsa* initiation from him. But Rāmacandra Purī pretended that he was getting the mercy of such a bonafide spiritual master. So, he was deprived of the means of devotion and became a *nirviśeṣavādi*.<sup>4</sup> Śrīla Īśvara Purī received the real mercy. In other words, he was completely surrendered to the lotus feet of his spiritual master.

*sei haite īśvara-puṛī — ‘premera sāgara’  
rāmacandra-puṛī haila sarva-nindā kara  
mahad-anugraha-nigrahera ‘sūkṣī’ dui-jane  
ei dui-dvāre śikhāilā jaga-jane*

—Caitanya Caritamrita, Anta-lila 8.31-32.

*“Thus, Īśvara Purī became like an ocean of ecstatic love for Kṛṣṇa, whereas Rāmacandra Purī became a dry speculator and a critic of everyone. Īśvara Purī received the blessing of Mādhavendra Purī, whereas Rāmacandra Purī received a rebuke from him. Therefore, these two persons, Īśvara Purī and Rāmacandra Purī, are examples of the objects of a great personality’s benediction and punishment. Mādhavendra Purī instructed the entire world by presenting these two examples.”*

### 3. Nāciketā

In an ancient time, there lived a king named Bajasrava Auddalika, who had a son named Nāciketā. Although Nāciketā was just a small boy, he was extremely intelligent and truthful beyond his years. King Auddalika once performed a *Viśvajit-yajña*, in which he gave away all his belongings in charity in the hopes of attaining heavenly destinations in return. For this sacrifice, one day, King Auddalika was preparing to offer some dry<sup>5</sup> cows in alms.

Nāciketā saw this, and considered regrettably, "Whoever gives these unusable cows as alms will surely go to the abode of unhappiness (hell)." He approached his father respectfully and asked him, "My dear father, to whom will you give me in charity?" The king did not reply immediately. Nāciketā asked him again. Again, his father remained silent. Nāciketā asked the same question a third time. This time, king Auddalika became irate and retorted, "I will give you to Yamarāja!"

Hearing this response from his father, Nāciketā began to consider in solitude, "I am the first among my father’s sons who would go to the mouth of death and I am the middle one amongst many of those who have already gone to the mouth of death. Therefore, whether first

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<sup>4</sup> An impersonalist

<sup>5</sup> Those cows who can no longer produce milk or calves.

or later, what is for certain is that I am going to the abode of death. I wonder what extraordinary feat Yamarāja has that my father wants to achieve by engaging me in the service of Yamarāja!"

Thinking in this way, Nāciketā said to his father, "I have been thinking about how our ancestors went to the abode of death. Following them, their descendants will also one day go to the abode of death. This phenomenon is just like the seasonal crops, which are born again in due course of time. Therefore, I feel no sorrow to go to death's abode." Saying this, in order to maintain the integrity of his father's words, Nāciketā gladly went to the abode of Yamarāja.

Yamarāja was not home when Nāciketā reached the abode of death. Nāciketā waited there patiently for Yamarāja for three nights. When Yamarāja returned after the third night, Yamarāja's wife informed him, "There is one starving guest at our home, who needs to be attended to properly." Hearing this, Yamarāja immediately went to Nāciketā and attended to him with appropriate offerings in a befitting manner. Then, he said to Nāciketā gently, "You have been fasting for three nights as a guest in our home. I am responsible for this offense. Therefore, you can ask for a boon for each night that you waited here."

Nāciketā replied, "Oh Yamarāja! The first boon I ask for is this. Let my father—who became angry at me—control his anger and be pacified. When I return, may he recognize me and address me affectionately." Yamarāja immediately granted the boon, saying, "Let it be so". Then, Nāciketā asked for the second boon, "There seems to be no fear in the heavenly planets. You enforce punishment. But in your absence, people there seem carefree. The residents of these heavenly planets do not seem to suffer from hunger, thirst, or scarcity. Everyone is ever enjoying themselves. Please bestow upon me the knowledge related to the science of fire by which people can go to heaven and attain immortality. This is the second boon that I ask for."

Yamarāja said, "The fire that you are talking about is the agency through which one attains the eternal abode of Lord Viṣṇu and the refuge of the entire universe." Yamarāja disclosed the knowledge of the fire to Nāciketā. Considering him fit to be a disciple, and being pleased by his demeanor, Yamarāja granted him an additional special benediction, apart from the three that he had already promised. Yamarāja said, "The fire about which you want to learn will, henceforth, be renowned by your name. Now you may ask for the third boon."

Nāciketā said, "Some say that the soul exists, and others say that there is no soul. I want to know your conclusion in this regard." Yamarāja said, "The demigods were also doubtful about this very topic in the past. This subject matter is very subtle. Please do not request me to explain this topic any further. You may ask me for any other boon. I can grant you the boon by which your sons and grandsons will live for a hundred years. You will get many cows, animals, elephants, horses, a vast kingdom, and even heaven, and you may live for as many years as you wish. You may pray for all these things—which are very valuable for any human in this earthly realm—as you desire. You may ask for women with beautiful youthful forms, decorated with many qualities, equipped with knowledge of playing musical instruments, or those possessing many chariots. With all these things, you will be able to live blissfully. I can

bestow upon you all these boons right now. Just please do not inquire into the subject matter of death because it is a very confidential topic.”

Yamarāja allured Nāciketā with many different things. But Nāciketā responded, "Oh Yamarāja! I do not hanker after the things that you are trying to attract me with because all these things fall under the jurisdiction of death. Nothing will last. The sons that one has today will no longer exist tomorrow. Even if you grant them a boon to live for a hundred, thousand or even ten thousand years, still they will eventually perish. In comparison to eternal time, even ten thousand years fall far short. In maintaining and protecting the children, the vigor of all of one's organs is destroyed and so much vital energy is lost. The chariots, elephants, horses, damsels, all the riches of the earth and heavenly planets, may all be with you. I don't need these things at all. Wealth can never satisfy anyone. It is only when I have the opportunity to meet a saintly person like you that I consider myself to have attained all the riches and a long life. What is the need for a separate prayer for all these things? Oh Yamarāja! I pray for nothing else. Please tell me about the soul. A long life can also be a reason for lamentation. No wise man prays for a long life because with progressing age, this body will be afflicted with many diseases. Therefore, there will definitely be no peace. Some people may be fortunate to have good health, but still, they cannot live on this planet for a very long time with eternally good health. Oh Yamarāja! People often express doubt about the existence of the soul. I am desirous to hear about this self-realization for my eternal benefit. Please know that I will not ask for anything other than the knowledge of transcendence since it is most confidential.”

Seeing Nāciketā so eager to learn about self-realization, Yamarāja said, “I admire your desire. You have abandoned *preyaḥ*—which is temporarily gratifying—and you are enthusiastic to learn about *śreyaḥ*, which is permanently beneficial. The service of God is *śreyaḥ* or eternal blessing, whereas sons, spouse, opulence, and objects related to them are *preyaḥ*. These two are different paths. Between the two, only one that chooses *śreyaḥ* will be delivered from material entanglement. On the other hand, whoever chooses *preyaḥ* gets entangled in material bondage because he gets deviated from the ultimate goal of life. Typically, everyone is captivated by both *śreyaḥ* and *preyaḥ*. But knowing the nature of the two paths, an intelligent person carefully considers which binds one to the material world and which offers liberation from this material world. A self-controlled person accepts those things that are ultimately beneficial and abandons those that only gratify temporarily. Men with a poor fund of knowledge pray for *preyaḥ*, endeavoring to achieve all the material objects that they haven't yet obtained. They strive hard to maintain the things that they have achieved at the cost of their very lives. You are not allured by such temporary gratification. My conclusion, therefore, is that you are a true aspirant of transcendental knowledge.

A blind person cannot reach his destination when led by another blind man. Similarly, those who beguile others by posing themselves as intelligent and learned cannot reach the ultimate destination themselves, nor can they show the path of the ultimate destination to others. Those that are deviated and ignorant, being enchanted by temporarily pleasing sense objects, travel through heavenly and hellish realms. Knowledge of self-realization or the means

to attain the transcendental realm is never revealed to these deviated, ignorant and deluded persons. They therefore continue to suffer from the pains of death. Ignorantly, they continue to think that there is no transcendental realm and no reality beyond this perceptible world. The knowledge of the soul does not reach their ears. Even if they hear the knowledge, they cannot realize it. It is very rare to find a bonafide spiritual master or a transcendentalist. Even when such a transcendental preacher is present, it is very rare to find a proper listener or a disciple. Oh Nāciketā! Do not allow your resolute intelligence to be swayed by dry arguments. If dry arguments are brought into the life of devotion, the spirit of devotion is destroyed. I tried to allure you in many ways and deprive you from attaining this transcendental knowledge. But you have passed the test without losing patience. Without knowledge of their relationship with God, the faithless can never attain the eternal nature of the self. Only a person who approaches a great soul to hear about self-realization and apply what he has heard can experience eternal bliss by achieving the blissful Lord. I am sure that the doors of Vaikuṅṭha have been opened for you.

Nāciketā replied, “Oh Yamarāja, there is no use of praising me. Please teach me that which is beyond religion and irreligion, beyond cause and effect, beyond past and future.”

Yamarāja said, “All the *vedas* glorify the original Supreme Form. Austerities and penances, along with fire sacrifices, like *Agniṣṭoma*, are prescribed for His pleasure. The celibates study *vedas* and take up the vow of celibacy in service to their spiritual master for the pleasure of that Supreme Form. I am revealing the identity of that all-pervasive Absolute Truth in brief. Know that the ‘*Om*’ is imperishable and non-different from the Absolute Truth. It is renowned as *param akṣara*.<sup>6</sup> This is the primary and ultimate shelter of all. The living entities who understand ‘*Om*’ as their shelter are respected in the abode of Lord Brahmā. Just as there is no birth and death of the Supreme Lord, similarly, those who know the Supreme Lord do not have birth and death either. The attainment of bliss by taking shelter of the all-pervasive sound ‘*Om*’—which represents the Supreme Lord—is the only resource and the only recourse. The Supersoul cannot be attained on the strength of scholarship or intelligence, even after hearing about Him a lot. The Supreme Person remains beyond our realization. The Supersoul reveals His original form, at His own will, to those who keep taking exclusive shelter of the Supreme Person as their ultimate goal. This is the attainment of the lotus feet of the Supreme Lord.

## 4. Janaśruti and Raikka

There once lived a king named Janaśruti. He had a personal motto: “I should feed everyone, everywhere, in all places.” With this motivation, he built numerous inns and became

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<sup>6</sup> The ultimate syllable.

famous as the most munificent person. The sages of the demigods became very pleased with the virtue of the generous king and wanted to favor him.

One summer night, they took the form of swans and flew in the sky in an orderly fashion. As was the custom in those days during summer nights, the king was sleeping on the terrace of the palace. The sages, in the form of swans, were flying just above the king. The swan which was in the rearmost position, asked the leading one, "Don't you know, the radiance of King Janaśruti extends upto the sky? Do not try to cross over it since you will be burnt to ashes by his radiance."

The leading swan replied, "Who is that person you are talking about? As if he is the coachman, Raikka!" The rearmost swan asked, "Who is this coachman, Raikka, that you are talking about?" The leading swan replied, "Whatever there is to be known, Raikka knows it all. That is his reputation in brief."

King Janaśruti overheard the conversation of the overhead swans. Getting up from his bed, he immediately called for his charioteer, "Go and search for this coachman named Raikka. I heard about him from the swans. I want to meet him." Although the charioteer searched far and wide for Raikka, he was not able to find him. The charioteer returned disheartened and reported the discouraging news to the king. The king said, "Go and search all the secluded places where the saints live." Following the king's command, the charioteer resumed his search again. In a secluded place, beneath a coach, the charioteer found a man who was scratching sores on his body. The charioteer asked him, "Are you the coachman Raikka?" The saint replied, "Yes." The charioteer returned to the king and informed him that he had found Raikka.

Janaśruti went to Raikka with six hundred cows, a bunch of gold necklaces, and one chariot as a gift. Offering all these things to Raikka, the king said, "Please kindly advise me about the demigod you worship." Hearing this, Raikka responded, "Hey low-born, you are obsessed with grief! Therefore, you are no more an administrator. I will definitely address you as a low-born! Let all these cows, necklaces and chariot be with you."

Even after hearing such harsh words, the king did not lose hope. Once again, he approached the saint with one thousand cows, a bunch of gold necklaces, a chariot, and his own daughter. The king said, "Please kindly take all these things. Please also accept my daughter as your wife, and this entire village as a place of your hermitage. Please kindly impart the knowledge of your worshipable god to me." Raikka responded, "You sorrowful low-born! Do you wish to get transcendental knowledge by paying some remuneration, without serving the spiritual master?" Saying this, Raikka imparted the knowledge of the Absolute Truth to the king.

From this anecdote, mentioned in *śruti śāstras*, one should understand that a son of a *brāhmaṇa* may not be a *brāhmaṇa*; a *kṣatriya*'s son may not be a *kṣatriya*, a *vaiśya*'s son may not be a *vaiśya*, and a *sūdra*'s son may not be a *sūdra*. The class of a person is determined by the quality of that particular person. This is the scientific, natural and scriptural practice.

Although King Janaśruti had a vast kingdom, although he was famous as a munificent person, although he came along with many cows, golden necklaces, horse-drawn chariot, a princess and village to offer to the great saint, the saint Raikka initially addressed him as a low-born knowing him to be overwhelmed with grief. When Janaśruti understood that his fame was very insignificant in comparison to the fame of Raikka *Muni*, grief arose in his heart. When Raikka observed that Janaśruti's heart had been temporarily overwhelmed with grief, the Muni revealed the necessity of serving the spiritual master. And then, the *Muni* imparted the science of the Absolute Truth to the king.

The importance of a bonafide spiritual master should not be estimated by considering the external profile or external behavior. This is another lesson from this anecdote. It is an offence to deride the spiritual master with human intellect. Although Raikka was lying below a chariot and scratching his sores, King Janaśruti did not judge the saint with mundane intelligence. Raikka *Muni* was busy with the bodily pain and pleasure just like any other living entity who is absorbed in bodily conception. If the king had speculated with deductive logic, he would have been deprived of the privilege of knowing the secret behind the Absolute Truth.

About a century ago, Śrīla Gaura Kiśore Dāsā Goswāmī—who was the embodiment of renunciation and the crest jewel among *Vaiṣṇava* sect—exhibited a pastime in which he stayed in a toilet of a hospice in the city of Navadvīpa. Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī Prabhu performed a pastime in which wet, itchy sores manifested all over his divine body. Without understanding the substantiality of the pastimes of these personalities, if one tries to approach them with mundane logic, he will be deprived.

As gross human intelligence did not interfere with King Janaśruti's understanding of Raikka *Muni*, the king surrendered completely. The king was not discouraged upon hearing the sharp words of his spiritual master. Considering Janaśruti as a fit candidate to receive transcendental knowledge, Raikka *Muni* eventually imparted knowledge unto him. Raikka *Muni* revealed to Janaśruti that service to the spiritual master does not come by way of offering worldly objects as remuneration. Transcendental knowledge cannot be learned without rendering service to the spiritual master with full surrender.

## 5. Satyakāma Jābāla

There was once a widow named Jābāla, who had a young son. One day, her son said to her, “Mother! I will go and live in the house of my *guru* as a *brahmacārī*. What is my *gotra*?” Hearing her son's question, Jābāla replied, “My dear son! I don't know your *gotra*. In my youth, I conceived of you while serving many people. Therefore, I do not know the *gotra* that you have taken birth in. Just tell your *guru* that my name is Jābāla and your name is Satyakāma”.

Satyakāma went to his *guru*, sage Gautama, and expressed his desire to stay in his *gurukul*. One day, sage Gautama asked about Satyakāma about his *gotra*. Satyakāma replied,

“*Gurudeva*, I do not know my *gotra*. I asked my mother. She said that in her youth, she served many people before I was born. My mother’s name is Jābāla and my name is Satyakāma.”

Upon hearing such simple and innocent words from the mouth of this young boy, sage Gautama became very satisfied and said, “One who is not a *brahmana* can never say the truth in such a simple and straightforward way. Please go and bring some wood for a fire sacrifice. I will offer your *upanayana-saṁskāra*. May you never be deviated from the truth.” Sage Gautama then proceeded with Satyakāma’s *upanayana-saṁskāra* ceremony. He then gave Satyakāma the service of taking four hundred weak and skinny cows from his cowshed and going out to herd them. Satyakāma obediently took the cows out and while leaving with the cows, said, “I will not return until I make a thousand cows out of these weak four hundred cows.” In due course of time, due to Satyakāma’s care and service, the cows began to multiply in number to one thousand.

At that time one bull, who was possessed by the demigod *Vāyu*, called Satyakāma and said, “Oh gentle boy! Our count has now reached one thousand. Now you please take us to the house of your *guru*”. The bull then taught Satyakāma one quarter of knowledge of the Absolute Truth. He also said to Satyakāma that the demigod of fire, *Agni*, would teach him the second quarter of the knowledge of the Absolute Truth. The following day, Satyakāma set out on a journey to the house of his *guru* along with the thousand cows. In the evening, Satyakāma settled all the cows to rest, and lit a fire. Then, the demigod of fire taught Satyakāma the second quarter of knowledge of the Absolute Truth. Then, he informed Satyakāma that the sun god, in the form of a duck, would teach him the third quarter of knowledge of the Absolute Truth. The following day, in the evening, Satyakāma tied the cows and sat down facing the east near a fire torch. Then the demigod of the sun planet, in the form of a duck, came there and taught him the third quarter of knowledge of the Absolute Truth. Next, the sun god told him that the demigod of consciousness, in a form of an aquatic bird called “Madgu”, would teach him the final quarter of knowledge of the Absolute Truth.

The next day, Satyakāma again set out to continue his journey to his *guru’s* house. In the evening, he lit a fire and sat down as before. The demigod of consciousness, in the form of ‘Madgu’ bird, appeared there and began to teach him the final quarter of knowledge of the Absolute Truth.

In this way, Satyakāma became a knower of the Absolute Truth. Finally, he reached his *guru’s* house. Sage Gautama could realize that Satyakāma had received transcendental knowledge because of his non-duplicitous service. He could also understand that Satyakāma heard the transcendental knowledge from others. Gautama asked Satyakāma, “Who imparted the knowledge of the Absolute Truth to you?” Satyakāma replied, “Somebody other than a human being has taught me until now. Even though they had instructed me for my perfection, please kindly instruct me again. I have heard that knowledge instructed by an *ācārya* brings perfection.”

Hearing these words of Satyakāma, the *ācārya* became very pleased and again instructed the same knowledge of the Absolute Truth. Hearing the instructions of his *guru* with faith, Satyakāma became an *ācārya* himself. A sage named Upakauśalā began learning the knowledge of the Absolute Truth from Satyakāma.

There are many lessons to learn from this anecdote of Jābāla and Satyakāma. *Śruti śāstras* say that one who is simple, guileless, and who always speaks the truth is called a *brāhmaṇa*. Even though Satyakāma was son of a maid servant, who served many persons in her youth, sage Gautama seeing Satyakāma as simple and guileless, accepted him as a person of brahmanical order and gave him brahminical initiation as well as the rights to serve *guru* and attain knowledge of the Absolute Truth. Therefore, it is not that the son of *brāhmaṇa* should be accepted as *brāhmaṇa*. Persons taking birth in any lineage or unknown *gotra* can be known as a *brāhmaṇa* by virtue of their work and quality. A person should not be considered a *brāhmaṇa* by birth. Instead, by serving a *mahābhāgavata* devotee, one attains the qualities of a *brāhmaṇa*.

It is the duty of every guileless person to follow the ideals of service to *guru* set by Satyakāma. Without caring for his own happiness and comfort in the slightest way, Satyakāma herded the cows of his spiritual master and increased their number with much enthusiasm. “I have come to the house of a *guru* to realize Absolute Truth. So I will just sit and do meditation”—Satyakāma did not have the foolishness to think like this. He was trying to fulfill the vow of how the number of the cows of his spiritual master can be increased in a fair way. With guileless service to *guru*, he could realize the truth about the Supreme Personality of Godhead. The demigods became satisfied due to such guileless service to his *guru* and imparted to him all the truths regarding the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Still, without being proud, he again approached his spiritual master and heard the whole subject matter directly from the lotus mouth of his *Gurudeva*. Through this, Satyakāma has taught us that we need to hear the topics of the Lord directly from a self-realized *guru*. Only such a simple, guileless, humble-hearted person, who is constantly engaged in the service of a spiritual master, can do welfare to others. By becoming an *ācārya* himself, he can turn himself into a speaker of the message of his spiritual master. In this world, the eternal uncontaminated message of Godhead is transmitted through the disciplic succession of spiritual master and disciple by the hearing process.

## 6. Upamanyu

There was once a wise sage named Ayoddhomya. He instructed one of his disciples—Upamanyu—to herd his cows every day and return them to his residence in the evening. Obediently following his spiritual master’s instructions, Upamanyu would take the cows out in the morning to the grasslands in the forest and return with them in the evening. He would hand the cows back to his spiritual master dutifully every evening and very humbly offer his obeisances, lying prostrate on the ground with folded hands.

One day, Sage Ayoddhoumya noticed that despite wandering around the grasslands all day, Upamanyu looked surprisingly well-fed. A little curious, the sage asked him, “My dear child Upamanyu, I notice that you seem very well-nourished despite wandering in the grasslands with the cows all day. What do you eat every day?” Upamanyu responded, “My Lord, I simply beg alms door to door like a mendicant.” Hearing this, the sage said, “My dear Upamanyu, you should know that it is improper for you to accept any alms without first offering them to me.” Having thus been instructed by his spiritual master, Upamanyu, from then on, began offering whatever alms he received each day to his spiritual master. The sage would accept all of Upamanyu’s collected alms, without offering him any in return.

A few weeks passed. Upamanyu continued to herd the cows daily and offering the collected alms to his spiritual master when he returned in the evening. One day, Sage Ayoddhoumya noticed again that despite his not giving back any alms to Upamanyu, the boy still looked quite well-fed. He asked him again, “My dear boy Upamanyu, I have been accepting all the foodstuff that you collect every day and I do not give you anything in return. Yet, you seem well-fed. What have you been eating?” Although a little self-conscious, Upamanyu responded honestly, “My Lord, whatever I beg the first time around, I offer to you. Then, I beg for a second time for a little handful. This is what I eat.” Hearing this, the sage said, “Dear Upamanyu, you should know that this is not an appropriate behaviour (*dharma* and *karma*) of a cultured person. This behaviour, if continued, will gradually lead you to become greedy and will cause disruptions to others as well.”

Upamanyu considered the words of his spiritual master very gravely and thoughtfully, and followed them with all his heart. He would herd the cows obediently, and offer all that he collected in alms to his spiritual master. Some time passed. One day, after herding his spiritual master’s cows, Upamanyu came to return them to his Guru’s house in the evening. Sage Ayoddhoumya noticed his disciple again, and asked, “My dear child Upamanyu, you wander here and there all day and beg alms for me. And since I forbade you to beg a second time for yourself, I am sure you are following that instruction. How then are you looking even more well-nourished than before? What do you eat for survival these days?” Upamanyu replied, “I am surviving on drinking cow’s milk.” Hearing this, the sage said, “I have not given you permission to drink milk. It is a transgression on your part to drink cow’s milk.” Upamanyu humbly begged for forgiveness from his guru for his unwitting offence.

Some days following this incident, Upamanyu returned with all the cows to his spiritual master’s residence. He came before his guru and paid his obeisances. The sage asked him again, “Dear Upamanyu, you do not take the alms you receive by begging, neither do you go to beg alms a second time for yourself. I have prohibited you from drinking milk. But I can see that you are very well-fed. What have you been eating now?” Upamanyu replied, “After the calves have drunk their mothers’ milk, whatever froth comes out from their mouth, I drink that.” Hearing this, the sage said, “Calves are very peaceful and out of their mercy on you, they have been effusing higher quantities of froth for you. Therefore, you are causing disturbance to their eating. Please do not do that again.” Upamanyu contemplated on the words of his spiritual master. Considering the instructions of the spiritual master to be entirely for his own benefit, he humbly continued his *guru’s* service by following his instructions very obediently.

One day, while he was herding the cows in the forest, Upamanyu felt increasingly hungry. The scorching sun overhead and the fatigue he felt from wandering with the cows all day seemed to make the pangs of hunger even more excruciating. He felt far too feeble to be able to herd the cows any longer. While he was thinking that he may be unable to continue this service for his spiritual master without taking something immediately, he chanced upon a few Arka (Giant Milkweed) plants nearby. He broke a few leaves off a plant and remembering his spiritual master, chewed on them. Little did he know that eating those leaves could cause blindness. Indeed, he developed a terrible eye infection that caused him to lose his eyesight completely in both the eyes. Thus blinded, he was wandering about when he accidentally fell into a deep well.

As darkness began to fall and there was still no sign of Upamanyu and the cows, Sage Ayoddhoumya became increasingly concerned about his disciple. He summoned some of his other disciples and said, "It is very unlike Upamanyu not to return with the cows by now. I had ordered him to refrain from eating anything. He may be hurt somewhere, which may be why he is not back yet. Let us go and look for him immediately." The sage, along with his disciples, proceeded into the forest in search of Upamanyu. "Upamanyu!" "Upamanyu!" The sage and his disciples began to cry loudly, looking for him.

Inside the well, poor Upamanyu sat feeling dejected. He could not see where he was, but he could sense that he had fallen into a deep hole. When he cried out for help, all he heard in return was the echo of his own voice resounding in the well. These grasslands in the forest were perfect grazing grounds for cows because there was not a lot of human traffic there. By the time night fell, Upamanyu began losing hope of a rescue. The injuries he endured in his limbs during the fall paled in comparison to the thought of not being found alive in these remote parts of the forest. But suddenly, he heard the cries of his spiritual master and his godbrothers, calling out his name! Elated and grateful, he called out to his spiritual master. When the sage and his disciples peered down the deep and dark well, Upamanyu explained how he had lost his eyesight and how he had accidentally fallen in.

Seeing Upamanyu's condition, the sage advised him to offer prayers to the two *Aśvinī-kumāras*. "The *Aśvinī-kumāras* are doctors of the demigods," the sage said, "and with their mercy, your eyesight could be restored." The sage then left with his disciples, promising to check on Upamanyu again the next day. Being thus instructed by his spiritual master, Upamanyu began offering prayers to the two *Aśvinī-kumāras* with all his heart. Suddenly, two effulgent heavenly beings appeared in the dark well. Although blind, Upamanyu sensed the presence of the radiant beings in the darkness. They introduced themselves as the two *Aśvinī-kumāras* who Upamanyu had been offering prayers to. "We are very satisfied with your sincere prayers, and have come to offer you this cake," one of them spoke. "If you eat this cake immediately, your diseased eyes will be cured in no time."

"My dear Sirs," Upamanyu said, "I thank you for your kindness. But I cannot possibly eat this cake without first offering it to and taking permission from my spiritual master!"

The two *Aśvinī-kumāras* looked at each other, and one then spoke, "Some time ago, your *Gurudeva* had prayed to us, just like you did today. We were very pleased with his prayers

as well and had offered him a similar cake. When we did so, your *Gurudeva* had immediately eaten the cake without taking permission from his spiritual master. Since your *Gurudeva* has set this precedent himself, you can also follow in the same way.”

Upamanyu folded his hands and begged the two *Aśvinī-kumāras*, “Dear Sirs, I humbly seek your forgiveness for disobeying your kind advice. Please do not ask me to accept this cake. I will not be able to eat it without first offering it to my Gurudeva, even though it may mean that my eyesight may never be restored.”

Both of the *Aśvinī-kumāras* became delighted to see Upamanyu’s steadfast devotion to his spiritual master. Pleased, they offered him this benediction, “May all your teeth shine like gold! May your vision be completely restored! And may you attain ultimate auspiciousness!” Saying this, the *Aśvinī-kumāras* disappeared into the darkness of the night. By morning, Upamanyu’s eyesight was completely restored. By holding on to the crevices he saw in the well in the daylight, he was able to climb out of the well.

Immediately after climbing out, Upamanyu went to the residence of his spiritual master and offered his obeisances unto his Guru’s lotus feet, prostrating himself like a rod on the floor. He narrated the entire incident about the *Aśvinī-kumāras* to his spiritual master. The sage became very pleased with Upamanyu and blessed him by saying, “You have passed the test! All the Vedas and all religious scriptures will always be in the pathway of your memory and you will attain ultimate auspiciousness.”

This narration of the Mahābhārata demonstrates ideal service to the *Guru*. A real servant of the spiritual master will never enjoy any of his possessions. Service is his eternal duty. However strict and intense the order of the spiritual master may be, a servant of the spiritual master will comply with those orders with a satisfied and undisturbed mind. While serving the spiritual master, one may have to sacrifice one’s happiness and comfort and may even have to give up one’s own life. A real disciple accepts any such personal condition blissfully. The servant of the spiritual master contemplates in this way:

*tomāra sevāya, duḥkha hoyā jato,  
se-o to’ parama sukha  
sevā-sukha-duḥkha, parama sampada,  
nāśaye avidyā-duḥkha*

*“All the troubles encountered in Your service shall be the cause of great happiness, for in Your devotional service joy and sorrow are equally great riches. Both destroy the misery of ignorance.”*

—Śaraṇāgati, Song 8, Verse 4

Without imitating the spiritual master’s behaviour, if one follows and complies with his instructions and teachings, then one is never underprivileged. Although the *Aśvinī-kumāras*’ advice to Upamanyu was to the contrary, he did not imitate his spiritual master’s behaviour. He did not accept the cake without the order of his spiritual master. Intelligent persons follow

the instructions of great personalities. By this process, all desires are fulfilled. Whoever serves a spiritual master with this mindset can surpass all stringent tests of the world. In the heart of that disciple, deep mysteries of all scriptures are revealed and such revelations remain in the pathway of memory. By the mercy of the spiritual master, ultimate auspicious service to Kṛṣṇa is attained.

## 7. Arjuna and Ekalavya

Many people consider Ekalavya's '*guru-bhakti*' to be ideal, but there is a unique deliberation concerning this topic.

Ekalavya was King Hiranyadhanu's son. He was, by caste, a *nisadha* (*candala*). In order to learn *astra-vidyā*,<sup>7</sup> Prince Ekalavya had approached Droṇācārya. However, Droṇācārya could perceive that Ekalavya possessed a very low-class mentality and would not utilize the knowledge in an authorized manner. The ācārya, therefore, refused to initiate him in the teachings of the *dhanur-veda*.<sup>8</sup> However, Ekalavya was determined to learn martial arts from Droṇācārya. He went off into a forest and—unbeknownst to Droṇācārya—crafted a mystical clay form of Droṇācārya. He would then continuously practice in front of this artificial *guru*. In this way, he became very expert in *astra-vidya*.

Droṇācārya was entrusted with teaching the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas *astra-vidya*. Among all his disciples, Arjuna most consistently endeavored to honor his *guru* and strived to master the skills of the weapons with absolute dedication. He thus became especially dear to Droṇācārya. Pleased with his disciple's dedication, the ācārya had once told Arjuna that none of his disciples would ever be able to excel him in skill.

It so happened that one day, Droṇācārya had instructed the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas to go to the forest to hunt. As the princes made their way through the forest, they saw a dog whose mouth was completely choked with seven arrows. The princes were utterly amazed at the skill with which the archer had shot these arrows into the dog's mouth. They could understand from the state of the poor dog that whoever had shot those arrows was far more skillful in archery than any of the Pāṇḍavas. Curious, they began searching for the archer and finally realized that it was Ekalavya, the son of Hiranyadhanu, who had been honing his archery skills on the dog's mouth that day.

When the Pāṇḍavas returned from the forest, they went to Droṇācārya and narrated to him the unusual incident that they had witnessed earlier. With genuine humility, Arjuna said to Droṇācārya, "My dear *Gurudeva*, having witnessed the superlative dexterity of this archer, I am convinced that he could not have learned such nuanced skill from anybody else other than you. Therefore, it must be that perhaps you have another disciple who is far more expert in

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<sup>7</sup> Knowledge of weapons and military science

<sup>8</sup> Art of archery and bowmanship

archery than me.” Droṇācārya listened to the narration of this incident from the Pāṇḍavas in amazement. He then requested Arjuna to take him to the forest to see Ekalavya.

When they reached the forest, they saw Ekalavya practicing archery in complete absorption, continuously shooting arrows like rainfall. When Ekalavya saw Droṇācārya approaching him, he immediately offered his prayers at the acarya’s feet and, with folded hands, introduced himself as his disciple. Droṇācārya replied, “Very well, if I am your *guru*, you must give me *guru-daksina*.” Ekalavya immediately said, “Please tell me what it is that I can give you. I am prepared to give you whatever it is!”

Droṇācārya then asked Ekalavya to cut off his right thumb and give that to him as his *guru-daksina*. Without any hesitation or protest, Ekalavya immediately executed the order of his *Gurudeva*.

The common opinion about this incident is as follows. Ekalavya's *guru* initially rejected him because he considered Ekalavya to be born of a low caste. Yet due to his faith in Droṇācārya, Ekalavya established a clay deity of him and became invincible. Therefore, his *guru-bhakti* is touted as being ideal. On the other hand, Arjuna is considered as being envious of Ekalavya who had mastered the art of archery through his perseverance. It is for this reason that it is commonly believed that Ekalavya was ruined by Droṇācārya.

However, this is not the opinion of devotees; neither is it an accurate conception. Everything about *Bhagavān* is supremely true; everything about the principles of devotion is supremely true; and everything in relation to the devotee is supremely true. These are the three truths – *Bhagavān*, *bhakti*, and *bhakta*. Everything a devotee does is good; everything a non-devotee does is not very good. The non-devotee has many bad qualities because he is not engaged in satisfying the senses of *Bhagavan*. Those that think that mundane laws are greater than *Bhagavan* cannot accommodate these words regarding the supreme truth. Such persons are *nirvisesavadis* or impersonalists; that is, they cannot accept the non-differentiated specialty of *Bhagavan*, *bhakti*, and *bhakta*.

What was Ekalavya’s fault? An analysis of this question is essential. Ekalavya wore the mask of *guru-bhakti* but he was actually inimical toward his *guru*. Whether his *guru* actually considered Ekalavya to be unqualified because of low-birth, or whether he was simply testing him—whatever the reason may be—when his *Gurudeva* did not wish to teach him the science of warfare, it was Ekalavya’s duty to accept his *guru's* instruction upon his head. Ekalavya, however, did not accept Droṇācārya’s initial instruction. He had a personal aspiration to become great.

Ekalavya’s practice and mastery of archery would not be considered bonafide or lawful without having a *guru*. Without accepting a *guru*, he would certainly never be in a position to be considered great. To this end, Ekalavya concocted a clay form of his ‘*guru*’ in order to attain greatness by learning the *dhanur-veda*. Ekalavya’s primary intention was to satisfy his own senses. He did not offer himself as a sacrifice to his *guru's* desire. His own intentions were not

sincere. Some may very well say that Ekalavya did ultimately happily accept the heartless order of his *guru* without protest. However, if we consider this topic deeply and with keen discernment, we can observe that Ekalavya considered mundane morality to be superior to transcendental devotion. When the *guru* requests something to be given as *dakṣiṇā*, then one must offer it to him. It was this sense of morality that inspired him to cut his thumb off. Ekalavya did not offer it with spontaneous devotion. The very nature of *bhakti* is that it is spontaneous and simple.

If Ekalavya had unmotivated and natural devotion within his heart toward *Hari, guru* and *Vaiṣṇava*, then the *guru*—Droṇācārya, the best of *Vaiṣṇavas*—Arjuna, and *Bhagavan Śrī Kṛṣṇa*, would not have been displeased with his behavior. Ekalavya's *Gurudeva* did not accept his attempt to learn the *dhanur-veda* and his hankering to become great. Deep within Ekalavya's heart, he desired to try and become greater than Arjuna, the best of *Vaiṣṇavas*. The aspiration to become greater than a *Vaiṣṇava* is not devotion; it is instead anti-devotional. It is the *dharma* of *Ativādī*.<sup>9</sup> According to worldly considerations, the desire to become great is actually regarded as good. However, the effort to take a subordinate position behind a *Vaiṣṇava* and the attempt to take shelter of a *Vaiṣṇava*—that is *bhakti*.

Ekalavya wanted his own expertise to be greater than that which could be acquired by learning Vedic sciences from a *mahanta-guru*. Arjuna notified Droṇācārya of this deviation. If Arjuna had not mercifully pointed this out, then impersonalism would have proclaimed its victory extensively. People would not have approached a *mahanta-guru* to accept any type of knowledge. They would have desired to create their own contradictory, concocted, clay, lifeless *gurus* in order to learn various sciences of devotional teachings. In this way, atheistic theories would have been widely propagated. Therefore, Arjuna had no envy toward Ekalavya; it was actually his causeless compassion toward Ekalavya and the entire world.

If Ekalavya had been an honest devotee of his *guru*, then Kṛṣṇa would not have killed such a *guru-bhakta*. Kṛṣṇa always protects His devotees. However, Ekalavya was eventually killed at the hands of Kṛṣṇa. This is how Ekalavya finally met his end.<sup>10</sup>

Śrī Caitanyadeva<sup>11</sup> has said that we cannot judge devotion simply on the basis of external austerities. The *asuras* perform penances that even the demigods cannot perform.<sup>12</sup> Against the wishes of his *guru*, Ekalavya wanted to become greater than a *Vaiṣṇava*. Therefore, he was killed by Kṛṣṇa and attained impersonal liberation. Kṛṣṇa always kills the *asuras* and

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<sup>9</sup> *Ativadis* are an *apasampradaya* (a non-bonafide sect) that originated in Orissa under one Jagannatha Dāsā during the time of Mahāprabhu. The word '*ativadi*' means 'one who thinks that he is very intelligent.' (*ati*—very, *vadi*—intelligent).

<sup>10</sup> Ekalavya's death is described in Chapter 48 of the *Udyoga-parva* of *Mahābhārata* wherein Kṛṣṇa kills him as He battles with Jarasandha's army.

<sup>11</sup> Sri Caitanya Mahāprabhu

<sup>12</sup> Asure o tapa kare, ki haya tahara – vine mora sarana laile nahi para (Caitanya Bhagavata, Madhya 23.46)

protects His devotees.<sup>13</sup> The proof of this is Hiranyakaśipu and Prahlāda. Therefore, we should never try to become greater than the *Vaiṣṇavas*. If we do not wear a mask of *guru-bhakti*, we will never become impersonalists. This is what the pure devotees have taught us in relation to the narrative of Ekalavya. Expertise in performing mundane activities is not *guru-bhakti*. Taking shelter of the *Vaiṣṇavas* is actually true devotion.

## 8. Duryodhana's Illusion

During the Khāṇḍava forest fire, Arjuna had protected a demon named Maya, who also happened to be a celebrated artist. In return for Arjuna's kindness, he constructed an extraordinarily magnificent assembly hall for Dharmarāja Yudhiṣṭhira's Rājasūya sacrifice. The assembly hall was bedecked with innumerable rare jewels, pearls, corals, and marble stones, and was designed with various mystifying optical illusions. The design and splendor of the hall were so uniquely remarkable that they were the talk of all people the world over!

Ever since childhood, Duryodhana, the eldest Kuru son, was always envious of his cousins—the Pāṇḍavas. When he received an invitation to the Rājasūya sacrifice, he accepted it with great antipathy. While at the sacrifice, he went to tour the famous assembly hall. He was struck by the marvel and beauty of its design, and his heart burnt even more with envy. While touring the hall, he saw a courtyard made of transparent crystals that gave it the appearance of a water surface. Duryodhana mistook the courtyard floor to be a reservoir of water. He lifted up his leg covering, as if getting ready to step into the water pool. The people assembled burst out laughing, clapping their hands in amusement. Duryodhana quickly realized that it was an illusion ahead, and hurriedly walked off with a huff to see the rest of the assembly hall. But the embarrassment severely bruised his ego. In another side of the wondrous hall, he saw a lake filled with crystal-clear water. This time, the lake was real. But Duryodhana had just mistaken a transparent crystal floor to be a water pool. If he made another such foolish mistake, there would be no limit to the insults he would have to bear. He thought what looked like water this time around must also be the same kind of crystal illusion as he had just seen. Thinking in this way, he stepped forward confidently and fell into the deep pool of water. The people who saw him plunging into the water could not contain themselves and burst out laughing. Duryodhana quickly gathered himself and walked off, red in the face with humiliation. Then, he reached another place in the hall where he mistook a crystal wall to be an open door. He darted forward

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<sup>13</sup> Madhvacarya, in his *Mahābhārata Tataparya Nirnaya* has commented that Ekalavya was the *amsa* (part) of the demon Manimanta.

*yuddhva ciram rana mukhe bhagavat sutah asau  
cakre nirayudham amum sthiram ekalavyam  
amsena yo bhuvam agat maniman iti sma  
sa krodha tantraka ganesu adhipo nisadah*

“Fighting for a long time with Ekalavya, who was steadfast in the battlefield, Pradyumna rendered him weaponless. Previously there was a group of demons known as the *Krodha-tantra-ganas*, amongst whom there was a prominent demon named Manimanta. Ekalavya is the *amsa* of that Manimanta.” (MTN 14.40)

and hit his face on the transparent wall, which left his head spinning. Gathering himself, he began looking for a doorway out. But he refrained from entering a wide doorway, thinking that he may be deceived like before. In this way, Duryodhana was repeatedly embarrassed while touring the assembly hall, and each embarrassment added exponentially to the insult he felt. By the time he returned to his room, his heart was ablaze with insult and fury. This incident is significant in what triggered the battle between the Kuru and the Pāṇḍava brothers.

Duryodhana (Du: + Yodhana) means enjoyer of desire for war through unjust means. Duryodhana wanted to enjoy the whole earth, without giving any land—not even as much as that held on the tip of a needle—to the Pāṇḍavas, who were devotees of Kṛṣṇa. The Pāṇḍavas were headed by Yudhiṣṭhira, also known as Dharmarāja. Yudhiṣṭhira (Yudhi + shtira) signifies one who is fixed in the battle for truth and justice. Fulfilling Kṛṣṇa's desire is his primary purpose. A devotee of Guru and Kṛṣṇa always wants to fulfil their desire. People with Duryodhana's nature are inimical toward such devotees. To the inimical eye, all activities of the devotees seem contrary to what they stand for themselves. Since they view devotees as completely different from themselves, the inimical wage war against the devotees.

The materialistic enjoyers—who are bound living entities—mistake water for land and land for water because they are generally antagonistic toward devotees. Since they take shelter where there is none and refuse real shelter, those ill-disposed toward the devotees usually sink. Association of a devotee is the shelter; maya is not. If one becomes inimical toward devotees, one will have to drown in the bottomless water of maya. Since the *Māyāvādīs*<sup>14</sup> harbour animosity toward devotees and the Supreme Personality of Godhead, this kind of illusion causes their downfall.

## 9. Dhṛtarāṣṭra Crushes the Iron-Bhima

In the battle of Kurukshetra, the Pāṇḍavas had killed all of Dhṛtarāṣṭra's hundred sons. Most of the hundred sons were slain at the hands of the middle of the five Pāṇḍava brothers—Bhimasena or Bhima. It was Bhima who had broken the eldest Kuru son Duryodhana's thigh and killed him; it was Bhima who had drunk the foaming blood from the chest of Duśāsana in the gory battlefield. For the brutal deaths of his sons, particularly at the hands of Bhima, Dhṛtarāṣṭra held extreme malice in his heart toward him.

After the Kurukshetra battle, the Pāṇḍavas brothers—headed by Yudhishtira—came to Dhṛtarāṣṭra to offer their obeisances to the elderly Kuru King. Dhṛtarāṣṭra had accepted the result of the battle, albeit begrudgingly. When Yudhishtira came forward to offer his obeisances to the old king, Dhṛtarāṣṭra embraced and pacified him, although with concealed resentment. Then, he affectionately called forth Bhima for an embrace as well. The king's real intention, however, was to avenge the death of his sons by crushing Bhima to death under his arms. The omniscient Personality of Godhead, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, knew the blind king's evil intent very

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<sup>14</sup> Mayavadi- Those who propound the doctrine of maya, i.e., those who spread the dogma that the Lord of Maya, Parabrahma, Supreme personality of Godhead, also comes under the grasp of maya and takes birth as jiva (ordinary living entity). In other words, Mayavadis say that Lord Narayan takes a poor destitute form.

well. He had therefore commissioned an iron statue of Bhima prior to the meeting of the Pandava brothers with the Kuru king. Anticipating Dhṛtarāṣṭra's evil anger-fuelled intentions, Śrī Kṛṣṇa pushed forward the iron statue of Bhima toward Dhṛtarāṣṭra for him to embrace. The insidious Dhṛtarāṣṭra extended his arms toward the statue and embraced it with all the vengeance burning in his heart over the death of his hundred sons. Dhṛtarāṣṭra possessed immense strength of many elephants, and his tight resentful embrace crushed the iron statue, shattering it to pieces. The pressure of the tight hold against the iron statue severely bruised his own chest and he began to vomit blood. All those who witnessed this incident were struck by the latent intensity of Dhṛtarāṣṭra's revenge.

The word 'Dhṛtarāṣṭra' means 'one by whom the state or kingdom is held.' In other words, one who considers knowledge and experience of this illusory inanimate world to be the only recourse or refuge is to be understood as Dhṛtarāṣṭra. Dhṛtarāṣṭra symbolizes a person whose heart is possessed with a constant flow of thoughts of gross materialism and who has no inquiry into transcendence, which is beyond the inanimate world or the plane of transcendental dynamism (*chidvillas*<sup>15</sup>).

Dhṛtarāṣṭra was born blind and never experienced variegatedness of the world. Therefore, he was an impersonalist (*nirviśeṣavādi*). Gross materialists and impersonalists—like Dhṛtarāṣṭra—are always trying to pestle and destroy the transcendental devotees of the Lord who are beyond the grip of illusion. When they see that the devotees of the Supreme Personality of Godhead abandon bad association of the impersonalists, the latter resort to illegitimate revenge and try to oppress the devotees of the Lord. They simply perish in their hard labor of extracting a little pleasure out of gross matter. In other words, they attain impersonal liberation. Kṛṣṇa protects the devotees who have taken exclusive shelter unto Him; not a single hair can be touched by the impersonalists. Impersonalists keep on exerting their might and energy, and end up vomiting blood—just like Dhṛtarāṣṭra.

## 10. Brahmā and the Hog-Bodied Indra

Indra, the King of heaven, was once enjoying with the heavenly society ladies in an intoxicated condition. At that very moment, his spiritual master, Bṛhaspati, visited him to offer him an instruction. However, Indra was so lost in his inebriated enjoyment that he neglected to greet and offer obeisances to his spiritual master. Seeing the miserable condition of his disciple, Bṛhaspaticursed him to be born as a hog on earth. Thus, the hog-bodied Indra found himself on earth frolicking at his own sweet will, eating stool, and enjoying with a she-hog. In due course, many hoglets were born in the womb of the she-hog.

One day, while traveling, Lord Brahmā chanced upon the hog-bodied Indra. Upon seeing Indra's pitiable condition, Lord Brahmā became filled with compassion and gently

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<sup>15</sup> *Chidvillas*: The Divine pastimes of the Supreme Lord and His devotees are to enhance the pleasure of the Lord. These pastimes are full of variegatedness and are eternally ongoing in the transcendental world, the abode of The Supreme Personality of Godhead.

addressed him as follows, "O Indra! You are the proprietor of the kingdom of heaven. Why are you abandoning the nectarean delicacies of Amarāvati (the capital city of the Kingdom of heaven) and eating stool here? Why have you left Nandakānana garden? Why are you frolicking here in this foul and disgusting place?"

When the hog-bodied Indra heard Brahmā's words, he took them as an insult and became enraged. He, along with his family members, began to attack Lord Brahmā with their tusks. Even so attacked, Lord Brahmā continued being merciful to Indra and repeatedly tried many different ways to make the hog-bodied Indra aware of his previous glorious position. The more Lord Brahmā tried to persuade the hog-bodied Indra, the more enraged Indra became, considering Brahmā to be his enemy. The hog believed that eating feces, loitering in filthy places, living the hoggish life, and enjoying such material pleasures was his eternal nature. For the hog-bodied Indra, the filthy place that Brahmā was referring to was his place of residence! The she-hog and her hoglets were his kith and kin. These were his near and dear objects of attachment and he did not want to give them up.

The compassionate Lord Brahmā could understand that attachment to one's family is the root cause of all troubles. As long as material attachments prevail, no good advice will enter into the ears. Therefore, for Indra's own upliftment, even by any means, Lord Brahmā killed each of Indra's hoglets—the dear objects of his attachment—one after the other. Seeing the death of the hoglets in front of his own eyes, the hog-bodied Indra could not contain his wrath and attempted to destroy Brahmā with his tusks. In response, Lord Brahmā tried to instruct Indra about the impermanent nature of this material world. But his advice fell on deaf ears. By then, the attachment Indra had for his hoglets had intensified as the attachment for his she-hog. Thus, Lord Brahmā killed the she-hog as well. Now absolutely deluded, the hog began to see darkness all around. As all his relatives now lay dead before him, the hog piteously asked Brahmā, "Sir, you have destroyed all my relatives! You were speaking previously about going to the Kingdom of heaven. Well, is there enough delicious stool there like we have here? Is that heaven a peacefully filthy and foul place? Can I get she-hogs there?" Brahmā replied, "You are the proprietor of heaven! You have come here because you received a curse due to your karmic reaction. If you attain your previous form, you will not think that eating feces is delicious, but rather that it is abhorrent. In heaven, you always have nectarean delicacies. There, you will have no desire to enjoy mundane pleasures (*grāmya-sukha*<sup>16</sup>) with she-hogs. You can have the best of pleasures."

Hearing Brahmā's words and still reeling in the aftermath of the loss of his wife and children, Indra began to repent with a profound realization of the transitory nature of this world. With this new-found realization, the hog-bodied Indra began to reverentially listen to the advice of Brahmā and inquire in earnest about how he can return to his previous place of residence. Lord Brahmā then advised Indra, who accepted Brahmā's advice with reverence. Soon, he gave up the life of a hog and regained his heavenly kingdom.

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<sup>16</sup> the abominable sensory pleasure in the lustful mingling of men and women.

In this illusory material world, the living entities will fall into such conditions. The constitutional position of the living entity is that he is an eternal servant of Kṛṣṇa. Devotional service unto Kṛṣṇa is his eternal occupation and Goloka-Vaikuṅṭha is his eternal residence. The ultimate necessity of all living entities is the attainment of pleasure in the service of the Supreme Lord. But unfortunately, when a living entity transmigrates in many species of life, being deprived of the pleasure of devotional service, he become oblivious to his original form, duties of his real eternal self, and his eternal necessities. Being intoxicated with the bodily conception of life, he considers the body to be his true self. In other words, he ascribes a sense of 'me' to his gross body. He considers other beings—who are by-products of his gross body—as his own kith and kin. He thinks the pleasure arising from the bodily conception of life is his actual necessity.

When a living entity thus forgets his true nature, the most merciful Kṛṣṇa sends his devotee, a *Vaiṣṇava Ṭhākura*, who manifests as the spiritual master to the living being. The spiritual master imparts the knowledge of one's constitutional position to the conditioned living entity. The conditioned living entity is extremely attached to consuming stool-like matter; therefore, he considers the most munificent spiritual master as his enemy and in spite of the good advice of *guru* and *Vaiṣṇavas*, the conditioned living entity tries to attack them in various ways. Still the *para-dukhā-dukhī*<sup>17</sup> *guru* and *Vaiṣṇavas*—desiring to confer the ultimate benefit to conditioned souls—endeavor to bestow their earnest mercy upon them, who are busy in the abominable activity of eating stool-like matter. Goddess *Durgā*, who is the maintainer of this castle-like material world, gradually deprives the conditioned living entities by putting them into materialistic pain, pleasure and perils of this world. Thus, she purifies them. When a living entity realizes the ephemeral nature of this material world, the auspicious instructions of *guru* and *sādhu* can enter into them through aural reception. Then, in a reverential mood, by taking exclusive shelter of the lotus feet of a spiritual master along with the association of the devotees, the living entity realizes his constitutional position of engaging in devotional service to the Lord. Gradually by *svārūpa-siddhi*<sup>18</sup> and *vastu-siddhi*<sup>19</sup>, the devotee of the Lord enters the eternal happiness and bliss of devotional service unto the lotus feet of Supreme Lord Kṛṣṇa in Goloka Vrindavan.

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<sup>17</sup> One who is pained by seeing the pain of others.

<sup>18</sup> Attaining the realization of perfection. The living entity, in his pure consciousness is the servant of the Lord. This is the constitutional position for all of us. With the realization of the constitutional position, the stage of being always diligently engaged along with body, mind and words, in the service of the Lord is *svārūpa-siddhi* or actual liberated stage. If one attains the constant devotional service of the Lord, then only one can attain *svārūpa-siddhi*. *Svārūpa-siddhi* devotees are highly exalted personalities. They easily become *paramhansa*.

<sup>19</sup> Liberation from the conception of material body. *Svārūpa-siddhi* devotees, by the mercy of the Lord, at the time of leaving the body, factually get manifested in their transcendental form as eternal associates in the eternal pastimes of the Lord, this is the topmost result of devotional service.

## 11. Illusory Form of Sītā Abducted by Rāvaṇa

Everyone knows that the King of Lankā, Rāvaṇa, abducted Śrī Jānaki devī—also known as Sītādevī—the wife of Lord Rāmacandra. Rāvaṇa kept her in the *Aśoka* grove in his kingdom of Lanka for many days. While Sītā was thus captive, Lord Rāmacandra constructed a bridge to go to Lankā. There, he killed Rāvaṇa and rescued Sītādevī. In the presence of all, Lord Rāmacandra asked Sītādevī to affirm the purity of her character by having her enter into a blazing fire. When Sītādevī entered the raging fire, not a hair in her body was burnt due to her steadfast chastity. Śrī Rāmacandra then accepted her as His wife.

Śrī Rāmacandra is Viṣṇu Himself. Sītādevī is His eternal consort—Śrī Lakṣmī herself. Śrī Rāmacandra did not accept any other wife, except for Sītā. Sītādevī also did not know anything other than Lord Rāma. Śrī Rāma and Sītā are not like ordinary male and female human beings. Rāvaṇa is a demon and an ordinary living entity. How, then, is it possible for a demon to abduct Śrī Lakṣmīdevī or touch her? Let alone touching her, can Rāvaṇa even see her with his two eyes? Scriptures like *Vedas* and *Purāṇas* say that a mortal living entity cannot see transcendental things, just like we—the conditioned living entities—cannot see *Bhagavān* through these eyes of flesh.

When Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu was travelling in South India, at Madurai, He once accepted *prasādam* in the house of a *brāhmaṇa*. The *brāhmaṇa* was a devotee of Lord Rāma. The *brāhmaṇa* invited Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu for lunch. After taking bath in the river *Kritamala*, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu came to the house of the *brāhmaṇa* to take lunch *prasādam*. There, he saw that even as the noon time was passing, the *brāhmaṇa* did not make any arrangement for cooking. Mahāprabhu asked him what the reason may be. The *brāhmaṇa* replied, “When Lakṣmaṇa brings wild vegetables, fruits and roots, Sītādevī will do the necessary cooking for Lord Rāmacandra.” Saying this, the *brāhmaṇa* hastily made arrangements for cooking. Mahāprabhu took *prasādam* at the house of that *brāhmaṇa* at three o’clock. However, the *brāhmaṇa* himself did not eat anything and was fasting. It appeared as if the *brāhmaṇa* was very worried and has some deep unhappiness. Seeing this, Mahāprabhu asked the *brāhmaṇa* the reason for his sorrow. The *brāhmaṇa* replied, “I have no reason to live. I shall give up my life by entering either into fire or into water. A demon has touched the mother of the universe, *Maha Lakṣmī* (Goddess Sītā). I even had to hear that through my ears. Having heard this, I do not desire to live. My heart is burning in sorrow.” Mahāprabhu said to the *brāhmaṇa*, “Sītādevī is Lakṣmī herself. She is the spiritual form of bliss and knowledge. Let alone touching mother Sītā, the demon could not even see her. When Rāvaṇa kidnapped her, he kidnapped only a material, illusory form. As soon as Rāvaṇa arrived before Sītā, she disappeared and presented to Rāvaṇa an illusory, material form, which was a replica of Sītādevī”.

When Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu came to *Setubandha*<sup>20</sup> in *Rāmeśvaram*, He listened to *Kūrma Purāṇa* in the assembly of a group of *brāhmaṇas*. In that assembly, during a conversation on the topic of Sītādevī, He heard, “When Jānakidevī—the topmost of the chaste ladies—saw Rāvaṇa, she took shelter of the fire god, *Agni*. *Agnideva* produced an illusory form of Sītā and the original Sītā was staying in the abode of the fire god. When Rāvaṇa saw the illusory form of Sītādevī, he mistook her to be the real Sītā and abducted her. Meanwhile, *Agni* carried the real Sītā and brought her to *Pārvatī*, goddess *Durgā*. An illusory form of mother Sītā was then delivered to Rāvaṇa, and in this way, Rāvaṇa was cheated. When Lord Rāmacandra tested Sītā, the illusory form of Sītā entered into the fire. At that time, *Agnideva* delivered the real Sītādevī to Lord Rāmacandra. With the permission of the *brāhmaṇas*, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu took the palm leaf, which described this episode, from the *Kūrma Purāṇa* and showed it to the Madurai *brāhmaṇa*.

In this example, there is a great lesson. Ordinary ignorant persons think that the atheists are capable of torturing *Bhagavān*, His devotees, the Deity, the river *Gaṅgā*, or *tulasī*. Many believe that some of the infidels destroyed the tall pinnacle of many temples and many Deities. Some of them are such positivists<sup>21</sup> that, they think that the thieves, robbers and atheists can steal the ornaments of the Deities or destroy the Deities. This means that God does not have any power to stop them. Therefore, there is no use of worshipping the Deity or Viṣṇu. But these positivists do not understand that the atheists and heretics cannot even see these transcendental things, let alone touch them. The illusory energy of the Lord takes the shape of truth and deprives the atheists and heretics. A magician produces an illusion in front of the people by producing gold coins from dust. Even by examining those gold coins multiple times, ordinary persons cannot understand the illusive tricks of the magician. Similarly, the All-Mighty Lord, by whose illusory energy the whole world is bewildered, baffles the atheists and heretics through illusion by keeping His own form in secret. How surprising it is?

## 12. Parīkṣit and Kali

One day, on the bank of the Sarasvati River, there was a bull that was dragging itself on just one leg and a cow that was grief-stricken and crying inconsolably. The bull was actually the personality of religion (Dharma), and the cow was mother Earth personified. The bull asked the cow, “Dear mother, why are you crying? Are you moved to tears because you are seeing me walking on just one leg? Or are you afraid of being exploited by the *śūdra* kings?” The bull continued, “Nobody offers any fire sacrifices these days, and so, the demigods do not receive their share of sacrifices. Is that the reason why you are feeling so anguished? The king of the demigods, Indra, does not shower rainfall like before since he does not receive his share of the sacrifice. Without rainfall, all subjects suffer. Are you pained by this? Husbands these days do not treat their wives well, nor do fathers always wish well for their children. On the contrary,

<sup>20</sup> The place where Lord Rāmacandra constructed a bridge between India and Laṅkā.

<sup>21</sup> Believers in direct perception or empiric evidence.

they behave mercilessly toward their dependents. Is this what troubles you? Or, are you grieving because the *brāhmaṇas* are no longer virtuous and are becoming subservient to those that are inimical toward them? Heavily influenced by Kali, the lowest of the *kṣatriya*<sup>22</sup> are bent on destroying kingdoms. The so-called rulers and leaders do not adhere to scriptural injunctions, but rather aspire to enjoy independently and engage in all sorts of adultery. Is this why you are grieving? Oh, Mother Earth! To eliminate the huge burden on you, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Śrī Hari, descended on this planet and engaged in pastimes which are more pleasing than the happiness derived from liberation. Are you mourning because that Lord Śrī Hari has now disappeared from the planet?”

In response to Dharma’s questions, mother Earth in the form of the cow replied, “Oh Dharma! I am mourning at the thought of all the people who are now within the sight of sinful Kali. I am anguished about the terrible circumstance that you, I, the demigods, sages, saintly persons, *brāhmaṇas* and all the other castes, and all those in the *brahmacarya*<sup>23</sup> order of life find ourselves in.”

It so happened that Mahārāja Parīkṣit—the grandson of Arjuna—was on a regular survey of his empire and had reached the very bank of the Sarasvati where the bull and the cow were conversing. Just as Mahārāja Parīkṣit reached there, a *śūdra*, in the disguise of a king, was persecuting the bull and the cow with a rod. Mahārāja Parīkṣit noticed that three of the bull’s legs were missing and he was urinating out of fear of the *śūdra*. The poor cow was also crying desolately as if she had just lost her calf. The scene of these two helpless animals being thus tormented by an unscrupulous *śūdra* enraged the righteous king. As a matter of duty to protect the powerless in his kingdom, the king made up his mind to punish the *śūdra* with death. But, first, he began consoling the bull and the cow. He asked the bull who had cut off his three legs. Then, Dharma—as the bull—enunciated many principles on religion and truth to the king. Hearing such wonderful articulation of the highest principles from the bull, Mahārāja Parīkṣit immediately understood that this bull in his presence was none other than religion personified. In the age of *Satya-yuga*, he had all four of his legs: penance, truth, mercy and cleanliness. By the time that *Kali-yuga* began, three of his legs—penance, mercy and cleanliness—had already been eliminated. Only one leg in the form of truth was remaining on which Dharma was somehow still standing. The unruly Kali seemed bent on breaking this last leg too!

Understanding the gravity of the situation, Mahārāja Parīkṣit prepared to rid the world of Kali—the *śūdra* disguised as a king—who was tormenting Dharma and mother Earth. Kali knew that he could not stand against the valour and virtue of the king. He also knew that the king was uncompromising in his deliverance of justice to his subjects. Kali’s despicable actions against Dharma and mother Earth would meet with the severest reproach from the king—likely in the form of his immediate death! Seeing no other way out, he threw open the kingly attire that he had disguised himself with. He fell gingerly at the king’s feet and begged for his life.

Mahārāja Parīkṣit was as virtuous as he was powerful. As a matter of religious principle, he never killed even the deadliest enemy that came forward in a mood of surrender. Seeing the

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<sup>22</sup> The warrior or kingly class

<sup>23</sup> The first of the four orders of life in the *Varṇāśrama* system, or student life.

woefully surrendered Kali at his feet, Mahārāja Parīkṣit spoke with compassion, “There is no danger to your life from me any longer. However, I forbid you to stay anywhere in the kingdom governed by me. Oh Kali! I know that wherever you reside, all irreligious qualities like greed, falsehood, theft, robbery, duplicity, misfortune, hypocrisy, quarrel, pride etc. naturally thrive. Therefore, you are unworthy to reside where religion and truth exist and where the devotees reside.”

Hearing Mahārāja Parīkṣit’s words, Kali’s anxiety about his impending death subsided and he let out a sigh of relief. He thanked Mahārāja Parīkṣit for sparing his life. With a quizzical look, however, he spoke to Parīkṣit, “Oh mighty Mahārāja! You are the emperor of the entire world! If I cannot stay in your kingdom, then, I have nowhere else to go! Please tell me, Oh King, where could I possibly stay in this world?”

Mahārāja Parīkṣit contemplated on how best to protect his citizens while also accommodating Kali’s request with compassion. Then, he said, “I grant you four places to reside. Wherever there are irreligious activities of gambling (cards, dice, etc.), different kinds of intoxication, illicit association with or too much attachment to women, and violence toward living entities, you may make those your places of residence.” In the reign of Mahārāja Parīkṣit, such irreligious activities were rare aberrations, and certainly not the norm. Kali therefore begged the king for more places where he could reside under the king’s government. Being merciful, Mahārāja Parīkṣit permitted Kali to reside in one additional place—where there is gold. Wherever there is gold, there is falsity, pride, lust, violence, and animosity. With Mahārāja Parīkṣit’s permission, Kali made these five places his place of residence. Mahārāja Parīkṣit then restored the three legs of Dharma—austerity, cleanliness, and mercy—and congratulated the earth.

It is therefore improper for a person who desires auspiciousness—particularly those on the path of religion, kings, leaders, and spiritual masters—to enjoy these five things where Kali resides on all counts. Those who genuinely want auspiciousness, those who want to serve the Holy Name, and those who desire service to the Supreme Personality of Godhead and to His devotees, for such persons it is imperative that they always stay away from these five residences of Kali and engage in the devotional service of Lord Śrī Hari. In the life of devotees, there will not be lawlessness, adultery, illicit attachment to women, attachment to drinking alcohol etc., attachment to wealth and money, killing of living entities, falsity, violence, envy, pride or any other kind of activity related to the modes of ignorance or passion. The devotees view even licit connection with women with complete detachment. They are always firm in the devotion of Lord Śrī Hari, who is beyond the three modes. By spreading the message and conduct of *hari-kathā*, they will always benefit themselves as well as others.

## 13. Satī and Dakṣa

Satī’s father Dakṣa once organized a fire sacrifice, in which he invited all the demigods, sages amongst the demigods, saintly kings, and other honorable personalities. However, Satī and her husband, Lord Śiva, were not amongst the invited guests. As the invitees were on their

way to attend Dakṣa's sacrifice, Satī heard about the grand sacrifice being organized by her father. When Satī saw such great personalities going to attend the sacrifice, she too became filled with the desire to attend the ceremony at father's house. With this longing, she went to Lord Śiva to seek his consent for her to visit the sacrifice at her father's house.

Lord Śiva said, "Your father, Dakṣa, insulted me in front of the progenitors. It is not proper for you to ever go to the house of such a father. My dear Satī, Dakṣa will not be very affectionate toward you. Your father is a very proud man. His heart burns in jealousy when he sees the pious glories of unpretentious men. Just like the demons, this class of men are envious toward the Supreme Personality of Godhead and His devotees. When I did not pay obeisances to him or greeted him, he slandered me. Wise persons may not externally offer obeisances to a person who is in bodily consciousness and who are agnostic. However, they always mentally offer obeisances to the indwelling Supreme Personality, Vāsudeva, situated in such a person's heart. Dear Satī, even though Dakṣa is the generator of your body—in other words, even though he is your father—it is not proper for you to see him. Besides, it is contrary to your duty to see persons who are partial toward your father."

Satī did not heed the words of her husband, Lord Śiva. She was extremely eager to see her relatives, all of who were about to meet each other in the house of her father, Dakṣa. When she went to Dakṣa's home, nobody greeted her out of fear of Dakṣa, with the exception of her mother and sisters. However, it was as if she had turned deaf toward any greetings them because she realized that her father did not greet her at all! She also observed that Dakṣa's sacrifice had no share of oblation for Lord Śiva, her husband. It was then that she realized that the sacrifice was initiated to denigrate Lord Śiva. Unable to tolerate such an insult against the best of the *Vaiṣṇavas*, Lord Śiva, she became furious and spoke to Dakṣa as follows, "Who does not have somebody that is their favorite or somebody very unpleasant in their lives? Therefore, who does not have some kind of conflict with somebody? However, you are envious of that great personality, Lord Śiva. Some saintly persons accept the faults of others as good qualities. But you have become so inimical with envy that you are seeing faults even in another's good qualities. Those who can properly discriminate between faults and good qualities are called '*madhyama*'. Those who consider a small good quality in others as a great quality and praise it as such are called '*uttama*'. You think there is fault in that best of the best, Lord Śiva. But actually, there is no fault. When one hears a powerful person start criticizing a protector of religion, then either one is not capable of counteracting it, or one is capable of doing so. If one is not capable of counteracting it, then it is his duty to cover his ears and leave the place immediately. If, however, one is capable of counteracting such blasphemy, then one should forcefully cut off the blasphemer's tongue and then give up his own life. Therefore, I shall no longer bear this body, produced of the semen of such a person who is envious of *Vaiṣṇavas*. If one inadvertently takes in a poisonous substance, then he should purify himself by vomiting it. There is no need of having this unworthy body, which is produced from your body. I am very ashamed of being related to somebody like you. Just as one leaves his body at the time of

death, I am going to leave this despicable body which is produced from your body.” Speaking these words, Satī left her body through the fire of yoga, i.e., through self-immolation.

There is a specific lesson to learn from the example of Satī. A real devotee of the Supreme Lord cannot tolerate insults against the *guru* or the *Vaiṣṇava*. When a bonafide *guru* or a pure devotee is being insulted, if possible, one should counteract it by making the tongue of that blasphemer nonfunctional. However, this may not be possible to do every single time, in which case, one should leave the place. If the tongue of the slanderer cannot be purified, then one’s duty is to give up one’s own life.

Some people say that we should be gentle toward the vilifiers of *guru* and *Vaiṣṇavas* taking into consideration social etiquette and practical courtesy. This opinion is of those unscrupulous people who are not favorable toward the Supreme Personality of Godhead or His devotees. Those who are gentle toward vilifiers of *guru* and *Vaiṣṇava* think that the Supreme Lord and His devotees are worthy of being treated like any other living entities. No matter how dignified a person may be from a public point of view, if he criticizes a *Vaiṣṇava thakur*, then his dignity cannot be protected and such vilifiers cannot be supported. Satīdevī’s example demonstrates, at the highest degree, the ultimate principle of non-cooperation toward bad association. Prahlāda relinquished the association of his father who was antagonistic to Lord Viṣṇu. Satīdevī set a great example because instead of relinquishing the association of her father—who was the vilifier—she burnt her own body to ashes by the fire of yoga.

‘Satī could not bear the vilification of her husband because her husband is very famous and the best of all. Therefore, she wanted to preserve her dignity and ego, just like an ordinary self-centered lady.’ If somebody thinks along these lines, such a person is committing a great offence against Satī’s feet. Her example is very elevated and transcendental. She used to consider her husband as the best of pure *Vaiṣṇavas*. This is clear in every sentence spoken by Satī in Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam. Satī’s consciousness is not centered around bodily consciousness. If her consciousness was centered around bodily conception, then she could not have left her body. In any ordinary chaste woman who is in bodily consciousness, if faced with a situations like Satī’s, the propensity to take revenge could have been very strong. The example of Satī is millions of times more elevated than those ordinary chaste ladies. In the case of the ordinary chaste ladies, they may give up their bodies to protect their chastity. In Satī’s example, there is transcendental love toward Viṣṇu and *Vaiṣṇava*. This is why, she is the best.

## 14. Dhruva

King Uttanapada, the son of Svayambhuva Manu, had two queens: Suniti and Suruci. Among them, Suruci was very dear to Uttanapada. From the womb of Suruci, Uttama was born and Dhruva was born to Suniti.

One day, while the two young princes—Uttama and Dhruva—were playing nearby, Uttanapada pick up Uttama and loving placed him on his lap as he sat on the throne. Seeing the affection of his father for his step-brother, the young Dhruva, too, wanted to get on the lap of his father. However, King Uttanapada did not even cast a glance at Dhruva, instead indulging Uttama affectionately on his lap. Suruci was also present there when this incident took place. With great pride, she spoke to Dhruva, “Even though you are a prince, you do not deserve to sit on the throne. If you would like to sit on the throne, you must undergo severe austerities, satisfy the Supreme Lord and with His blessings, you shall have to take birth from my womb.”

The young Dhruva was very aggrieved by such harsh words of his step-mother. He ran to his mother, Suniti, who heard how her co-wife Suruci had abused her son with such caustic words. Greatly affected by hearing this narration, and heaving a sigh, Suniti spoke to her son, Dhruva, “My dear son, you have fallen into such a pitiful condition because you were born from the womb of an unfortunate person like me. Your stepmother is right, though, because if you have any desire to accede to the throne, you must satisfy the Supreme Personality of Godhead. There is no other way to alleviate your sorrow, except for the mercy of the Lord, who is very kind to His devotees. You should surrender unto Him and worship Him.” Hearing his mother’s words filled both with sorrow but also with profound encouragement, Dhruva made an unflinching resolve in his heart to leave for the forest and engage in devotional service unto Lord Śrī Hari.

Understanding Dhruva's firm determination, Nārada *Muni* approached him and said, “My dear child, it is destiny that is the cause of one’s happiness and sorrow. Therefore, one must be satisfied with one’s destiny. It will be very difficult for you to attain the Lord's mercy by undertaking the mystic process of meditation that your mother has instructed to you. Even great sages cannot achieve this feat, despite after practicing severe austerities for thousands of years.” When Dhruva heard the advice of Śrī Nārada *muni*, he replied, “Oh learned *brāhmaṇa*, please advise which honest path I should follow so that I may obtain an exalted position far beyond that which has ever been achieved by any of my forefathers, or by anyone else for that matter? Will you please kindly advise me on this?” The great sage Nārada said to Dhruva, “My dear child, by engaging in devotional service to the Supreme Lord, it is possible to attain all perfection. Therefore, go to *Madhuban*,<sup>24</sup> which is situated on the holy bank of river Yamunā, and worship the Lord, Śrī Hari, diligently.” After advising Dhruva in this way, Nārada *Muni* initiated him in the most confidential twelve-syllable mantra.

Dhruva followed Nārada *muni*'s instructions meticulously and engaged in one-pointed meditation. The Supreme Personality of Godhead, who is very kind to His devotees, became very satisfied by Dhruva’s unalloyed devotional service for a long period of time. He appeared before the young Dhruva and imparted transcendental knowledge unto him. Seeing the Lord in front of him, Dhruva offered suitable prayers to Him, “My dear Lord, whatever one desires, You grant him that. However, those who worship You, for any other purpose than for pure

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<sup>24</sup> One of the twelve forests of Vrindavan.

devotional service, are surely deprived by *maya*. They are greedy to enjoy ephemeral material things, which are available even in hellish planets. Oh master! The bliss that one experiences by meditating upon Your lotus feet and hearing Your pastimes in the association of Your devotees, is unparalleled even in comparison to the supersensory pleasure of spiritual bliss (*brāhmaṇanda*). Therefore, even the post for the demigods is very insignificant. Oh eternal Lord, may I get the association of those pure souls who perform unalloyed devotional service unto you? The ocean of material nescience is full of sorrow. On the strength of such saintly association—hearing Your glories—I will be able to cross over the ocean of material nescience very easily.”

The Supreme Lord, who is very kind to His devotees, became very pleased with the prayers offered by Dhruva, and said thus, “Oh child of pious vows! All good fortune unto you! I know the desire within your heart. Nobody has ever been able to occupy the glorious post that I am now awarding unto you. Great sages like *Dharma, Agni, Kaśyapa, Indra, Vanaprastha*, the seven sages, as well as all the stars are continually circumambulating that region. Oh son, your father will soon go to the forest after giving the entire world to you to reign. You will continuously rule the earth according to scriptural injunctions for thirty-six thousand years. Your stepmother, Suruci, was envious of you, even though you were never envious of her. I do not tolerate such animosity toward My devotees. As a result of her envy toward you, her son, Uttama, will be killed while hunting in the forest. When she goes out to the forest searching for her son, afflicted by great pain due to his absence, she, too, will be devoured by a forest fire. By worshipping Me in devotional service, you will be able to remember Me and thereafter go to My abode.” Saying this, the Lord disappeared.

In this way, all of Dhruva’s desires were indeed fulfilled. However, his heart was not completely happy. He returned home, feeling quite remorseful. Even after seeing the Lord in person, he did not pray to Him to attain eternal devotional service unto His lotus feet. “Ah, I am so unfortunate! Even after approaching the lotus feet of Lord Śrī Hari, who can vanquish material life, I prayed for things which are perishable! It is impossible to satisfy the Supreme Lord—who is the inhibitor of this material world—by means of penances and austerities. Even though I pleased Him thus, I prayed for the impermanent world. Alas! Just like a foolish and poor man, who asks an emperor for a few broken grains of husked rice, I, too, had a similar misled mentality and prayed for very insignificant transitory material things from the Lord. Lord Śrī Hari was ready to bestow the bliss of devotional service upon me, but I, foolishly, asked for a proud possession.

Meanwhile, hearing the news of his son’s return, King Uttanapada very happily greeted Dhruva into the kingdom. In time, the association of his saintly son helped elevate the King’s consciousness. After some time, King Uttanapada installed Dhruva as the prince regent and went to forest to perform exclusive devotional service unto the Supreme Lord.

Both Dhruva and Prahlāda manifested ideal devotional service to the Supreme Lord at a very young age. There are some unique features of the quality of each’s devotional service.

From the very beginning, Prahlāda did not perform devotional service unto Lord Śrī Hari for any kind of materialistic gain or to obtain any kingdom. However, Dhruva engaged in devotional service unto Lord Hari—having been tormented by the harsh words of his stepmother—because he hoped to gain his father's kingdom and his favor. When Lord Narsimhadeva offered His benediction to Prahlāda, Prahlāda replied, “The servant who desires something in exchange for his devotional service to his master is not a servant, but a merchant.” On the other hand, Dhruva had begun performing austerities with the hope of gaining a kingdom. However, when he saw the lotus-eyed Lord Śrī Hari, who asked him for a benediction, Dhruva replied, “Oh Lord! I engaged in meditation upon You to gain a kingdom. But now, I am blessed with Your *darshan*, which is very rare to obtain even for the demigods and sages. While looking for mere pieces of glass, I found wish-fulfilling gems. I do not seek any other benediction.” From the exemplary behavior of Dhruva, we can learn that pseudo devotional service to the Lord in order to fulfill material desires is not pure devotional service. Devotional service must be rendered for attaining exclusive and causeless service unto the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Even if there is some residual desire in the heart, that desire is eradicated by unadulterated, unflinching devotional service unto the Supreme Lord. But we should always remember that we cannot obtain devotional service with ulterior motives in our hearts. Extreme and unmotivated eagerness for devotional service vanquishes other material desires from the heart and thus one attains to the stage of unalloyed devotional service.

## 15. The Ideal Monarch, Pṛthu

In the lineage of Dhruva Mahārāja, there was once a king named Anga, who had a son named Vena. Since childhood, Vena was extremely cruel by nature. When he would go hunting in the forest, people who saw him even from afar would run in fear, screaming, “Here comes Vena!” Vena was so cruel and merciless that while playing with other boys his age, he did not even feel the slightest remorse to kill them just like animals. King Anga tried many ways of chastisement and reprimand in order to discipline his son and prevent such outrageous behavior. However, all efforts were to no avail. King Anga was so pained by the actions of his own son that he began to repent silently in his heart and decided to leave his kingdom. Unbeknownst to all, including his wife, one night, the King left home. When people heard of the King's departure, everyone started searching for him all over the earth to try to persuade him to come back. However, after a long and persistent search mission, there was still no sign of the King. Everyone started giving up hope of ever finding the King.

In the absence of the King, the sages began advising Vena in different ways to give up his evil behavior and engage instead in *yagna* in devotion to Lord Viṣṇu. However, Vena rejected their sagacious advice and said proudly, “I am God myself. Who is the Lord of sacrifice, Viṣṇu, anyway?” The sages could not tolerate such criticism against their beloved Lord Viṣṇu and therefore, destroyed Vena.

Vena’s mother, who had access to some mystic potency, preserved the dead body of her son by a certain mantra. In the absence of a reigning King or his son, the kingdom fell into sheer anarchy. Seeing the anarchic situation of the kingdom, the sages reasoned, “The dynasty of the saintly King Dhruva should not end altogether in such a manner. Many saintly kings, who were great devotees of Lord Viṣṇu, have appeared in this lineage.” Thinking in this way, the sages rolled the two hands of Vena’s preserved body. From them, two personalities—a male and a female—appeared, who were both part of Viṣṇu. The male personality was Pṛthu and the female personality was Archi. In due course of time, Pṛthu Mahārāja was crowned king. Due to his grace and in loyalty to him, mother Earth generously gifted the subjects of his kingdom by producing various kinds of substances.

Once, when Pṛthu Mahārāja had begun performing an *ashwamedha yajna*,<sup>25</sup> Indra—the King of heaven—tried to steal the sacrificial horse. However, Indra—who had disguised himself in the garb of a religious man—was defeated by the valor of Mahārāja Pṛthu’s son and gave up the horse he had stolen and quickly disappeared from the scene.

In order to try to steal the sacrificial horse, Indra had put on many different garbs. Each of these garbs is called *pāṣaṇḍī*,<sup>26</sup> or ‘symbol of sin’. Personalities like *Digambar Jains*, Baudhists in blood-red cloths, and *kapalika*<sup>27</sup> etc. wear these *pāṣaṇḍī* garb.

When King Pṛthu understood Indra’s deceptive behavior, he prepared to kill Indra. However, Lord Brahmā intervened and advised Pṛthu against taking Indra’s life. At that very moment, the Lord of sacrifice Śrī Hari, appeared with Indra in the sacrificial arena. The Lord spoke to King Pṛthu, “Indra has obstructed your hundredth horse sacrifice. However, he is now begging your forgiveness. Please forgive him.” When Mahārāja Pṛthu heard the Lord’s words, he accepted them with bowed head as the order of Lord Śrī Hari. Indra fell unto the feet of Pṛthu and begged forgiveness.

Then, Lord Śrī Hari desired to give Mahārāja Pṛthu a benediction. To this, Pṛthu said, “You are the Lord of all the demigods who are empowered to give benedictions. Which conscientious person will ask for benedictions desired by arrogant persons? Such enjoyable things are available even to embodied dwellers of hell. If in the liberated state, there is no opportunity to hear the nectarean glories of Your lotus feet from the mouth of *Vaiṣṇavas*, then I do not even pray for liberation. The only benediction I am praying for is that You give me thousands of ears with which I may hear Your glories. I do not desire anything else. When a person somehow hears Your auspicious glories, even just once, in the association of great saints—if he is not totally an animal or if he can comprehend things even a little—then he cannot refrain from hearing Your glories.” This statement of King Pṛthu is accepted as the crown jewel of all teachings by pure devotees.

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<sup>25</sup> Horse sacrifice

<sup>26</sup> Another dictionary meaning of *pāṣaṇḍī* is a heretic.

<sup>27</sup> An ascetic who worships the cult of Goddess Kālī.

King Pṛthu—the monarch among *Vaiṣṇavas*—was staying in the land situated between Gaṅgā and Yamunā. Completely detached, he was ruling his kingdom—which was the whole earth consisting of seven islands—with absolute power to enforce punishment for the sake of serving Lord Śrī Hari and the *Vaiṣṇavas*. His command was unresisted throughout the kingdom. He never exercised his authority over *brāhmaṇas* (those who know Brahman) and *Vaiṣṇavas* (the masters of all people). He was an ideal king, who kept the welfare of his subjects in the forefront of his mind. He engaged his subjects in the service of Śrī Hari; he glorified and preached the topics of the Lord to them. He never viewed his subjects as mere instruments to bring glory and luxury to himself. He never excused atheism of any kind. His nectarean instructions to his subjects are described in Śrīmad Bhagavatam (Chapter 4.21). There, he says to his subjects, “By becoming resolute in perfecting service to Śrī Hari, you should become engaged in the service of the lotus feet of the Lord unconditionally, to the extent possible as per your qualification, with body, mind, word, quality, and your own prescribed duty. My subjects who worship the spiritual master of the world, Lord Śrī Hari, in a resolute manner bestow their mercy upon Me. Kings should never try to enforce their influence upon the self-realized *brāhmaṇa* or *Vaiṣṇava* family, who are solely engaged in the service of Lord Viṣṇu. Let me hold the dust of the feet of these self-realized personalities on my crown throughout my life.”

By the order of the Supreme Lord, one day, the great sages headed by Sanat Kumāra visited the assembly of King Pṛthu. It was generally the custom that persons who are devoid of any material desire did not meet a sense-gratifier or a king. However, Sanat Kumāra appeared in the royal assembly of King Pṛthu just to bestow his mercy upon such an exalted *Vaiṣṇava* king. King Pṛthu served the sages personally in great humility, setting an example on how *Vaiṣṇavas* are to be served. King Pṛthu spoke to them as follows, “If a house consists of items, such as, water, grass, earth, householders, servants, and paraphernalia—which are all suitable to serve worshipable saints like you—then, such a house is a really blessed *grha*. Even if the residents of such a house be poor, they are actually real householders and they are certainly blessed. On the other hand, residents of houses that are not consecrated by the water which bathe the feet of *mahābhāgavatas* bring fear of death, just like a tree resided by snakes. Even if such houses are filled with ample wealth, their residents still live in fear. Oh Lords! We foolishly consider subjects that are pleasant to our dull senses to be the most essential things. This world is an arena of many tribulations. We have fallen into this world due to the reactions of our own misdeeds. Is there any possibility of any good for us in such a world? I have strong faith that you are the only well-wisher of the aggrieved people of this world. Therefore, please kindly tell us how can auspiciousness can preside in this world.”

Sanat Kumāra replied, “Oh King, you have a rare and unflinching inclination for the glorification of the lotus feet of Madhuripu<sup>28</sup> Śrī Hari. With this kind of inclination, the dirt of material desire gets washed away from the inner consciousness of the heart. With faith, when one practices *Bhāgavata dharma*, enquires about the Absolute Truth, engages in dedicated

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<sup>28</sup> The enemy of the demon Madhu, another name of Kṛṣṇa.

service of Lord Śrī Hari and His great saintly devotees, and hears and chants the topics of *Bhagavān*, then attachment to glorification of the lotus feet of Lord Śrī Hari develops. The soul attains happiness by developing distaste for the association of dishonest people attached to wealth, beauty, etc. and by leaving aside his own wealth and material aspiration and by developing a preference for secluded life. **One should not desire to reside even at a secluded place where there is no possibility of drinking the nectarean topics of Lord Śrī Hari from the lotus mouth of saintly persons; otherwise, one will fall prey to gratifying his senses** If one stays in such secluded places where one cannot hear the glorification of Lord Śrī Hari, then, He (Kṛṣṇa) is not pleased.

Nonviolence, living a life pursuing remission, performance of virtuous activities in accordance with the guidance of a bonafide spiritual master, attentively discussing the character of Lord Mukunda, sense control, relinquishing desire for sense gratification, observing vows for the sake of Lord Śrī Hari, tolerance toward other religions, not endeavoring either to gain worldly possessions or to protect worldly possessions, tolerating dualities like heat and cold etc., glorifying Lord Śrī Hari who is the ornament of His devotees—by doing all these activities, one’s devotion increases. This phenomenal world operates on cause and effect. Renouncing this phenomenal world increases attachment to *Parabrahman* (Śrī Kṛṣṇa). It is based on the soul (oneself) only that the body and other things become dear to us. If the soul is neglected or degraded, then what else can be more seriously harmful to a living entity? Anxiety after wealth and other objects of sense gratification is the root cause of destruction of all human pursuits (*dharma, artha, kāma, and mokṣa*). The knot of fruitive work in a devotee’s heart gets easily cut off when one remembers the beauty of the lotus leaf-like fingers of the lotus feet of the Lord. On the other hand, however, impersonal yogīs who simply control their senses, although devoid of devotion to Lord Śrī Hari, are not able to cut off this knot. Therefore, rather than trying to control the senses as a separate endeavor, please simply engage in devotional service to Lord Vāsudeva. There is a lot of tribulation in the life of one who, without taking shelter of the boat-like lotus feet of *Bhagavān* Śrī Kṛṣṇa, desires to cross over the ocean of material existence by trying to control his senses through the process of meditation. Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the only recourse for crossing the ocean of material existence. Therefore, Oh King, by taking the lotus feet of the worshipable Lord as a boat, please cross over this miserable and insurmountable ocean of material existence.”

Mahārāja Pṛthu said, “Oh great sage, Lord Śrī Hari is merciful to the poor and He has shown mercy to me today. You were each commissioned as the bearer of His mercy. What *dakṣiṇā*<sup>29</sup> could I possibly offer to you? My body, kingdom, and so on are like remnants given by saints like you. Just as a servant offers something to the king, I offer everything—including my life, sons, house, family, wealth, kingdom, army, earth etc.—to you. Please mercifully accept these.”

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<sup>29</sup> Offering of gratitude

Mahārāja Pṛthu was detached from actions by offering the fruits of the actions to the Lord. He got rid of pride that arises from a doership mentality, by knowing the transcendental Lord as the only master of all work. By staying at home with empress Lakṣmī and by roaming around everywhere like a sun-god He never got entangled with matter. In philoprogenitiveness He was Manu, in Lordship He was Brahmā, in consideration of truth of Brahman he was as good as Brihaspati and was like Lord Himself in controlling over the senses. After offering the earth to His son, Mahārāja Pṛthu went to the forest along with His wife. Sometimes He used to eat roots and fruits, sometimes dry leaves and sometimes just by drinking water he used to spend time. At the end He ate only air. To worship Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa He performed such superexcellent austerities. As King Pṛthu was engaged in service to Śrī Bhagavan (Śrī Kṛṣṇa) very quickly devotion to Śrī Kṛṣṇa arose in His heart.

## 16. King Prācīnabarhi

Born in the dynasty of the great *Vaiṣṇava* emperor, Mahārāja Pṛthu, King Prācīnabarhi was known for his heroism. He once performed a sacrificial ceremony that covered the entire earth with ‘*prācīnāgra*’ grass (i.e., the auspicious *kuśa* grass was spread in such a manner that their tips pointed eastward). From this time onwards, he became renowned by the name ‘Prācīnabarhi’—named after the *kuśa* grass. Prācīnabarhi had a wife named Śatadruti, from whom he had ten sons. These sons were known as ‘Pracetās’. When the ten sons were old enough, King Prācīnabarhi sent them away from the kingdom to practice austerities.

Śrī Nārada Muni, the best among *Vaiṣṇavas*, could understand that King Prācīnabarhi’s heart was too attached to fruitive work. Therefore, one day, he appeared before the King and offered him some sage advice. Seeing the most exalted *Vaiṣṇava*, Śrī Nārada Muni, in front of him, the King inquired from him, “An attached householder considers his wife, sons, and wealth as ‘the ultimate truth.’ This is the reason that they wander the entire world in pursuit of their desirable deeds but never attaining the ultimate truth. What is the solution for the welfare of such souls?”

Śrī Nārada reminded Prācīnabarhi of the thousands of animals he had killed during the sacrificial ceremony he had performed earlier and said to him, “Oh King! The many thousand animals that you had mercilessly killed for the sacrificial ceremony are now burning with rage. They are constantly remembering how you persecuted them and are eagerly awaiting to avenge the miseries you inflicted upon them. Upon your death, they are eager to tear you into pieces with iron horns. This is an apt time for you to hear an ancient allegory of King Purañjana, which I will now narrate to you. Please hear this from me.

There was once a famous king named Purañjana, who had a friend. Nobody knew the name and activities of his friend. King Purañjana was in search for a suitable place to live. Lustily, he began searching various different kinds of dwellings (various types of bodies) so he could extract the maximum materialistic pleasures from such an abode. However, none of the

dwelling he found seemed fit for fulfilling his unlimited desires and wishes. Finally, one day, during the course of his travel to the southern part of the Himalayas, his sight fell upon an abode (the human body) consisting of nine gates (which is allegorically referring to the human form). This abode (the human form) was adorned with walls (the skin), gardens (exterior matter), castle (face), trench (goodness, passion and ignorance—the three modes), ventilators (pores of hair follicles), and exit gate (eyes). The domes of the abode was built with heaps of gold, silver, and iron (bile, mucus and air—the three components of body). Although various wild animals lived in the forest, they were as non-violent as the sages (The enjoyable items obtained due to pious activities by the living entity—named Purañjana—are all non-duplicitous). Therefore, nobody was afraid of entering the forest. While strolling in the garden of that beautiful dwelling, King Purañjana (the living entity) saw a beautiful young woman (referring to the materialistic intellect) entering the forest. She had ten servants (the ten senses) accompanying her. Each servant had hundreds of wives (that is, each of the senses was the master of hundreds of other engagements). The charming lady was also accompanied by a five-headed serpent (the life form manifested as five kinds of action) acting as her bodyguard.

The young girl (in the form of ignorance that puts the living entity in illusion) was wandering in the forest in search of a proper husband (who would be no better than an enjoyer). The glance of that young girl was like a sharpened arrow. Even so, the brave man Purañjana (the living entity who is interested in enjoying) addressed the lusty girl. He was immediately pierced by the arrow of her glance and he began to be impatient. The woman also became attracted to King Purañjana and began to gently, “This would be an ideal place for my residence. It is my good fortune that you have come here. It is evident to me that that you, too, desire sensual pleasure, just as I do. Please accept all the enjoyable items that I am going to present to you. Please stay in this city of nine gates for one hundred years.” In this way, Purañjana became a puppet at the hands of that charming lady for one hundred years. He became so occupied indulging in various enjoyable matters with her that he forgot his constitutional position.

One day, King Purañjana picked up a large bow in his hands (which symbolizes his doership and enjoyer mentality). He put on an armor made of gold (gold armor symbolizes the mode of passion) and tied a quiver with inexhaustible arrows on his back (inexhaustible arrows symbolize unlimited desires for enjoyment, beauty, pride, and material designations). Then, he rode on a chariot (which symbolizes the dream-like material body) and went inside a forest named Pañca-prastha (Pañca means five, symbolizing sight, taste, smell, sound and touch). The commander of all the senses, namely the mind, followed Purañjana. On that day, King Purañjana abandoned his wife (conscientious intelligence) and accepted the bow and arrow (which symbolize attachment, enviousness, and the false pride of a doer). He moved about the forest with pride for the pleasure of hunting (to extract pleasure from material objects). King Purañjana (the *jīva* soul) mercilessly killed many animals that day. After hunting many small and big game, the King became exhausted with thirst and hunger (remorseful for his evil deeds). Thus, he finally returned home (on the path of religion). When he arrived at his palace, he could not find his queen at first. He began looking for her and found her lying despondently

on the bare ground. He touched her feet gently and began pacifying her by embracing her, taking her in his lap, and inquiring about her moroseness. He apologized to her if he had offended her in any way. In this way, King Purañjana pacified his wife. Together, they began enjoying each other again. In due course, his wife gave birth to eleven hundred sons (symbolizing conscientious discrimination, doubts, etc.) and one hundred and ten daughters (shyness, anxiety, worries, etc). Each son of Purañjana's, in turn, gave birth to hundreds of sons. In this way, the King became attached to his family and became inattentive to the service of the benefactor, the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

Finally, he met with what is never desired by people who are lusty—old age. Unnecessary endeavor to serve the low-born—which manifests as mental and physical ailments—and the daughter of time—old age—attacked the castle-like body of Purañjana. Purañjana lost his bodily luster due to this attack. Purañjana began to notice that his conscience (in the form of his sons), sobriety (in the form of his grandsons), and his mind (along with its presiding deities) all began to manifest unfavorable disposition toward him. What's more, he noticed his wife's love toward him dissipating (which symbolizes retrieval of intelligence). He could not find any remedy for his condition even after applying various medicines (in the form of mantras). Thus, cornered by the attack of various diseases (which is represented in the allegory by an army of the low-born) and old age (the daughter of death), King Purañjana found himself no longer able to fight against the inevitable destruction of his castle-like body. In this way, he left his body. At the time of his death, Purañjana was unable to remember his one and only benefactor, the Supreme Personality of Godhead. When he reached the abode of death, all the animals that he had killed during his sacrificial ceremonies gathered around him, eager to take revenge. Since Purañjana was thinking of his wife when he died, he attained a female body.

After enjoying the heavens as a result of all the good deeds he had done, he was born as the daughter of King Vidarbha—a gross materialist. Later, she got married to Malayadhwaaja, who was a devotee of the Lord. She and Malayadhwaaja gave birth to a daughter (who symbolizes the natural inclination toward the service of the Lord) and seven sons (who symbolize hearing, chanting and associating with devotees). The sons grew up to being devoted to the Lord by the process of hearing and chanting. When they were old enough, the saintly king Malayadhwaaja (who symbolizes a bonafide spiritual master dedicated to the service of Śrī Kṛṣṇa) divided this whole world among his sons, considering ways to propagate Kṛṣṇa consciousness and facilitate devotional service like hearing, chanting, etc. He then left for a solitary place called Kulācala in order to fully devote himself to the Lord's devotional service. The daughter of Vidarbha also left everything and followed her husband. She was deeply devoted to her husband, just like a devotee who is very favorable to his spiritual master. She took refuge of renunciation, which was adorned with the spirit of devotion, and began to serve her highly-realized husband in the matter of religiosity. When Malayadhwaaja (in the form of the spiritual master) left this planet, the daughter of Vidarbha took a vow of following her husband. After carefully preserving her husband's body, which was absorbed in the ultimate state of trance, she decided to end her life by burning in the fire of separation. She began remembering her husband's qualities and became intensely eager to attain the service of her

spiritual master in the eternal abode by leaving behind all attachment to life. At that time, one old benefactor (Śrī *Bhagavān*) appeared in the disguise of a *brāhmaṇa* before the daughter of Vidarbha (a female disciple very dedicated and extremely dear to the spiritual master), who was in severe pain due to her separate from her husband. The *brāhmaṇa* began discussing her constitutional position (the true position of all living entities), the position of the Lord, the role of ignorance and illusion, and ways to get out of them to attain devotional service to the Lord.”

After hearing this narration, King Prācīnabarhi asked Śrī Nārada about the significance of the allegory of Purañjana. Nārada Muni explained the real meaning of each word one by one as follows, “According to the fruit of action, the living entity is awarded different kinds of birth—higher or lower. However, fruitive action can never eradicate the threefold miseries of life. One cannot achieve the ultimate benediction without exclusive devotional service unto the Supreme Lord. The only thing that can give birth to attachment to Śrī Vāsudeva is the constant hearing of nectarean topics of Lord Śrī Hari from the lotus mouth of saintly personalities. Feelings of hunger, thirst, grief, illusion, fear, and feelings of misery due to various deficiencies mostly go away as ancillary benefits of this kind of attachment. Fruitive action is never the true conclusion of the Vedas. Śrī Viṣṇu is the original personality of Godhead described in the Vedas. That which increases inclination toward Lord Śrī Hari is true knowledge. The only duty of the living entity is to fix his mind on the consciousness of Lord Śrī Hari by giving up all kinds of attachment to the body and household paraphernalia. The so-called spiritual masters are unaware of such truth of self-realization. Only a bonafide spiritual master can dispel all doubts of a living entity.” Hearing this advice from Śrī Nārada, King Prācīnabarhi abandoned all kinds of bad association. He went to the hermitage of the sage Kapila and began worshipping the Lord in solitude. Eventually, he attained the lotus feet of Lord Śrī Hari.

## 17. The Ten Pracetā Brothers

There was once a king named Prācīnabarhi who had ten sons. Each of the ten sons was renowned by the name ‘Pracetā’ and each was very religious and of good character. Once, following the order of their father, the Pracetās set out on a journey towards the western direction to practice austerities. On their way, they met with Lord Śiva. Śambhu, or Lord Śiva, is most merciful and he, out of his mercy, began instructing the Pracetās about the Absolute Truth. One can learn many valuable things from those instructions. Lord Śiva said, “A person who surrenders unflinchingly unto the lotus feet of Śrī Vāsudeva (Lord Kṛṣṇa, the son of Vāsudeva) is very dear to me. By following prescribed duties for many births, one can become qualified to attain the post of Brahmā, and with further qualification, one can attain me (Śiva). However, one who is a devotee of Vāsudeva can attain the Supreme abode of Lord Viṣṇu immediately after leaving the present body. It is true that time personified destroys the entire universe, but even time personified does not dare put one who is surrendered to the lotus feet of Lord Vāsudeva under its control. Such devotees do not waste their time talking about

ordinary matters of the kingdom of the world (heaven) if association of Vaiṣṇavas—who are close associates of Bhagavān (Supreme Lord Kṛṣṇa)—is available even for a fraction of a moment. To them, even liberation seems very insignificant. The fortune of association with devotees of Lord Śrī Hari is the best sign of the Lord’s mercy. If one’s mind gets attracted to pure devotees of the Lord, then the living entity can easily understand the tattva of Bhagavān or the truth about the Supreme Lord, Kṛṣṇa.” With these words, Lord Śiva gave the Pracetās prayers to be chanted to Lord Viṣṇu. As instructed by Lord Śiva, the Pracetās faithfully chanted these prayers to Lord Viṣṇu for ten thousand years. They completely pleased Lord Viṣṇu by this prayer called the ‘*rudra geeta*,’ or a song sung by Lord Śiva (who is also known as Rudra). This ‘*rudra geeta*’ is like a complete blossoming of the pure devotional prayer of Mahādeva (Lord Śiva) towards Lord Viṣṇu.

Lord Viṣṇu appeared before the Pracetās after ten thousand years. The Lord expressed His special satisfaction not just of their pure devotional service but also of the real friendship and cooperation amongst the brothers. He told them to ask Him for a benediction and instructed them to engage in devotional service by entering into the order of household life. Lord Śrī Vāsudeva said, “Those who submit all results of their actions knowing that Bhagavān is the only enjoyer of all the results do all activities in a favorable mood of service. For those who live discussing the topics of Bhagavān, staying in the order of household life does not become a reason for bondage. Lord Śrī Hari appears in a form that is ever increasingly fresh in the hearts of those who hear of His qualities.”

The ten Pracetā brothers prayed together, “Oh Lord! Those upon whom Bhagavān—the guide of Bhakti-yoga and the only goal—is pleased, cannot have any cherished benediction other than praying for His mercy. Just like a honeybee who has tasted the pārijāta (asphodel) flower will not taste honey from any other flower, pure devotees who have gained the Lord’s lotus feet do not have anything more to pray for except for the honey of serving Those lotus feet.” Praying for only one benediction from Bhagavān, the Pracetās said, “Dear Lord! For as long as we traverse this world—being bewildered by Your illusory energy birth after birth according to our own karma—please give us the only benediction that we get the association of Your devotees who are engaged in chanting Your glories. The eternal benefit one gets by associating with—even for a short span of time—pure devotees, who are eternal associates of the Lord is incomparable to heaven or even liberation. What to speak of the deplorable so-called happiness of lording over a kingdom of this world! In the society of pure devotees, only pure topics about Your Lordship are chanted. When one hears those topics, the thirst for sense enjoyment can easily become pacified. Your personal associates—the devotees—wander all over the world just to purify even the holy places of pilgrimage. Dear Lord, by virtue of a moment’s association with Lord Śiva, who is very dear to You and who is Your most intimate friend, we were fortunate to attain You as our ultimate shelter. You are the most expert physician who is capable of treating the extremely incurable<sup>30</sup> disease of material existence. Dear Lord, we have studied the Vedas; accepted a spiritual master; and offered respects to

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<sup>30</sup> Extremely incurable means which is very difficult to cure through treatment.

*brāhmaṇas*, advanced devotees, and aged personalities who are spiritually very advanced. We have offered our respects to them, and have remained without envy toward any brother, friends or anyone else. We have also undergone severe austerities within the water and have not taken food for a long time. All these spiritual assets of ours are simply offered for Your satisfaction. We pray simply for this benediction and nothing more.”

If every living entity accepts the ideals of pure devotion like the Pracetās, then, one can get eternal benefit. In Śrīmad-Bhagavad-gītā, Śrī Kṛṣṇa says to Śrī Arjuna, “Those who become devotees of other demigods worship those demigods with faith.” The irregularity of such persons needs to be specially noticed. Anything done in a wrong way is not pure devotion. Bhagavān Śrī Viṣṇu is the origin of everyone; He is the life of all demigods; He is the controller of all controllers. Devādideva<sup>31</sup> Mahādeva has set an ideal example of devotion to Viṣṇu by always holding river Ganges—which is the nectar from the lotus feet of Śrī Viṣṇu—on his head. Mahādeva is always holding Anantadeva in the form of a snake on his head as a head ornament, and as an ornament around his throat. He has become mad in love by singing the name of Saṅkarṣaṇa Rāma in Ilāvṛta-varṣa along with Pārvatī. The Pracetās served Śrī Viṣṇu by accepting Lord Śiva who is very dear to Lord Kṛṣṇa. However, they did not accept Lord Śiva in an incorrect and non-spiritual way by considering him to be an independent God. In other words, they did not accept Śiva to be Lord Viṣṇu Himself, or think that only their names and forms are different. This is why, their devotion is an exemplar of pure devotion.

By the order of Bhagavān Viṣṇu and Brahmā, the ten Pracetā brothers married a girl named Māriṣā, who had grown up under the guardianship of trees. Dakṣa, the son of Lord Brahmā—who had committed an offence at the lotus feet of Lord Śiva—took birth from the womb of Māriṣā. After engaging in the household order of life for many years, the Pracetās eventually handed over all responsibility of home and their wife to their sons. Then, they left home and went to a sea shore in the eastern direction. This was the same place where sage Jajli had attained perfection. There, they came upon the sage of the demigods, Nārada muni.

As soon as they saw Nārada muni, they offered prayers at the lotus feet of the exalted Nārada muni with utter humility, “Oh, Prabhu! We have almost forgotten whatever our Gurudeva Lord Śiva and Lord Śrī Hari had previously instructed us. We got very attached to household life. Please instruct transcendental knowledge onto us again.” Nārada, out of compassion for the ten brothers, spoke as follows, “That birth by means of which service to Śrī Viṣṇu takes place is the real birth. The only duty to be performed is any work through which favorability towards service of Bhagavān is achieved. The topmost lifespan of anybody is that in which service is rendered to Lord Hari. The purest mind and the truest words are those mind and words through which service is rendered to Bhagavān. Without service to Śrī Hari, what is the result of birth, activities performed according to Vedic injunctions, or even a long life like that of the demigods? Without service to Śrī Hari, what is the use of any of the following: hearing all of Vedānta; penances; elaborate explanations of scripture; jugglery of

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<sup>31</sup> This means the first of the demigods.

words; capability to infer meanings of different scriptures; strength; acute intelligence; or dexterity of senses? What is the use of any of the following in which the senses of Śrī Hari are not pleased: eight-fold mystic power; knowledge; asceticism; study of scripture; vows; detachment; and all kinds of other accomplishments? The soul of every living entity is Śrī Hari. He is merciful to such an extent that He gives even Himself. He is the form of ultimate bliss. Just as pouring water on the root of a tree energizes the trunk, branches, twigs and all other parts of the tree, and just as supplying food to the belly enlivens the senses and limbs of the body, similarly simply through the performance of devotional service unto the Supreme Personality of Godhead, all demigods, fathers, forefathers, etc. are automatically worshiped. When we water a tree, we water it at the root; we do not need to separately water each branch, leaf, or flower. Similarly, when we supply food to the belly, we do not need to separately feed the eye, ear, nose, etc. Similarly, if Śrī Viṣṇu—who is the root and life of all demigods—is served, there is no need to serve any other demigod separately. Therefore, pure devotees serve Bhagavān Acyuta, who is the root of all.

There is no material desire in the heart of pure devotees. Their consciousness is pure. When they call upon Bhagavān, He responds to their call and comes to reside in their hearts. Accepting subjugation to his devotees, Śrī Hari does not go to any other place from there. Śrī Hari considers those materially detached persons, for whom Bhagavān is the only wealth, as very dear and acknowledges their devotion as most pleasant. Therefore, Śrī Hari does not accept worship of those so-called ‘great personalities’ who are maddened by pride of scholarship, wealth, aristocracy, etc., and who criticize the materially detached saintly persons.”

Hearing these instructions from the mouth of Nārada muni, the ten Pracetā brothers went to the abode of Lord Viṣṇu while meditating on the lotus feet of Śrī Hari.

## 18. Bharata and Rantideva

In very ancient time, there was a king named Ṛṣabhadeva, who is an incarnation of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. He appeared as the son of Mahārāja Nābhi, a *kṣatriya*. The name of Ṛṣabhadeva’s queen was Jayantī. Ṛṣabhadeva had one hundred sons. In those days, unlike the current practice of the son of a *brāhmaṇa* being automatically considered a *brāhmaṇa*, caste and race were determined by one’s nature and character. If the son of *kṣatriya*, *vaiśya*, or *sūdra* had the symptoms of *brāhmaṇa*, he was counted amongst the *brāhmaṇas*. Similarly, if the son of a *brāhmaṇa* demonstrated symptoms of a *sūdra*, he was considered as *sūdra*; he was no more called a *brāhmaṇa*. Out of the hundred sons of Ṛṣabhadeva, ten were *kṣatriyas*, nine were *paramahaiṁsa* devotees of the Lord, and eighty-one were *brāhmaṇas*. Out of the ten *kṣatriya* sons, Bharata was the best of all. It is his name that is glorified in the name of the land that currently has India, which was called Bhāratavarṣa. The land was previously known as Ilavrtavarsa.

Ṛṣabhadeva gave transcendental education and religious instructions to His sons. Ṛṣabhadeva's instructions offer the ideal example of how a father should teach his son.<sup>32</sup>

Ṛṣabhadeva said to His sons, “Even dogs and hogs, who eat stool, are highly covetous for sense gratification. Sense gratification is not the duty of a human being; service to the Lord is the only duty of a human being. Service to great saintly persons is the doorway for liberation. Those who are not attached to worldly things and who are always chanting the glories of the Lord are certainly great. Please engage in service of such great souls, leaving aside attachment to the body and the intelligence of ‘I’ and ‘mine.’ A person who sees a blind man going in the wrong direction and still does not alert him is certainly very cruel. Similarly, a person who does not alert people of the world as they pursue the path of attachment to the body is very merciless. A *guru* is not a *guru*, a relative is not a relative, a father is not a father, a mother is not a mother, and a demigod is not a demigod if such authorities cannot deliver the living entity from the death-like material existence by giving instructions on *bhakti*. It is for this reason that we see that in the past, Bali Mahārāja rejected Śukrācārya who was his so-called *guru*, Bibhīṣaṇa rejected his elder brother Rāvaṇa, Prahlāda rejected his father Hiraṇyakaśipu, Bharata rejected his mother Kaikeyī, King Khaṭvāṅga rejected the demigods, and the wife of the *brāhmaṇas* rejected their *yajñic brāhmaṇa* husbands to engage in the service of the Lord because the so-called *guru*, relative, husband, father, mother, or demigod created an obstruction in their service to the Lord.”

Not long after Bharata had received such education from his father that he began ruling the kingdom for some time. Ultimately, though, he left household life and entered into the hermitage of Pulahā and there, engaged in the service of Lord Vāsudeva. His hermitage was situated near the river Gaṇḍakī. There are large quantities of *Nārāyaṇa-silā* available in that river. Staying in seclusion, in the groves of the hermitage of Pulahā, Mahārāja Bharata used to serve the Lord with different kinds of flowers, leaves, basil, fruits, and roots. He was so engrossed in the Lord's service that physical symptoms of the amplification of his love for the Lord were visible, such as, trembling of the body, tears flowing from his eyes, delirious thrill (in the mode of pure goodness), etc.

One day, as Mahārāja Bharata was sitting on the bank of river chanting the Holy Name, a pregnant deer came to the bank of the river and started drinking water. Just as the deer was drinking water, some distance away, a lion suddenly began roaring loudly. The deer became fearful for her life, and tried to make a dash to the other side of the river by jumping into the water. While trying to cross the river, the deer gave birth to a baby deer, but unfortunately, she did not survive herself. Mahārāja Bharata could see that the breed in the womb of the deer was now floating helplessly in the river stream.

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<sup>32</sup> The instructions of Ṛṣabhadeva to His sons appear in the Fifth canto, Fifth chapter of the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam.

Could there be any stone-like heart that would not have melted by such a heart-wrenching scene? Mahārāja Bharata was moved to action. To save the deer calf, Bharata stopped his glorification of the Lord’s name, and thought,

*“nūnam hy āryāḥ sādharma upāsama-sīlāḥ kṛpaṇa-suhṛda evam-vidhārthe svārthān api gurutarān upekṣante.*

*Even though one is in the renounced order, one who is advanced certainly feels compassion for the suffering living entities. One should certainly neglect his own personal interests to protect one who has surrendered, although they may be very important.”*

—Śrīmad Bhāgavatam 5.8.10

Thinking in this way, Bharata rescued the helpless deer calf from the river stream and very carefully started serving it day and night. He was always thinking of the deer, so much so that at the time of death, he thought of the deer calf sitting and lamenting next to him as if like his own son. His consciousness was so attached to the deer calf that, even after becoming a *sannyāsī* and leaving home, he was meditating on the calf. Thus, when Bharata left his human body, he accepted a deer body in his next life.

Although Bharata helped the helpless deer, he did not consider the living entity to be Nārāyaṇa; he did not consider living entities to be God; he did not imagine the poor and the helpless as Nārāyaṇa. That was to his credit. It is because of this that repentance and memory of service to the Lord arose in his heart within a short span of time while he was still in the body of a deer. The deer-bodied Bharata repented thus, “Alas! What a tribulation! I got deviated from the path of intelligent people. I had left all association and came to the solitary forest. I was able to fix my mind on Vāsudeva by practicing devotional service for a long time, by earnestly hearing and glorifying the name and quality of the Lord, by remembering Him, and other processes. Yet, all that dwindled along with the deer calf! I am a fool!”

Even in a deer’s body, as this good intelligence arose in Bharata’s mind, he left his mother deer and the Kālāñjara mountain in which he was born as a deer. He proceeded to the hermitage of Pulatsya and Pulahā. There, he left the deer body and got the body of a *brāhmaṇa* in his next life. The *brāhmaṇa* Bharata remembered his past life. He refrained from meeting any materialistic persons for fear that he may fall down again due to bad association. In order to protect himself from others, he lived as if he were a mad, dimwitted, dumb fool. Internally, however, he was absorbed in the service of the Lord.

One day, in the dead of night, Bharata (known in that life as Jaḍa Bharata) was guarding a grain field. At that time, some associates of a bandit leader came and captured Jaḍa Bharata to sacrifice him in the worship of Bhadrakālī. As the dacoits were getting ready to sacrifice him to the demigoddess, she appeared from the idol in a fierce form and cut the dacoits with their own swords in order to protect the devotee.

One time, the King of Sindhu and Sauvīra, Rahūgaṇa was going to the hermitage of Kapila. It so happened that the King’s chief palanquin carriers needed another carrier. They

happened to see Jaḍa Bharata looking like a worthless fool. Forcefully, they engaged him in the task of carrying the King's palanquin. The prideless Jaḍa Bharata carried the palanquin without any protest. However, his compassion was such that he feared that some living entities may be harmed when he was walking, he walked very slowly and deliberately. The speed with which Jaḍa Bharata was walking was obviously much slower than that of the other palanquin carriers. Naturally, then, the palanquin was wobbling unevenly.

The King inside the palanquin was very annoyed with the palanquin carriers. Inferring that the new palanquin carrier, Jaḍa Bharata, was to be blamed, he started reprimanding Bharata and threatened him with punishment. In response to the King's words filled with pride, Bharata began speaking about profound truths.<sup>33</sup> The King was taken aback to see this foolish-looking palanquin carrier talking about such elevated subjects like a learned person. Bharata's words awakened his consciousness, and the King begged for Bharata's forgiveness. If great personalities are insulted, even persons as great as Lord Śiva will be destroyed.

Bharata said to King Rahūgaṇa, "The forest of this material world is insurmountable. Living entities, bound by the influence of *māyā*, suffer the resultant reactions of their own actions. In this forest, there are six plunderers in the form of one's senses, wife and children, etc. Just as in a deep forest, there are flesh and blood-eating foxes, dogs and tigers, similarly there are such six plunderers in the forest of material life. As a tiger cunningly steals the sheep, in this forest of material life, clever foxes, like one's son or wife, also say 'you are my father', 'you are my husband' and in this way, by entering into one's house-like heart, they steal the intelligence of the living entity. Being situated in familial attachment, one gets angry with one's wife or son due to hunger. In this place, there is punishment and three-fold misery. Those who are proud thinking 'this land is mine' give away their life by fighting amongst themselves. Some, in association with their wives and allured by her sweet words, enjoy so-called happiness and desire to see the face of a son. Sometimes, one may be fearful of the passing time and associate with a deceptive and wicked-minded heretic. Hey Rahūgaṇa! Relinquish your material attachment and engage in the service of Lord Hari."

Having received the association and instructions from the *mahābhāgavata* Bharata, King Rahūgaṇa understood the non-permanent nature of this world and that the only way to ultimate happiness was service to Śrī Hari. He was therefore able to reject the identification of the self as the body and surrendered completely to Śrī Hari.

Due to his avarice for serving the Supreme Personality of Godhead, King Bharata—even while in his youth—was able to very easily renounce his very beautiful wife, son, well-wishers, kingdom, and other material possessions, which are certainly very difficult to give up. He considered heaven and even liberation to be insignificant. For him, only service to Lord Nārāyaṇa was the essence. It is offensive and actually suicidal to considering the poor, helpless

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<sup>33</sup> The instructions given by Bharata to Rahūgaṇa is described in Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam Fifth canto, from the tenth through fourteenth chapters.

animals, or other living entities to be Nārāyaṇa. Bharata realized that. That is why, while living in the deer body, he chanted these words, “I surrender to the Lord of *māyā*, the indweller in all, Lord Hari”.

*nārāyaṇāya haraye nama ity udāraṁ  
hāsyān mṛgatvam api yaḥ samudājahāra*

—Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 5.14.45

While Bharata was leaving his deer body, he was chanting aloud, “Obeisances to Sri Hari Nārāyaṇa. (I am surrendering to Nārāyaṇa.)”

Along with Bharata, the character of another great soul has been discussed by the *ācāryas*. His name is Rantidev. He was a great charitable king. He was not a *sannyāsī* like Bharata, but he was a superlative *vaiṣṇava* householder. He engaged all his money and wealth in the service of the devotees of the Lord. Even while he would be fasting himself, he used to always satisfy others with Viṣṇu *prasādam*. He was so benevolent that sometimes, the King would give away everything. Not having any material possession, he would fast along with his entire family, sometime for more than a month without drinking water! Regardless of the living entity, he used to satisfy everybody with the Lord’s *prasādam* and would try to ignite devotion to Lord in their heart. His prayer was-

*na kāmāye ’haṁ gatim īśvarāt parām  
aṣṭarddhi-yuktām apunar-bhavaṁ vā  
ārtim prapadye ’khila-deha-bhājām  
antaḥ-sthito yena bhavanty aduḥkhāḥ*

*“I do not pray to the Supreme Personality of Godhead for the eight perfections of mystic yoga, nor for salvation from repeated birth and death. I want only to stay among all the living entities and suffer all distresses on their behalf, so that they may be freed from suffering.”*

—Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 9.21.12

Seeing that Rantideva’s heart was so moved by the sorrow of others, Brahmā and other demigods, and Viṣṇumāyā tested him. They presented many temptations to him. But King Rantideva would pay obeisances to such temptations from afar and with devotion, would fix his consciousness only on the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Vāsudeva.<sup>34</sup>

The close associate of Śrī Caitanyadeva, Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī prabhu, has given a very valuable instruction after comparing the character of Bharata and Mahārāja Rantideva. He said, “Bharata had difficulty because he left the service of the Lord to serve the body of a living entity. The real path of auspiciousness is to try to do good to the soul of the living entity. Living entity

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<sup>34</sup> *sa vai tebhyo namaskṛtya /niḥsaṅgo vigata-sprahaḥ/vāsudeve bhagavati/bhaktyā cakre manaḥ param/*

is eternal servant of the Lord. Since Bharata forgot this real service, he endured bodily and mental tribulations. In reality, to deliver a living entity from tribulation, the seed of the tribulation—that is to say, ignorance or *māyā*—needs to be eradicated. That ignorance can be destroyed by hearing and chanting of the topics of the Lord. Such such hearing and chanting, the situation of one’s eternal form is awakened. By gaining wealth, poverty is automatically eradicated. Similarly, by gaining the wealth of eternal service to the Lord, ignorance is automatically removed. Rantideva did not want to benefit the body of other living entities by being moved by the external sorrow of the living entities. He fixed his mind on Lord Vāsudeva with devotion. Demigods brought many temptations to him, but he did not get fascinated by them; he did not desire for the happiness of liberation, what to speak of material sense gratification. He especially tried to ensure that all living entities get engaged in the service of the Lord.

Therefore, those who want to gain real auspiciousness will try to help others in such way that their soul is benefited. They will ensure that there is opportunity for hearing and chanting of the topics of Śrī Hari; they will try to eliminate the famine of chanting of the Holy Name so that everybody can be enriched by the wealth of service to Lord Kṛṣṇa. By temporarily benefiting the body and mind of another, one cannot extricate the eternal deficiency of that living entity. All deficiencies gets abolished if one becomes rich by the wealth of service to Lord Hari.

*“King Rantideva had no ambition to enjoy material benefits from the demigods. He offered them obeisances, but because he was factually attached to Lord Viṣṇu, Vāsudeva, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, he fixed his mind at Lord Viṣṇu's lotus feet.”*

—Srimad Bhagavatam 9.21.16

## 19. Ajāmila

In the country of Kānyakubja, there once lived a *brāhmaṇa* named Ajāmila. He married a *sūdra* lover, by whose continual bad association, all his good conduct gradually eroded. Ajāmila became so deviated from the path of goodness that he started to maintain his family by employing various evil means and engaging in atrocious occupations. He passed eighty-eight years of his life in this way.

Old Ajāmila had ten sons, of which the youngest was a little boy named Nārāyaṇa. Nārāyaṇa was the apple of both his parents’ eyes. Old Ajāmila found immense joy in the inarticulate babble of his sweet-tempered child, and found himself enamored by his son’s childish play. Whatever Ajāmila liked to eat or drink, he always made sure to give some portions of it to his son, Nārāyaṇa. Ajāmila was very attached to that child.

While he was passing his life in this way, one day, Ajāmila found himself lying on his deathbed. Even at the time of death, Ajāmila was thinking of his son, Nārāyaṇa. Suddenly,

Ajāmila saw three terrible-looking persons (*yamadūtās*) approaching him to take him (the soul in the body) away. Confused, he began calling loudly for his son, who was playing some distance away. ‘Nārāyaṇa! Nārāyaṇa!’ Hearing the name of their Lord from the mouth of Ajāmila, some close associates of Lord Nārāyaṇa (*Viṣṇudūtās*) appeared there. They considered this dying man’s chanting of the name of the Lord offenceless (*nāmābhāsa* chanting). However, they saw that the *Yamadūtās* were pulling the soul (Ajāmila) from the core of the heart of the body of Ajāmila. Immediately, the *Viṣṇudūtās* prohibited the *Yamadūtās* from doing so. The *Yamadūtās* asked the *Viṣṇudūtās*, “Why are you obstructing the order of Dharmarāja Yama (the Lord of Death)? All of you are very attractive and have four hands, each long enough to extend to your knees. The resplendence of your bodies is illuminating all directions. Who are you? Whose attendants are you? Where have you come from, and why are you stopping us from arresting this sinful Ajāmila? We are the servants of Dharmarāja. Why are you stopping us?”

The *Viṣṇudūtās* smiled and with grave voice said to the *Yamadūtās*, “If you are truly the order-carriers of Dharmarāja, then please tell us the real form of religion as well as the symptoms of irreligion. Please tell us how punishment is determined and who the right candidate for punishment is.” The *Yamadūtās* replied, “Whatever is prescribed as duty in the Vedas is religion and anything contrary to that is irreligion. We have heard that the Vedas are Nārāyaṇa Himself. Sin and piety are both possible for fruitive workers because they are engaged with the three modes of material nature. Embodied persons cannot refrain from some action, even for a fraction of a second. The kinds of action one engages in while on this earth and the extent to which one engages in religious or irreligious activities determines both the type and extent of the reaction he receives in his next life. The all-knowing Yamarāja (Dharmarāja Yama), who is comparable to Brahmā, can see the previous conduct of all living entities from his residence and he accordingly administers judgment. In his early years, Ajāmila was a good-natured person, learned in scriptures. However, due to the influence of bad association, he fell down. Eventually, he lost all discrimination of good and bad, and engaged in various sinful activities. He never underwent any atonement for all the sins committed. Therefore, we will take him to Yamarāja, who carries a mace. After receiving due punishment commensurate with his sins, Ajāmila will be purified there.”

Hearing this, the *Viṣṇudūtās* regretfully said, “Alas! Alas! An unenlightened citizen is like an ignorant animal sleeping in peace with its head on the lap of its master, faithfully believing in the master’s protection. If injustice is seen in the saintly souls like Yama, then where can the living entity go to seek shelter? A person who does not deserve any punishment, is being punished. By taking the name of ‘Nārāyaṇa’ at the time of death, this *brāhmaṇa* has atoned for sins of not only this life but millions of lifetimes. The *nāmābhāsa* (one level in chanting the names of Lord) chanting of Lord Sri Hari is the best atonement for all kinds of sins. If anybody utters His Holy Names, the Lord considers thus of such a person: ‘This person is my own. I will have to protect this person by all means.’”

Through atonement prescribed in scriptures, there may be temporary peace due to nullification of reactions of one’s sins. However, the tendency to commit sin again is not

destroyed from the root. Therefore, such a person engages in sinful activities again. By simply a glimpse of chanting the Holy Name (i.e. *nāmābhāsa* chanting), even the tendency to sin, or the root of sin, is completely uprooted. The heart gets purified by becoming devoid of sinful tendencies. In any form and in any condition, if the Holy Name is chanted, that is never fruitless. From such chanting, one can obtain the ultimate auspiciousness and all inauspiciousness is removed. Religious activities, such as, austerities, vows, and charitable acts cannot remove the dirt from the heart in the manner that *nāmābhāsa* chanting of the Holy Name does.

On this earth, one may be able to appreciate that there are different kinds of fear in committing a sin. For instance, one may be punished by the king, criticized by people in general, or suffer consequences in hellish planets. However, even after seeing, knowing, and understanding that there could be punishment, people still feel compelled to engage in sinful activities over and over again. They may commit sin even after going through the process of atonement. Therefore, how can atonement, such as, a twelve years' vow, even be called an atonement? One may desist from committing sinful activities for some time, but on another instance, one is drawn to engage in sinful activities again. This is why, 'fruitive atonement' is as meaningless as an elephant bathing. An elephant trainer can force the elephant to take bath in the river to wash away all the dirt on its body. However, as soon as the elephant gets to the bank of the river, it sprinkles dust all over on its body. A similar situation exists for one who has a sinful tendency at heart. If the root of sinful tendency is not destroyed, whatever stringent atonement one may undergo to get rid of a sinful reaction, one will again be involved in sinful activity at some point. The reaction of one fruitive action cannot be destroyed by another fruitive action. Just as sinful conduct is fruitive action, atonement—such as, *candrāyan*—is also fruitive action. If deep-rooted ignorance is not destroyed, one may be able to absolve the reaction of one sinful activity through different processes of atonement. However, bad impressions in the heart causes new sins to sprout over and over again. Such atonement can be compared to bamboo bushes getting destroyed by fire. Such atonement may include: concentration of mind, controlling external and internal senses through celibacy, charity, speaking truth, cleanliness, nonviolence, abstinence, chanting, and regulation. All of these processes can eradicate sin. However, just as after the bamboo bushes have been burnt to ashes, at an opportune time, we find that the shoots will again re-grow. It means that the fire had not burnt the roots. Similarly, celibacy, charity, cleanliness, penance, etc. cannot destroy the root of sin.

However, those who have taken shelter of Lord Vāsudeva, by dint of unalloyed devotional service, such persons can easily destroy the sin from its root along with its ancillary. Just as we see that when the sun rises, all the piled-up snow melts until there is none left, similarly, if unalloyed devotional service arises in the heart of a living entity, there cannot be any sinful tendency. The sun's main function is to give light, but along with that, even the cold is destroyed. In the same way, when the unalloyed devotional service arises, love appears in

the heart of the living entity, and as a secondary result, ignorance and sinful tendency are destroyed immediately.

“There are two types of sins: 1) unmanifested (*aprārabdha*); and 2) manifested (*prārabdha*). Those that remain in our consciousness as unmanifested and the reaction to which are not yet materialized are called *aprārabdha* (unmanifested) sin. *Aprārabdha* sins are beginningless and unlimited. Reactions to those sins which have begun to manifest (*ārabdha*) are called *prārabdha* sin. It is due to the influence of *prārabdha* sin that one gets birth in a low-caste family, etc. In the *Padma Purāṇa*, there are four types of sins mentioned: 1. *phalommukha* (begun to manifest); 2. *bīja* (seed); 3. *kūṭa* (tendencies); and 4. *aprārabdha* (unmanifested) *Phalommukha* means *prārabdha*, i.e. the fruits such sins have begun fructifying in a real way. *Bīja* is the desire to get engaged in sinful activities; this is the reason for readiness of manifested sinful reaction. *Kūṭa* is the cause of readiness of *bīja* or sinful desires. *Aprārabdha-phal* or unmanifested fruits are those for which the procedure of *kūṭa* (sinful tendency) has not yet started.

Frost is destroyed immediately even with the slightest contact with the sunray; it does not even require as much sun as is required to melt snow. Similarly, just a glimpse of bhakti (*ābhāsa*) is enough to destroy sin. No amount of penance or atonement activities can purify a person as much as he/she can be purified with taking association of a pure devotee for even a moment and by taking shelter of Śrī Kṛṣṇa through service. Even if all the rivers join together, they cannot purify a pot of alcohol. Similarly, great fruitive atonement cannot purify a person who is averse to the service of Nārāyaṇa. In this world, those people who have even just once absorbed their consciousness on the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa; whose minds have become even just a little devoted towards the qualities of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, for such persons, all atonements have been performed by the glimpse of the attachment towards the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Such persons do not see Yama or his servants, even in their dreams.

Ajāmila has not only atoned for his sins in this lifetime; by the influence of a glimpse of the Holy Name, he has atoned for sins he has committed in millions of other lifetimes. What's more, he has uttered the names of Lord Hari, which is the all-auspicious means of getting liberated. The *ābhāsa* (glimpse) of the Holy Name of Lord Viṣṇu is the best form of atonement even for those who steal gold and other valuable things, those who drink alcohol, or those who kill *brāhmaṇas*, or are intimately involved with the wife of one's spiritual master, kill a woman, kill a cow, kill one's father, kill the king, or commit whatever other abominable sins there are. The Lord considers that it is His duty to provide all protection to whoever it is that chants His Holy Name. However, it is a great offence if someone uses the weapon of the Holy Name for the purpose of engaging in these sinful and wicked activities, thinking, 'Since any kind of great sins can be destroyed by the glimpse of the Holy Name, let me commit sin again and again. By chanting the holy sound vibrations, I will rid myself of the reactions of those sins!' This offense is called sinful tendency by the strength of the Holy Name (*nāmno balād yasya hi pāpa-buddhiḥ*). Persons who thus misuse the Holy Name are never protected by the Holy Name; they are deceitful offenders. They are unforgivable offenders at the lotus feet of the Holy Name,

causing more inauspiciousness to themselves and unto others. There is no respite for us if we deceive and try to engage in transaction with Him who is our only protector.

Even though Ajāmila engaged in many sinful activities, he did not commit an offense of any kind against the lotus feet of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Therefore, when he uttered the Holy Name, it was considered as a glimpse of the Holy Name and not an offense. ‘The Lord is my only master. He has full consciousness and I have infinitesimal consciousness. Every living entity is His eternal servant. I am not the body or the mind. This material world is my purifying jail.’—this kind of knowledge is called *sambandha-jñāna*. Until the awakening and realization of such kind of knowledge does not take place in the heart—by the mercy of spiritual master—the chanting of the Holy Name is considered a glimpse of the Holy Name (*nāmābhāsa*).

The *nāmābhāsa* chanting of the Holy Name are of four kinds: 1) indicative (*sanket*); 2) joking (*parihāsa*); 3) disgrace (*stobha*); and 4) neglect (*helā*). The first one—indicative—is again of two types. The first type of *sanket nāmābhāsa* is taking the name in gross intelligence indicating or targeting Viṣṇu. Ajāmila had this kind of indicative *nāmābhāsa*. Even though he was initially calling his son but in that, there was an indication of Lord Nārāyaṇa. Lord Viṣṇu appeared on the path of his memory. After this *nāmābhāsa* arose, he became free from the world and leaving aside all sorrow, he was doing devotional service to Lord in solitude. In second type of *sanket-nāmābhāsa* or indicative *nāmābhāsa*, other kinds of material things are targeted while trying to utter the names of Viṣṇu. Just like when the Muslims use the word ‘Haram’ or ‘Ha!’ ‘Ram!’ they are addressing Viṣṇu even though they target another living entity.

An example of the second type of *nāmābhāsa* chanting, or taking the names of Sri Kṛṣṇa jokingly, is seen in Jarāsandha. The word ‘*stobha*’ means disgrace or meaningless word or gesticulation. The *Mahājānas* state that Śiśupāla had this *nāmābhāsa*. The word *helā* indicates neglect. This kind of *nāmābhāsa* is possible by the materialistic, infidel, or a person of indolent nature if they do not have any offence of any kind. Joking (*parihāsa*) *nāmābhāsa* is slightly freer from flaws than indicative (‘*sanket*’) *nāmābhāsa*. Disgrace (*stobha*) is filled with more flaws than joking (*parihāsa*). Neglect (*helā*) is even more faulty than disgrace (*stobha*). Out of all the different kinds of piety, *nāmābhāsa* is considered to be the paramount piety of the living entity. *Nāmābhāsa* is most efficacious than any other kind of piety, vows, *yoga*, and all other kinds of auspicious activities. By means of *nāmābhāsa*, purification of consciousness, destruction of sins, easy deliverance from the material world and from the cycle of repeated birth and death, and eternal auspiciousness emerge.

Another kind of *nāmābhāsa* or *pratibimba nāmābhāsa* is considered amongst the offenses. We have experienced that sometimes, light reflected from the surface of the water may surge from something on the water and may appear to be displaying from there. This example can be compared with *pratibimba* (which means reflection) *nāmābhāsa*. The resplendency of the Holy Name reflecting from the lake resembling *māyāvāda* can be called reflection *nāmābhāsa*. From *anartha* related to ignorance comes shadow (*chāyā*) *nāmābhāsa*

and from *anartha* related to evil knowledge comes reflection (*pratibimba*) *nāmābhāsa*. In reality this reflection *nāmābhāsa* should not be labeled as *nāmābhāsa*; it is in fact an offense to the Holy Name. If someone pretends to be taking the Holy Name while harboring *māyāvāda* in the heart—in other words, considering Kṛṣṇa’s name, form, qualities, entourage and pastimes as temporary or fictitious—this is reflection *nāmābhāsa*, or one of the ten offences against the Holy Name, specifically the sixth offense.

Some *Mahājanas* say that Ajāmila chanted *nāmābhāsa* and destroyed all his sin on the day that he first called his son by the name of ‘Nārāyaṇa.’ By the first utterance of the name of ‘Nārāyaṇa,’ Ajāmila chanted *nāmābhāsa* when he gave his son the name ‘Nārāyaṇa’ for the first time during the name-giving ceremony. Thereafter, whenever he uttered the names of Nārāyaṇa, they were all part of his devotional service. However, it is seen that even after the *nāmābhāsa* chanting of the Holy Name during his son’s name-giving ceremony, Ajāmila did not refrain from sinful acts. Attracted to and in association of a low-class maidservant, he committed many sinful activities. This seeming conundrum can be resolved by the example of a tree. While the process of fructification for a tree starts quite a long back, actual fructification happens in due course of time. In the same way, although Ajāmila’s first utterance of ‘Nārāyaṇa’ during his son’s name-giving ceremony was *nāmābhāsa*, it was only at the time of leaving his body that the fruit of his *nāmābhāsa* chanting was fully fructified.

Some people may distort this principle and imagine uttering the names of the Holy Name as Holy Name and consider it to be *nāmābhāsa*. Such people may indulge in further sinful activities on the strength of Holy Name and consider whatever kind of tendency to sin and wickedness that they have to be simply the interval between the seed and the fructification of the tree. It must be noted that not everybody is, in fact, Ajāmila. From an external vision, if the activities of Ajāmila is equated to the wickedness of a person with *anartha* and if such activities are supported by the example of Ajāmila, then there will be delay in uttering the pure Holy Name of the Lord. If one supports the wickedness of a person with *anartha*—particularly by citing Ajāmila, Bilvamaṅgala, or others—there will be offence in the form of sinful engagement on the strength of the Holy Name. For liberated persons, those so-called wickedness is not a matter of fault; however, for conditioned persons, these cannot be an ideal example. Therefore, some *Mahājanas* have come to the conclusion that if the last uttering of the name ‘Nārāyaṇa’ by Ajāmila at the time of leaving his body is considered as *nāmābhāsa*, then there will not be any opening left for the ordinary insignificant living entity to run towards the path of auspiciousness. Theoretically, there is no difference between the previously spoken conclusion and this later conclusion. But in the latter case, more caution has been adopted for the devotional practitioner with *anartha*.

In the Holy Name of Lord Hari, all potencies are vested. Any persons who at the end utters the word “Hari”—whether he is fallen from a higher family, deviated from the path while traversing, has a broken body, is inflicted by snake bite, or distressed by the disease of old age, injured due to being beaten up by sticks—such persons need not have to suffer in hell. The great saintly persons have prescribed heavier atonement for heavier sins and lighter atonement

for lighter sins. There may be such provisioning in regards to atonement. However, there cannot be any such provisioning for the chanting of the Holy Name. Just by remembrance of that name, the sinful person gets rid of all sins.

All the sins of the sinner can get destroyed by such atonement processes as, penance, charity, vows, etc. However, such means do not eradicate the dirtiness in the heart or the impressions rooted in the heart in the form of tendency to sin. Only by devotion in the form of hearing and chanting the topics of the Lord can consciousness get purified in every way. In the same way as fire burns grass, if someone knowingly or unknowingly chants the Holy Name of Lord Viṣṇu, it destroys all sins of the chanter. Even when a medicine is taken unknowingly, it shows its powerful effect. Similarly even though the Holy Name is chanted unknowingly, it shows its potent power.

The associates of Lord Viṣṇu freed Ajāmila from the ropes of Yama and protected him from death. The Yamadūtas narrated the incident from end-to-end to Yamarāja after returning to Yamaloka.

Meanwhile, Ajāmila after coming to normalcy, prayed to the Viṣṇudūtas. However, they immediately disappeared. Hearing the pure *Bhagavad-dharma* in the conversation between the Yamadūtas and Viṣṇudūtas, Ajāmila became devout towards Śrī Hari. He became immensely repentant of his past foul misdeeds. Damning himself hundreds of times, he the following vow: “Identifying oneself with the inert body is the root of all desire for sense enjoyment. From the desire for sense enjoyment arises attachment to illusory auspicious and inauspicious activity, which is the binding force for the living entity. I will remove this binding by service to the Lord. The illusory energy of Lord Śrī Hari has subdued me in the form of lust. I am lowest of mankind, being driven arbitrarily by that lust like a subdued animal and dancing to its tune. By the association of the associates of Lord Viṣṇu and by chanting His names, my consciousness has been purified. No more will I get enchanted by false temptation. I will not fall down in the world filled with great darkness of ignorance. Now, by renouncing my attachment to body and household paraphernalia, I will fix my mind on the lotus feet of Śrī Viṣṇu.

A resolute renunciation and devotion had awakened in Ajāmila by just the few moments of association of the Vaiṣṇavas. Being freed from the ropes of affection toward his sons and others, he went to Haridwar and engaged himself in the service of the Lord. There, he was able to once again see the same four great personalities—the associates of Lord Viṣṇu who had rescued him earlier. After praying to them, Ajāmila immediately left his body in the holy place of Haridwar and immediately got his eternal form as the Lord’s servant.

When one hears this anecdote of Ajāmila, one should not think that this kind of story is imagined in order to excessively glorify the Holy Name. Some people say, ‘Many people chant the Holy Name hundreds of times. Yet, their desire for the material world does not subside; they do not get freed from sin and wickedness. How can we, then, understand that there is such power in the Holy Name? How do we think that the example of Ajāmila is true? This kind of exaggeration exists in the Vaiṣṇava family, even at the cost of such imaginative stories.’ This

kind of consideration is called *arthavāda*—things are told as imagination for over-glorification. There is no offender greater than those who think that the excellence of the Holy Name is over-glorification, or those who consider other process of devotional service to be the same as the congregational chanting of the Holy Name (i.e., the congregational chanting of the Holy Name is just another process of devotional service). Their hearts will never be attracted to the Holy Name. In the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, the prominent commentator Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura has said:

*“namabhasbolenajamilo duracharopi vaikuntha prapitastathaiba smartadah,  
sadacharah shastragnya api bahusho namgrahino pyrthyobad-kalpanadinamaporadhbalen  
ghorsamsarmeba prapyonto ityto nammahatmydritya sarbamuktiprasangopi nashnkyo”.*

Although Ajāmila was wicked-minded, by the influence of *nāmābhāsa*, he went to Vaikuntha. Yet, *smārtas*, by dint of their good conduct and by being learned in scripture, may chant the Holy Name for hundreds of times. Yet, due to their offences against the Holy Name in the form of *arthavāda* (attributing mundane interpretation to Holy Name), they get the dire tribulations in this world only. Therefore, seeing the excellence of the Holy Name, we need not be anxious thinking that everyone would be liberated.

Bhagavān Śrī Caitanyadeva said, “*Śrīnāma* is more merciful than all of the powerful incarnations of the Name Himself. There is no doubt on that. But I am so unfortunate that despite the means to the lotus feet of *Śrīnāma prabhu*, since I must have committed some offenses that I do not have faith and attraction for the Holy Name.”\*

Those who doubt the power of all-powerful Bhagavān, they are atheists. On the other hand, those who introspecting upon their own disqualification, while non-dupliciously trying to get rid of them, they are the true travelers on the path of devotion. We should become followers of pure devotees instead of being an Citraketu atheist.

\* *nāmnām akāri bahudhā nija-sarva-śaktis  
tatrārpitā niyamitaḥ smarāṇe na kālaḥ  
etādṛśī tava kṛpā bhagavan mamāpi  
durdaivam īdṛśam ihājani nānurūgaḥ*

—Sikshstakam 2

## 20. Citraketu

There was once a sovereign monarch named Citraketu in the kingdom of Śūrasena, who had ten million wives. However, all of the wives were barren. Since Citraketu could not have children, there was no peace in his heart.

A great sage, Aṅgirā, once came mercifully to the house of Citraketu. Noting the King’s moroseness, the sage performed a fire sacrifice for him. The first wife of King Citraketu was

Kṛtadyuti, to whom sage Aṅgirā gave the remnants of the fire sacrifice. As a result, Kṛtadyuti got pregnant and gave birth to a beautiful son. The King was overjoyed and doted on his little son and his mother. Seeing the King's affection toward his first wife and their son, the other queens of the king became very envious. Eventually, they hatched an evil plan and poisoned the son. Both Kṛtadyuti and Citraketu became maddened with grief for the loss of their only son. The queen started lamenting aloud, "Oh, controller! You provisioned death to the child while his parents are still alive. How can we see this as Him being benignant? He is going against His own creation. He must be the enemy to the living entity! If there is no rule regarding birth and death—if a living entity takes birth and death according to his *karma* alone—then what is the use of accepting God? The controller has created the rope of affection in order to increase His own creation. If He cuts that rope Himself by putting little sons on the mouth of death, then will anybody become affectionate towards their sons? Gradually, the creation will be extinct. This only proves the foolishness of the controller."

In this way, lamenting pitifully, Kṛtadyuti was criticizing the controller over and over again and calling out to her dead son. The whole capital became engulfed in the shadowy shroud of the royal couple's grief and it seemed as though the entire kingdom was desolately funereal. Hearing of the news, sage Aṅgirā along with the best of the *vaiṣṇavas*, Śrī Nārada, appeared in front of Citraketu in disguise. They saw the king lying senseless, as if dead, near the body of his dead son. They could understand that all of the King's knowledge and intelligence had evaporated. Those around the royal couple—their relatives, subjects, city-dwellers, and others—were adding fuel to the fire of their grief by saying words of empathy and endearment that only enhanced their illusion further. Some stood still beside them, stunned and perplexed, as if figures in a painting. The hearts of the other wives of King were secretly elated since the envy that burned them had now been satisfied. The sages could understand that the darkness of ignorance has completely overwhelmed everyone's hearts.

It was during such circumstances that both Śrī Nārada and Aṅgirā went to Citraketu and said, "Oh, King! Who is it that belongs to you, for whom you are lamenting so? Who are you amongst the friends of your son? You may say that you are his father and he is your son. But, I would ask this, did this relationship exist before? Does it exist now? Or, will it exist in the future? Just as sand particles get separated by the force of the water current and they may again come together, living entities are brought together by time and part ways in due course. When a rice seed is sown, sometimes a rice plant germinates but at other times, the seed fails to sprout. Inspired by the external illusory energy of the Lord, living entities sometimes take birth from fathers as sons, but sometimes, such birth does not occur. Do we need to lament for such temporary relationships? Not only you or us, but this entire moving and non-moving world is existing at the present time. But it was not there before, and it will not be there forever. From a seed, another seed is produced. Similarly, from the body of the father and the body of the mother, a son is produced. Why are you lamenting for such an inert body? Can the inert become eternal like those that are conscious?"

Hearing such messages from the great sages, King Citraketu responded, “Who are you two? Where are you coming from in the disguise of mad persons? In order to eradicate the ignorance of materially attached imbecile persons like us, the *mahābhāgavata* devotees of the Lord to wander about arbitrarily across the world. My intelligence is submerged in darkness of ignorance, like that of a village animal. Please ignite the lamp of my knowledge.”

The great sage Aṅgirā then said, “Oh, King! I am the same Aṅgirā that gave you the son you so desired, and he is the absolutely revered sage Nārada. You are a devotee of Lord. Lamentation and illusion won’t be able to overwhelm you. This is why, we have come to you. As you are engaged in the service of the knower of Brahman, it is not proper for you to get overwhelmed in any way. When I last visited your home, I would have imparted upon you absolute knowledge. However, I knew that you had other desires, particularly the desire for a son. You are now experience the grief of losing your son and are coming to understand that wife, son, house, riches, all opulence, wealth, material possession—these are all temporary. In this earth, even a kingdom, army, treasury, servants, ministers, well-wishers—all of them give fear, illusion, lamentation, and pain. Just like the *gandharvas*, they come in a moment and disappear at a moment’s notice. They are all transient, just like a dream, or an illusion. This body is an arena for different kinds of tribulations. Therefore, in a peaceful state of mind, you should think about the truth of the soul. ‘Who are you? Where are you coming from? Where will you go as a consequence? Are you impressed by lamentation and illusion?’” Reasoning in this way, abandon the faith of permanence you have placed in this world and gain transcendental peace.”

The spiritual master of the world, sage Nārada, mercifully said to Citraketu, “By becoming restrained, please accept the ultimately auspicious mantra, which I am going to give you. Within seven nights, you will be able to see the great Lord Saṅkarṣaṇa. Even Mahādeva and other demigods have taken shelter of this Lord Saṅkarṣaṇa.”

Meanwhile, Nārada revived the dead prince and said, “You have died an untimely death; your lifespan is still remaining. Therefore, please enter into the body again and enjoy the kingdom for the remainder of your lifespan.” Then the living entity associated with the prince’s body said, “Due to my *karma*, I have traveled in many species. In which of my lifetimes were they my parents? In this eternal flow of the world, everyone becomes a friend, relative, enemy, close friend, mediator, or ignorer to each other. As gold and other commodities go from one hand to another, similarly living entities also gradually traverse around the world being born of different fathers and mothers. As long as there is a relationship an object, there is attachment for it. As soon as the relationship ceases to exist, the attachment no longer exists. It is only the body that takes birth and death occurs only to the body. In fact, there is no birth or death of the soul. It is eternal; there is no decay or destruction of it. The soul does not accept anything related to the fruits of action, such as, a kingdom, or wealth.”

Having thus spoken, the living entity departed. Astonished, Citraketu and others in the royal assembly were struck by such words. Abandoning the leash of illusion, they rid

themselves of lamentation. The queens who had administered poison to the prince became very regretful and ashamed. The words of sage Aṅgirā prompted them to abandon the desire for a son. Having heard the messages of the two great personalities, Citraketu quit his lamentation and illusion. He then managed to climb out of the dark well of household life. Nārada was especially satisfied with the surrendered devotee, Citraketu who had conquered all his senses, and gave him instructions regarding devotional service to the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

After seven nights, just as Śrī Nārada had mercifully spoken, Citraketu was able to see Lord Saṅkarṣaṇa. Citraketu glorified Lord Saṅkarṣaṇa and said, “Hey Ajita! Even though You are unconquerable by all, You are conquerable by pure devotees; the reason being that You give Your own self to the devotees! Due to this endearing nature of Yours, You have also enchanted them. You are the cause of all causes. Those animalistic, materially hungry people who are leaving You, the best of the Personality of Godhead, worship other demigods who are only personifications of Your opulence. Such persons are fools! As the regalia consumables of servants do not remain after the destruction of the royal family, the consumables given by the other demigods are destroyed after the destruction of the demigods. There is no ulterior motive in *Bhagavad-dharma*. That is the only auspicious religion for living entity. Just by hearing Your name only once, very sinful low-caste persons get liberated from this world”.

Lord Saṅkarṣaṇa gave many instructions to Citraketu. He said to Citraketu that if he holds the Lord’s words in his heart without being attached to material possessions and with reverence, he will soon attain Lord Saṅkarṣaṇa. Having thus gained the Lord’s *darśana*, that great ascetic, Citraketu, travelled the world for millions of years. In the cave of Sumeru, he arranged for the chanting of the Holy Name by the wives of the *vidhyādharas*. One day, as Citraketu was flying around on an airplane given to him by Lord Viṣṇu, he saw in the assembly of the sages the crest jewel of the *Paramahānsas*, Lord Mahādeva, sitting with Pārvatī placed on his lap. Lord Mahādeva was embracing her with both his hands. Seeing this, Citraketu said aloud with laughter, “Oh! I have heard that Mahādeva is the spiritual master of the general populous and the speaker of religion. What a wonder it is, then, that he is sitting coupled with his wife like a shameless person in the assembly of the sages! Ordinary low-class village people also hold their wives privately. But this Mahādeva, despite being an ascetic, has placed his wife on his lap in the middle of the assembly!” Pārvatīdevī heard Citraketu’s entire remark, as did Lord Mahādeva, and those present in the assembly. Mahādeva only smiled slightly and remained silent; His followers and members of the assembly also remained silent.

Why and how did Citraketu remark in this way about Lord Mahādeva? Generally, people do not have the strength to understand this. The *Mahājanas* explain that Citraketu’s desire was to glorify Lord Siva as an extremely capable person. From an external vision, even though there appears to be extreme misconduct, that cannot do any harm to Citraketu. However, foolish persons and persons with amateur faith could become offensive in criticizing Citraketu’s behavior. As Dakṣa was destroyed due to his offense against Lord Śiva, similarly, such an offense can destroy persons that consider Citraketu as having spoken offensive

criticism of Lord Śiva. Citraketu used scathing words, even though he was a well-wisher of all. Still, he is a devotee of Lord Hari. Mahādeva himself thought in this way. Since he is a devotee of Lord Hari, therefore, I cannot be angry with him. The members of the assembly understood Lord Śiva's inclination; therefore, they did not reprimand Citraketu. Had Citraketu intended to criticize Lord Śiva, the assembled members would have covered their ears and left the place immediately.

In order to teach the general populace, Pārvatīdevī enacted a pastime. By the inspiration of Lord Saṅkarṣaṇa, she expressed intense anger toward Citraketu, and said, “Oho! This person is correcting Lord Śiva, whose lotus feet is meditated upon by demigods like Lord Brahmā, who is himself the revered lord of the world! Therefore, this person should take birth in a sinful demoniac family. This way, he will commit offense against saintly persons again.”

Having heard Pārvatīdevī's curse, Citraketu descended from the airplane. With bowed head, he humbly paid his obeisances to Satī, just like a rod. He accepted her curse and submitted, “I take your curse on my head.”

Citraketu is a devotee of the Lord. He is not under the influence of *karma*. Pure loving devotees are never bound by *karma*, even from the time of their birth. Lord Saṅkarṣaṇa provisioned this curse in order to reinforce Citraketu's equal vision for curse or mercy, heaven, hell, or liberation, and to solidify his abstinence from the reign over the *vidhyādhara*s. Additionally, in order to increase the hunger of Citraketu's love through the process of separation and to give the sweetness of service of His own lotus feet in Vaikuṅṭhaloka, Lord Saṅkarṣaṇa inspired this curse in the heart of Pārvatīdevī.

As Citraketu was not frightened even to the slightest degree after hearing the curse, Mahādeva said to Pārvatī, “Have you seen the nobility of such great souls, as, who are the servants of the servants of Śrī Hari, and who are apathetic towards material enjoyment? Those who have taken shelter of Lord Nārāyaṇa do not fear anywhere. They see heaven, liberation, and hell with equal vision.”

To teach the world the grave consequence of criticizing a *Vaiṣṇava*, and to make the words of Pārvatī come true, Citraketu took birth as a demon named Vṛtāsura. Even though he was staying in the womb of the demoniac species, the consideration of devotional service to the Lord never left his heart. In the end, Indra killed this Vṛtāsura. At the time of leaving his body, Vṛtāsura attained the body of an associate of Lord Saṅkarṣaṇa.

## 21. King Suyajña

There was once a famous king named Suyajña in Uśīnara province. While fighting in battle one time, he was killed by his enemies. When the dead body of the king was brought back to his palace, all his relatives surrounded his body hoping to catch a glimpse of the resplendence of his body one last time. The expression of anger he had worn against his

enemies was still visible on the face of his dead body. Seeing his deceased body, his grief-stricken queens began lamenting and falling to the floor on all sides of the king. They were repeatedly hitting their chests with their hands; their tears rolled on to the feet of their beloved husband; their hair loosened; and their ornaments unfastened onto the ground. In this way, they mourned and lamented, “Ah! What did the cruel destiny do to us? How would the people of Uśīnara endure this grief? Oh hero! Please take us along with you to the place you have now gone to. We will also go there and serve your feet again.” The wives were so overwhelmed with grief that they placed their husband’s dead body on their laps and would not allow anybody to take the body away for cremation.

While the wives were thus lamenting, the sun was about to set on the western horizon. Yamarāja, the god of death, himself heard their loud cries of lamentation. He disguised himself as a boy and appeared before the dead body of the king. In the midst of that melancholic scene, Yamarāja—disguised as a boy—said, “What a surprise! All these folks here are older than me. They have undoubtedly witnessed many more births and deaths than me. These are the relatives of the deceased and they, too, will die one day. But look how they are deluded! The deceased King Suyajña is going to an unknown place from where man originated. Knowing that it is not possible to reverse the situation, their mourning is in vain. I can understand that they do not even have the minimum intelligence that a boy my age does.

We are abandoned by our parents in this world of misery. Even though we are vulnerable, a person will protect us everywhere. It is His mercy alone that we are protected even in the womb of our mother, and we have been saved from wild beasts, like lions, or tigers. If the Supreme God protects an object that has fallen on the road, then nobody can ever destroy or abduct it. If He wills, the person to whom the object belongs can get it back. If God does not protect, then, even the most secretly guarded objects in the house are destroyed. If He cares, then the life of a helpless person lost in the forest is saved. But if He ignores somebody, that person may be in the safety of his home but he will not survive. The house and the householder are two different things. Only a very foolish person considers these two to be the same. Such a deluded person thinks of the body as the embodied soul. O foolish people! King Suyajña, for whom you are mourning, is lying just here before you. He has not gone anywhere else. Therefore, why are you lamenting for him? This person has been hearing and answering you until today. Why are you now mourning for his silence? The true self, who actually listens and answers from within this body, is never visible to anyone. You can still see the body that you had been seeing earlier.

There was once a hunter who used to trap birds by laying nets on the ground in the forest and keeping pieces of meat as bait. One day, while wandering in the forest, he saw two *kuliṅga* birds. One of them was a male and the other, a female. The female bird got trapped in the net laid out by the hunter. The male bird was very aggrieved to see his female companion in danger. However hard the little bird tried, he was unable to disentangle her from the hunter’s net. The poor bird began to lament, “How cruel is destiny! My wife is lamenting in such a state of danger. How will the needs of destiny be fulfilled by accepting my wife? If this cruel destiny

accepts my wife—who is half of my existence—then, destiny should accept me as well. What is the use of living in such a grief-stricken condition with only one half remaining, without my wife, my better half? How shall I, by myself, take care of my motherless children?” While the bird was mourning near his wife—saddened by the loss of his beloved—the hunter took the opportunity and shot an arrow right at the male bird.

O foolish queens! You are also unintelligent like that *kuliṅga* bird. Like the bird, you, too, are unable to see your own death. Even if you lament like this for hundreds of years, you will never get your husband back.”

Yamarāja very carefully narrated this anecdote to remove the grief of King Suyajña's queens and relatives. Intelligent persons are not overwhelmed with grief for the inevitable mortal body. Instead, they seek devotion to Kṛṣṇa, which is the eternal truth. The crest jewel among *Vaiṣṇava*, Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura sings the following to teach people in general.

*deho-geho-kalatrādi-cintā avirata  
jāgiche hṛdoye mor buddhi kori' hata  
hāy, hāy! nāhi bhāvi-anitya e saba  
jīvana vigate kothā rohibe vaibhava?  
śmaśāne śarīr mama poḍiyā rohibe  
bihaṅga-pataṅga tāy bihār koribe  
kukkur sṛgāl sab ānandita ho'ye  
mahotsava koribe āmār deho lo'ye  
je deher ei gati, tā'r anugata  
samsār-vaibhava ūr bandhu-jana jata  
ataeva māyā-moha chāḍi' buddhimān  
nitya-tattva kṛṣṇa-bhakti koruna sandhān*

*"Unending thoughts regarding this body, houses, material paraphernalia, are arising in the heart, killing my intelligence.*

*Alas! I never think that all of these are ephemeral. When this body perishes, where will this opulence go?*

*My body will be lying on the crematorium, which will be visited by insects and birds.*

*The dogs and foxes will make merry and hold a big feast with my corpse. We are servants to the body which awaits such a destiny.*

*Along with all our friends and worldly possessions, we are following the commands of the body, which itself is awaiting such a destiny.*

*Therefore, putting aside all these illusions, O intelligent one! Please search for the eternal truth of Kṛṣṇa Consciousness."*

—Durlabha Mānava-Janma, 8-13

## 22.Prahlāda Mahārāja

The demigods became unsettled by the tyranny of the demon-king, Hiranyakaśipu. That demon had conquered the three worlds and all different directions, and had brought all living entities under his subjugation. Spreading sovereignty over the heavenly palace of *Devarāja* Indra, he frolicked around enjoying bounties of the world. Other than Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva, all presiding deities of the universe were forced to worship Hiranyakaśipu with various gifts. Taking action against this, Indra strategically organized a great battle. The demon leaders, realizing this, began to flee in various directions. The demigods destroyed the residence of Hiranyakaśipu and kidnapped the demon-king's queen, Kayādhu.

When the demigods—headed by Indra—were thus taking Kayādhu away, they met Nārada on the way. Nārada advised Indra that the demigods should by no means take away an innocent woman disrespectfully. Kayādhu, who is another man's wife and a chaste woman, should especially not be thus treated. Indra promised to carefully protect Kayādhu in his house until the demon-prince, who was in the demon's wife's womb, is born. When the son would be born, Indra revealed to Nārada that he intended to kill the child to uproot Hiranyakaśipu's dynasty so that they could not ever cause such havoc against the demigods again. Thereafter, he intended to release the mother. Hearing this, Nārada said, "Unlike his father, Hiranyakaśipu, this child is not of demoniac nature. He is a sinless *mahābhāgavata*, who is extremely influential and a close associate of the Lord. Killing him is beyond anyone's capability." On this conclusive advice of *devarṣi* Nārada, Indra released Kayādhu.

At that time, Hiranyakaśipu was undertaking a most severe type of austerity in the valley of Mandara hills. Since Kayādhu did not have anywhere safe to go, *devarṣi* Nārada advised her, "Come, dear mother, you can live safely in my shelter until your husband returns." Kayādhu stayed in the hermitage of Nārada. Nārada, the best among the *vaiṣṇavas*, started imparting transcendental knowledge to the mother for the benefit of the child in her womb. While in the womb, just like Śukadeva Gosvāmī, Prahlāda began to hear of ontological knowledge.

Meanwhile, Hiranyakaśipu, by dint of his severe austerities, obtained a benediction from Brahmā,. The benediction provided him immunity from death in the present time or in the future, from the hands of any living entity created by the creator, in any covered or open space, in daylight or night, from the hands of any living entity created by Brahmā, by means of any weapon, on land or in the sky, by any human or animal, consciously or unconsciously, at the hands of demigods or demons, etc. With such benediction, nobody would be able to defeat him in battle; he would be able to gain dominance over all and gain opulence including the eight *yogic* perfections. After getting the benediction, Hiranyakaśipu brought Kayādhu back to his royal palace from the hermitage of Śrī Nārada. There, Prahlāda took birth and began to grow into a young boy.

From a very young age, Prahlāda was disinterested in all kinds of sporting engagements. His mind was completely absorbed in Kṛṣṇa consciousness and he was totally oblivious to

worldly-mindedness. He never looked for any kind of sense gratification in his bodily necessities, such as, sitting, walking, eating, drinking, sleeping and talking. Being absolutely absorbed in love of Kṛṣṇa, he sometimes cried, sometimes laughed, was sometimes jubilant, sometimes sang loudly, and sometimes he would call Kṛṣṇa loudly in complete anxiety. Sometimes, he would discard all bashfulness and jubilantly dance in ecstasy. Due to his association with perfect unalloyed devotees, who had nothing to do with anything material, he was constantly engaged in the service of the Lord's lotus feet and was absorbed in transcendental bliss. Even persons who were always in unholy association and had very poor spiritual understanding could be blessed by his association, achieving attachment and steadiness in devotion.

When the time came for the boy to begin his formal education, Hiranyaśipu sent Prahlāda to the house of the spiritual master of the demons, Śukrācārya. Śukrācārya was engaged in priestly duties elsewhere, therefore, his two sons, Śaṇḍa and Amarka, were appointed as Prahlāda's teachers. They lived near Hiranyaśipu's palace. The two began to teach Prahlāda, along with other sons of the demons, various topics, such as, politics, philosophy, etc. However, Prahlāda did not like the philosophy taught by his teachers which encouraged discriminating someone as a friend and another as an enemy.

One day, Hiranyaśipu affectionately placed his son, Prahlāda, on his lap and very lovingly inquired, "My dear son, please tell me from what you have learned so far, what is the best of all the subjects?" Prahlāda replied, "The best thing to do is to take the shelter of the lotus feet of the Lord Śrī Hari and become a forest dweller, renouncing household life, which is similar to a blind well." Shocked to hear such fervent devotion towards Viṣṇu—who he considered his enemy—from the mouth of his own son, Hiranyaśipu remarked with an angry laughter, "Young children's minds can be polluted by the influence of other intelligentsia. Take this boy once again to the house of his spiritual master, and protect him very carefully so that disguised *vaiṣṇavas* can no longer erode his intelligence."

Prahlāda was brought back to his spiritual masters' home. Śaṇḍa and Amarka comforted him with sweet words and asked, "Prahlāda, please tell us the truth. Why do you have such an opposite intellect from all the other boys here? Where did you get this from?" Prahlāda replied, "Being moved by the illusory potency of the Lord Śrī Hari, ignorant people get absorbed in untruthful application of the mind considering, 'he is my relative,' 'he is unrelated.' The Supreme Personality of Godhead, who is the Lord of this illusory potency, is the ultimate cause of all such things. Everything happens according to the Lord's will." Upon hearing this, the servants of Hiranyaśipu, Śaṇḍa and Amarka were enraged and asked the other students to bring a whip. They said, "Due to his degraded intelligence, he has become like a cinder in the dynasty of the demons. There is not other way to correct him than to punish him. This boy has appeared like a thorn tree in the sandalwood forest-like dynasty of the demons! Lord Viṣṇu is the axe that can down the sandalwood forest of the demons, and this Prahlāda appears to be the associated handle of that axe!" Śaṇḍa and Amarka chastised and threatened Prahlāda in

various ways and began teaching him scriptures about the paths of religion, economic development and sense gratification.

After some time, when Śaṅḍa and Amarka believed that Prahlaḍa was sufficiently educated in diplomatic affairs, they arranged for him to visit Hiranyaśipu. Prahlaḍa paid prostate obeisances to his father and Hiranyaśipu affectionately embraced him and placed him on his lap. Delighted to see his son, he asked him warmly, “My dear son! Whatever you have learned from your teachers for so long, please repeat it to me. What is the best among all that you have learned?” Prahlaḍa replied, “Hearing and chanting about the transcendental Holy Name, form, qualities, paraphernalia, and pastimes of Lord Viṣṇu, glorifying the Lord, remembering, serving His lotus feet, worshiping Him, becoming His servant, considering the Lord as one's best friend, and surrendering everything unto Him—one who has dedicated his entire life to the service of Kṛṣṇa through these nine processes of devotional service should be understood to be the most learned person because he has acquired complete knowledge.”

When Hiranyaśipu heard these unexpected words of devotional service from the mouth of his son, Prahlaḍa, he burned with extreme rage. Then, he called for Śaṅḍa and spoke as follows, “You have disobeyed my order and taken shelter of my enemy's party! You have filled this boy's heart with malice against me! You are my worst enemy in the guise of a friend.” The son of Śukrācārya pleaded with Hiranyaśipu, “Oh, King! Whatever your son Prahlaḍa has said, neither I nor anyone else has taught him that! His spontaneous devotional service has naturally developed in him.”

Hiranyaśipu then turned to Prahlaḍa and asked, “You, destroyer of the family, where have you gotten this intelligence from?” Prahlaḍa replied, “Those who are too attached to materialistic life due to their uncontrolled senses progress toward densely dark hellish conditions after death. Like ruminating animals, conditioned living entities repeatedly chew the chewed joy and sorrow of their worldly ancestors. Their inclination towards Kṛṣṇa is never awakened—neither by anybody's instructions, nor by their own efforts, nor by a combination of both. Those whose hearts are afflicted with thoughts of enjoyment and who are attached to external sense objects can never know that service to Lord Viṣṇu is the ultimate goal of life for the devotees who are enquiring into the absolute. They are like blind men guided by another blind man, who without knowledge of the real path fall into the ditch of materialistic life. They are bound by the long rope of rules and regulations as prescribed in the revealed scriptures for attaining religiosity, wealth, and desires. They become entangled in fruitive labor, just like bulls tied by ropes. Unless such persons who are completely absorbed in sense gratification smear on their bodies the dust of the lotus feet of a *vaiṣṇava*—who are completely freed from material contamination and dedicated, unattached servants of the Lord—they cannot be attached to the lotus feet of the Lord. The dust of the lotus feet of a noble, high-minded soul is the cause of devotion to Kṛṣṇa.”

Who can describe the torrential rage that overwhelmed Hiranyaśipu when he heard these words coming out of his son's mouth? With eyes reddened with wrath, Hiranyaśipu

almost barked, “Take this boy away from my sight immediately! I do not want to see his face! Kill him! This rascal is the killer of my brother because he has abandoned his father and his relatives, and is serving the lotus feet of Viṣṇu, who is his family’s enemy! Although only five years old, he is already disobeying his parents from such a young. He must be killed by all means.”

Following their master Hiranyaśipu’s orders, the terrifying demons began attacking Prahlāda with their tridents, yelling loudly, “Hit him! Hit him!” Despite the demons’ efforts, Prahlāda remained unharmed. Hiranyaśipu subsequently ordered that his son be crushed under the feet of giant elephants, thrown into blazing fire, locked with terrifying poisonous snakes, hurled into an abyss from the top of a hill, subjected to destructive mystic spells and illusory tricks, administered poison, starved, exposed to severe cold and wind, and hurled with heavy stones.

When Prahlāda was thrown from mountain cliffs or from rooftops of palaces with a height of a hundred *yojanas*, mother Earth—seeing the unflinching devotion of the young boy for the Lord—saved Prahlāda. When Prahlāda survived unharmed, Hiranyaśipu ordered a demon named Śambara, who was a great mystic magician, to create an illusion to kill his son. Prahlāda, who was non-envious of even Śambara, remained unharmed despite powerful spells casted by the demon, and continued remembering only Śrī Madhusūdana. At the Lord’s command, the Sudarśana *cakra* acted like the boy’s bodyguard and destroyed thousands of illusory spells casted by Śambara. Then, Hiranyaśipu order the air to enter the body of Prahlāda in order to dry him up from within. However, Lord Janārdana<sup>35</sup> situated within the heart of Prahlāda, very easily overcame the terrible wind.

Hiranyaśipu saw that neither fire could burn Prahlāda, nor any weapon could tear him asunder, nor a snake bite affected him. When the drying wind, poison, any magic spell, powerful elephants, hurling him from dizzying heights—when none of these tactics could even touch a single strand of Prahlāda’s hair, Hiranyaśipu was overcome with doubt and great anxiety about what could be done next. At that time, Śaṅḍa and Amarka spoke to Hiranyaśipu in order to encourage him, “Oh, Lord! We know that when you simply move one of your eyebrows, all the commanders of the various planets become very fearful. Without the help of any assistants, you conquered all the three worlds. Therefore, we do not believe that there is any reason for you to become anxious. Until the return of our spiritual master, Śukrācārya, arrest this child with the ropes of Varuṇa so that he will not flee in fear. Perhaps by the time he is a little grown up and would have served some worshipping personalities, his disposition will change.”

Since Hiranyaśipu agreed to this suggestion, Śaṅḍa and Amarka started to systematically teach Prahlāda about mundane religion and charity. Prahlāda, however, did not

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<sup>35</sup> Another name for Kṛṣṇa, the vanquisher of the demon Jana.

like these teachings. He could not accept the advice of his instructors as the best since their hearts were attached to worldly affairs and engrossed in sense gratification.

Sometimes, Śaṅḍa and Amarka would visit their own homes for some household affairs for some time. The students of the same age as Prahlāda Mahārāja would cease the opportunity for unattended leisurely play and would call him to take part. Prahlāda would address his classmates smilingly, “Dear brothers, having achieved this rare human form of life, which awards one with complete perfection, one who is sufficiently intelligent, should perform devotional service from the very tender age of childhood. Although this human birth is very rare, impermanent, and transitory, only a slight amount of devotional service in this birth can give one complete perfection. The only duty in the human form of life is to serve the lotus feet of the Lord Viṣṇu, because He is the most beloved, the master of the soul, and the well-wisher of all living entities. Sense gratification is available in any form of life. Such happiness is automatically obtained without any endeavor just as we effortlessly obtain distress. Therefore, one must not merely endeavor for sense gratification because we only waste vital energy and lifespan in such attempts. One can never attain the kind of extreme auspiciousness that one gets in worshipping the lotus feet of Śrī Mukunda by endeavoring for materialistic happiness. Therefore, any conscientious person would endeavor for Kṛṣṇa consciousness from a very tender age and continue until the body is incapacitated in order to get the full utility of this body.

Every human being has a maximum duration of life of one hundred years. For persons who have unrestricted senses, the life span is reduced to half of that. Even that is spent vainly. At night, one wastes one’s time, sleeping in ignorance. One passes one’s tender childhood years in bewilderment; then, one engages in various sporting activity in boyhood and wastes another ten years. Similarly, one passes the last twenty years of one’s being afflicted by diseases and old age. The remaining ten years of one’s lifespan is unfortunately wasted pursuing insatiable lusty desires and very strong illusion of materialistic household life. Where is that person who has not conquered his senses but is able to liberate himself from the bondage of affection towards his wife and children? Who can renounce the greed for wealth, which is dearer than life itself? Men who are overly attached to their family put a lot of effort to earn wealth even at the risk of their very lives. The core of his heart is so attached to his kinsmen and relatives that he cannot leave their association by any means. Who can give up the association of one’s affectionate and dear wife, when one remembers times spent privately in her company? Who can walk away from the sweet broken babbles of one’s children? How can an attached person abandon his son, married daughter, brothers, sisters, old and dependent parents, many glittering ornaments and garments, his house filled with various sense-gratifying paraphernalia, traditional family occupation, animals, and servants? Just like a silkworm which weaves its home in the form of a cocoon and eventually gets trapped in it since it forgot to allocate space for an exit door, similarly, an attached householder is bound by material conditions due to his endeavor to fulfill his fruitive desires. How can such conditioned living entities become averse to his own body and its byproducts? Such a person can never understand that he is wasting his valuable life in the sole maintenance of his family. He also fails to understand that the purpose of human life—

a life suitable for realization of the Absolute Truth—and thus, his life is being imperceptibly wasted. While such a person is squandering his life away, he is acutely attentive in seeing that not a single of his hard-earned penny is lost in mismanagement. Even while continually suffering the threefold miseries of material existence, he does not develop a distaste for material existence. Despite knowing that one who takes the wealth of others is punished by the laws of Yamarāja after death, and perhaps even by the laws of the government in this very lifetime, he continues cheating others in many ways to acquire wealth since he is unable to control his senses and is too attached to the duties of family maintenance. Even a person who is apparently advanced in education is overcome by ignorance while maintaining his family. What then can be said of people in general? A person who is addicted to sense gratification ends up being a mere plaything in the hands of attractive women. Their children and grandchildren act as their shackles to material bondage.

Therefore, although you are sons of demons, please keep aloof from the association of such materialistic, demoniac persons and take shelter of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, who is the origin of all demigods. There are no impediments in pleasing Him or worshipping Him under any conditions, whether one be a child or an old man. There is no difficulty in pleasing the Lord. The principles of religion, economic development, sense gratification, liberation, fruitive work, argument, penal policy, agriculture, and all such occupations fall under the jurisdiction of the *vedas*, which is not beyond the three modes of material nature. All these are transient in nature. Surrender to the Supreme Lord Viṣṇu and taking full shelter of His lotus feet is transcendental. These are not words from my mere mental concoction. Formerly, the Supreme Lord, Nārāyaṇa Himself, imparted this rare, unblemished, transcendental knowledge to Sri Nārada. I received this knowledge from that great sage Nārada. This transcendental knowledge is not only meant to awaken in the heart of educated class of men. Anyone can be a fit recipient of this knowledge, if one is blessed with the mercy of pure devotees of the Lord, who are not engaged in anything other than the service of the Lord.”

The demon-boys received Prahlāda Mahārāja's nectarean and soul-nurturing advice and accepted them wholeheartedly, considering it the best of all knowledge and rejecting the teachings of Śaṅḍa and Amarka. By then, it was very clear to Śaṅḍa and Amarka that not only was Prahlāda's intelligence misaligned with their teachings, but due to his association, the intelligence of all other tender-hearted classmates of his had also been tarnished and established unto the Supreme Lord, Viṣṇu. They informed Hiranyakaśipu about what was happening in their classrooms.

Hiranyakaśipu had already planned various different ways to kill Prahlāda. This time, as he heard of Prahlāda preaching devotional service to the sons of the other demons, his rage was so palpable that his whole body shivered in anger. He was now determined to kill his son immediately. He called for Prahlāda and began to chastise him with very sharp words. Prahlāda still tried to very calmly and earnestly explain to his father that one should give up one's demoniac nature and act without enmity or duality in full knowledge that the Lord is empowering everyone from within and without, and that Viṣṇu is the Supreme Personality of

Godhead. Lord Viṣṇu is omniscient and He is the Supreme Personality of Godhead. He is omnipresent. By now, Hiranyaśipu was blinded by rage burning like fire. He began rebuking Prahlāda, “Oh most unfortunate boy! You are saying there is another Supreme being other than me, who is situated everywhere. You must be a liar or a fanatic. If your Lord is all-pervading, why is He then not visible in this pillar of my assembly hall? I will cut off your boastful head. Now, let me see if your most worshipping Lord Hari comes to your rescue.”

Gripped by crippling anger, Hiranyaśipu chastised his highly exalted devotee-son again and again, and pulled out his sword to cut off his son’s head. Hiranyaśipu got up from his royal throne, and with great anger, struck his fist against the column. As soon as his blow hit the pillar, a fierce fearful sound reverberated from the pillar. Demigods, like Brahmā, heard this terrible sound in their own abodes and thought fearfully that their own abodes were being destroyed. In order to prove that the statement of His servant, Prahlāda, was substantial; and to prove that the Supreme Lord is present everywhere, the Lord exhibited a wonderful, ghastly nonhuman form, emerging from the pillar of the assembly hall as a life-threat to the demons.

Hiranyaśipu wondered, “This creature is neither man nor an animal.” He studied the form of the Lord, trying to decide what this strange looking form of Lord Nṛsiṃha really is. The Lord had appeared in the form of the wondrous terrifying form of Śrī Nṛsiṃha. Hiranyaśipu charged after Śrī Nṛsiṃha with a club in his hands, roaring like a lion. Just as a small insect falls into a blazing fire, Hiranyaśipu was overshadowed by the glorious effulgence of Lord Nṛsiṃhadeva. Still, Hiranyaśipu wanted to fight with the Lord with all his might. However, the many-armed Lord Nṛsiṃhadeva immediately eviscerated Hiranyaśipu’s heart from his body and threw it aside like an insignificant moth. Then, He turned toward the demon’s soldiers, who came in thousands to fight with Him with raised weapons. Lord Nṛsiṃhadeva killed all of them merely with the ends of His nails. When He had finished all the demon soldiers, Lord Nṛsiṃhadeva sat on the excellent throne of the King in the assembly hall.

Having just witnessed such a terrifying and wondrous feat of the Lord, nobody dared come forward to serve the Lord directly out of fear and obedience. Meanwhile, the wives of the demigods started showering flowers from heaven upon Lord Nṛsiṃhadeva. The sky was covered with airplanes of the demigods. Demigods like, Brahmā, Indra, and Mahādeva; close associates of Lord Viṣṇu, such as, Sunanda and Kumuda, offered their obeisances and prayers to Lord Nṛsiṃhadeva with folded hands. Even Brahmā and Rudra could not go near Nṛsiṃhadeva, who was infuriated with anger. Even at the request of the demigods, Goddess Lakṣmī herself—who had become fearful at the sight of Nṛsiṃhadeva endowed with extraordinary features—could not bring herself to approach the Lord. Then, Brahmā decided to send Prahlāda to pacify Nṛsiṃhadeva.

When Lord Nṛsiṃhadeva saw Prahlāda prostrated at the soles of His lotus feet, He became most ecstatic with affection and placed His lotus hand upon the boy’s head. Prahlāda spoke in a voice overwhelmed with love, “Wealth, birth in aristocratic family, beauty, austerity, erudition, sensory expertise, luster, influence, physical strength, diligence, intelligence, mystic

yogic power—even one who possesses all these qualifications cannot satisfy the Supreme Personality of Godhead. However, the Lord is simply satisfied by devotional service, as offered by Gajendra. If a *brāhmaṇa* has all the twelve *brāhminical* qualities but he is averse to the lotus feet of the Lord, he is certainly lower than a devotee, who has dedicated his mind, words, activities, wealth, and life to the Supreme Lord even though he has taken birth in the family of dog-eaters. That low-born devotee can purify his whole family along with himself; whereas a so-called *brāhmaṇa* in a position of false prestige cannot even purify himself. My Lord Nṛsiṃhadeva! Please, kindly give up Your anger. You have killed the demon. People will always remember Your half-man half-lion form, the remembrance of which can expel their fears. I am not afraid of Your form. Rather, I am afraid of being thrown in the bad association of demons in such perpetual materialistic condition. When will that moment come when You, being pleased with me, will call me to the shelter of Your lotus feet? I am wandering with the proud notion of false ego. Please tell me how I can attain servitorship at Your lotus feet. Oh, my Lord Nṛsiṃhadeva! By engaging in chanting Your glories, following exactly in the footsteps of Lord Brahmā and his disciplic succession, in the association of devotees, who have taken exclusive shelter of Your lotus feet, I shall undoubtedly be able to cross the ocean of nescience.

“Oh, Lord Nṛsiṃhadeva! In this world, a father and mother cannot protect their children since parents are not the true guardians of a child. A child cannot be saved even by well-wishing parents. Medicine cannot protector the patient because sometimes disease progresses and death occurs even with diligent application of medicine. The boat is not the protector of someone drowning in the sea since we have seen people drown in the sea despite sailing on a boat. The one ignored by You has no protection at all. Only he, upon whom You have bestowed Your mercy, is protected. Where goes the manifestation of the temporary material world, which is no better than a mirage? And where goes our gross body, which is the origin of all diseases? Even after knowing all this, people are not interested in liberation. You bestow upon one who serves You countless mercy like a desire tree.

“In the hope of fulfilling my material desires, I had fallen into the well of material existence, which is infested by serpents of sense enjoyment. Lord Nārada has accepted me in the service to Your lotus feet. Oh lord of Vaikuṅṭha! My mind—which is sinful; lusty; rebellious; seeking pleasure from outside our relationship; full of desire; tormented by so-called happiness, sorrow, and fear and by the thought of acquiring more and more wealth—is never attached to hearing Your glories. With such a mental condition, how shall I be able to discuss Your activities? Oh, infallible One! My position is like that of a person who has many wives, all trying to attract his attention in their own ways. I am also restless being attracted by my unsatiated tongue pulling me in one direction; my genitals beckoning me in another direction; the sense of touch moving me in some other direction; my belly is propelling me elsewhere; my ears pointing somewhere else; my nose attracted to extract lower pleasure; my restless vision fixing me on one side; and the working senses pulling me to another.

“My dear Lord! Great sages who are interested in their own liberation often observe strict vows of silence in a solitary place. They are not altruistic by nature. I do not desire to be

liberated alone, leaving behind my miserly friends and relatives. I do not see anyone other than You as the protector of the transmigrating living entities. We may get temporary pleasure of warmth from rubbing two hands together, which if used for a long time produces burning irritation. The so-called pleasure derived by the intermixing of men and women in mundane household life produces insignificant pleasure, similar to the little comfort produced by the rubbing of two hands in cold weather. However, it keeps giving birth to sorrow one after another. Lustful men cannot be satisfied by such activities. Only self-controlled men can get freedom from such lustful propensities. Observance of silence, vedic knowledge, austerities, reciting *vedas*, explaining scriptural injunctions, living in solitude, chanting, meditative trance—all such activities do not bring benediction to a person who is subdued by his senses. These methods are often means of earning a livelihood for them. Oh most revered one! Obeisances unto You, Your glorifications, dedicating all the activities unto You, worshipping You, remembering Your lotus feet, and hearing Your pastimes—without these six limbs of devotional service, how can one attain the platform of devotional service, which is meant for the all-perfected devotees?”

Being pacified by Prahlāda’s prayers, Lord Nṛsimhadeva asked him to ask for a boon. Prahlāda, the topmost emblem of pure devotees, was well aware of the principles of devotional service. God often deprives living entities of the highest goal, bestowing him with various kinds of boons and even liberation. However, He holds causeless and pure devotion towards Him very confidentially. Thus, considering Nṛsimhadeva’s proposal for a boon as an obstacle in the path of pure devotion, Prahlāda replied, “Oh Lord! Please do not allure me—who is naturally inclined towards sense gratification—with such boons. Since I am afraid of lusty undertakings and am desirous of salvation, I’ve taken shelter of Your lotus feet. Desire is like the seed of this conditioned life. Oh, master of the universe! You are merciful. You cannot put a living entity in a miserable condition without showing Your causeless mercy. One who prays for material enjoyment from You is never Your servant; such a person is a merchant. A person seeking his own comfort and pleasure from his master is not a true servant, and one who seeks dominion over his servants is not a true master. I’m the unconditional servant of Your servant. You are such a master who is beyond the primordial qualities of material nature, namely, goodness, passion and ignorance. If You wish to give me a boon somehow, then, I pray to You that no material desires and longing ever arises in my heart.”

Lord Nṛsimhadeva was particularly pleased with this statement of Prahlāda. The lion is ferocious to all other living entities; however, it is very affectionate towards its own cubs. Similarly, Sri Nṛsimhadeva was very ferocious towards Hiranyakaśipu and other demons, but He was very affectionate towards His own devotee, Prahlāda.

Prahlāda's character is filled with practical lessons for old and young people alike. Prahlāda is an ideal pure devotee. He never asked for anything other than pure unalloyed devotion from the Lord. Desire for peace, liberation etc. does not afflict the mind of a pure devotee; these are tendencies of a person with a mercantile mentality. Prahlāda Mahārāja

preached this simple fact of life. Sri Prahlāda Mahārāja taught us what to pray to Lord Nṛsiṃhadeva:

*Nātha yonī-sahasreṣu yeṣu yeṣu vrajāmy aham  
teṣu teṣv acyutā bhaktir acyutāstu sadā tvayi  
Yā prītir avivekānām visayeṣv anapāyinī  
tvām anusmarataḥ sā me hṛdayān nāpasarpatu*

*“Oh most infallible one! O Lord! No matter in what kind of birth I am in, whichever species it may be, out of this thousands of life forms, may I always have unflinching devotion towards You. The kind of intense attachment unscrupulous man feels for wealth, may I be blessed with that kind of fervent love, which constantly reminds me of You.”*

—Viṣṇu Purāṇa 1.20.19

The main lesson from the life of Prahlāda Mahārāja underscores self-surrender to or taking full shelter of the Lord. Hirānyakaśipu was the king of the demon family; he had no shortage of manpower and riches. Moreover, he achieved excellent feats on the strength of his austerities. Demigods, humans, *yakṣas*, *rākṣasas*, or any creature created by Brahmā would have never been able to kill him; he had received such a powerful benediction. The three worlds were under his subjugation. He was never devoid of any kind of opulence or strength. On the other hand, Prahlāda was a very young child with no other refuge than the exclusive shelter of the Lord. Hirānyakaśipu's pride or his limitless opulence could not save him; Prahlāda's taking shelter bore the fruit of success. God protects one who has taken His shelter. His devotees are never vanquished. Prahlāda's life is a clear display of this fact. Śrīla Prahlāda Mahārāja says:

*manye tad etad akhilam nigamasya satyam  
svātmārpaṇam sva-suhṛdaḥ paramasya puṁsaḥ*

*“Offering one's own self to the Supreme Lord Viṣṇu, is what I consider to be 'the ultimate truth'. Other than this, everything else is temporary and false.”*

—Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 7.6.26

## 23. Mahārāja Bali

In the house of sage Kaśyapa, in the lap of Śrī Aditi-devī, the lotus-eyed Śrī Hari descended in the twelfth lunar day of the month of *śrāvāṇa* wearing yellow garments and holding a conch, disk, mace and a lotus. This twelfth lunar day is well-known as *Vijaya*. Immediately after appearing, the Lord revealed himself as a dwarf in front of Aditi and Kaśyapa. Great sages performed the birth ceremony for the dwarf *brāhmaṇa* son. At the time of the thread-giving ceremony of the Lord, Śrī Vāmanadeva, the sun-God personally uttered the *Gāyatrī mantra*. Bṛhaspati offered the sacred thread, and Kaśyapa Muni offered a straw belt. Mother earth gave Him a deerskin, and the demigod of the moon, who is the king of the forest,

gave Him a *brahma-daṇḍa*.<sup>36</sup> His mother, Aditi, gave Him cloth for underwear, and the deity presiding over the heavenly kingdom offered Him an umbrella. Lord Brahmā offered a waterpot; the seven sages offered Him *kuśa* grass, and mother Sarasvatī gave Him a string of *rudrākṣa* beads. Kuvera gave Him a pot for begging alms, and mother Satī gave Him His first alms.

Elsewhere, Bali—the grandson of best of the devotees Prahlāda Mahārāja—was performing *aśvamedha-yajña*<sup>37</sup> on the north bank of river Narmadā in a field called Bhṛgukaccha. The *brāhmaṇas* performing the sacrifice were from the esteemed lineage of Bhṛgu. Lord Vāmanadeva appeared in that place of sacrifice. The *brāhmaṇas* welcomed Lord Vāmana and Bali Mahārāja provided a sitting place to Him, washed His lotus feet, and worshiped him with various religious services. Lord Śiva, the best of the demigods, who carries the emblem of the moon on his forehead, receives on his head with great devotion the Ganges water emanating from the toe of Viṣṇu. Bali Mahārāja also effortlessly got the great fortune of placing that same water that washed the Lord’s lotus feet on his head. Bali offered prayers to Lord Vāmanadeva and said, “Since You have mercifully appeared in my house, my forefathers are now satisfied. Due to Your presence, my dynasty has now been purified and the sacrifice we are performing has been perfected. I can see a begging bowl on your hand. It seems like You have come here to ask for something. Please accept from me whatever it is that You like.”

Hearing Bali’s words, Śrī Vāmanadeva said, “On material subject matters, you have instructions from authorities like Śukrācārya, and on spiritual subject matters, you have Prahlāda Mahārāja as your instructing authority. So far, no such miserly persons have taken birth in your dynasty who have rejected a *brāhmaṇa* beggar or denied charity after promising one. Your father gave his life in response to the prayers of the demigods, even though he knew them as his enemy. You have taken birth in such a family. All I am asking from you is three pieces of land measured by my own feet. Even though you are broad-minded and capable of giving many things in charity, I am not going to ask for anything else from you since it is improper for a wise person to ask for more than what is necessary.”

Since Lord Vāmana only asked for three pieces of land measured only by his own small feet, Bali Mahārāja repeatedly requested Lord Vāmana to ask for more. Śrī Vāmanadeva said, “Whatever dear things exist in the three worlds cannot fulfill the desire for a person whose senses are not controlled. If I am unsatisfied even after receiving the land spanning three paces of my feet, then my desire will remain strong. Even if I get one island with nine *varṣas*, I will still desire to get the seven islands. Even though kings like Pṛthu, Gayā, and others got sovereignty over the seven islands, they could not find the end of thirst for wealth, things and desire. Our duty is to be satisfied by whatever we get as per the manifestation of the result of our previous actions. Only then will we be peaceful at heart. A dissatisfied person without any

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<sup>36</sup> The rod of a *brahmacārī*.

<sup>37</sup> Horse sacrifice

control over his senses cannot be happy even after getting the three worlds. For a living entity dissatisfaction with wealth and lust is the cause of existence in this material world.”

King Bali prepared to offer the requested land in charity to Lord Vāmana, saying with a smile, “Please accept whatever you desire.” With this intention, Mahārāja Bali accepted the water pot. However, prudent Śukrācārya could understand the intention of Lord Vāmana. He said to his disciple, Mahārāja Bali, “Without knowing his deceptive intentions, you have promised to give land in charity to him. I do not think this is good. This deceptive celibate will take away your kingdom, riches, beauty, effulgence, fame, and knowledge. After taking everything, he will give it to Indra. He is going to embezzle everything that belongs to you. You are a crass fool. How will you maintain your livelihood if you give everything to Viṣṇu? A charity which endangers one’s own occupation is not appreciated in the scriptures. In order to maintain religion, respect, wealth, material desire, and relative, wise persons divide their wealth in five parts. This way, they live happily in this world and in the next. If you give everything to Lord Viṣṇu, what other means will you have to be able to do the other activities? Can any dutiful householder see their family relatives suffering due to starvation or taking up a begging bowl in hand? You have promised to give charity to Viṣṇu. However, only that which is promised along with words like ‘om’ is true; promises made with words like ‘No’ is not true. In this world, even truth cannot exist without a little bit of falsity. One cannot live life by rejecting falsity completely. When the root of a tree is uprooted, the tree becomes dry and falls to the ground. Similarly, when falsity is destroyed, the body immediately becomes dry. Scriptures dealing with logic say, ‘False words are not blameworthy if they are used to subdue ladies, as a joke, in marriage, for the purpose of one’s livelihood, in a crisis of life, for the benefit of the cow and *brāhmaṇas*, or if somebody is exposed to violence.’”

Instructing in this way, the priest of the demoniac family, the great logician Śukrācārya, tried to prevent King Bali from serving Lord Viṣṇu. For a moment, Bali remained silent and weighed the advice of the family priest in his mind. Then, he spoke to his spiritual master, “I consider whatever you have stated as the duty of a householder to be true. However, as the grandson of the great Prahlāda Mahārāja, how can I act like a deceptive person and deny that which I have already promised? Great souls like Dadhīci, Lord Śiva, and others have offered their life to benefit others. Even if one becomes bereft of everything in trying to fulfill the desire of great personalities—who are knowers of the Supreme Truth—that is also beneficial to the soul. Therefore, I will definitely fulfill the desire of this Vāmanadeva.”

Seeing that his disciple was intent on acting against his instructions, the priest of the demoniac family, Śukrācārya, cursed his disciple Bali, “You are very proud of your scholarship; you are not humble and have become disobedient to the orders of the family priest! You will very soon lose all your opulence.” Despite being thus cursed by the family priest, Bali Mahārāja did not hesitate to keep his promise and worshiping Lord Vāmana, offered Him the promised land. At that time, there was a shower of flowers from the sky on Bali Mahārāja. Anantadeva Lord Hari, in the form of Lord Vāmana, then, started growing in size. His form was so gigantic that by His first step, He covered the whole earth; with His body He covered the sky; and with

His arms, He covered all directions! With His second step, He covered the heavenly realm, including *Satyaloka*. After the second step, there was no space remaining that King Bali could offer for Him to place His third step.

Meanwhile, the demons witnessing this entire affair, became very anxious to see all the land and property of Bali being robbed by this deceptive person. They thought that it is their duty and an appropriate service to their master to take the life of Lord Viṣṇu, who was in the form of Vāmana. Against the will of Bali Mahārāja, the demons—armed with their weapons—charged forward to kill Lord Vāmanadeva. The associates of Lord Viṣṇu forbade them from taking such actions, but they paid no heed. The associates of Lord Viṣṇu eventually destroyed the demons. Understanding the desire of his master, Garuḍa, the associate of Lord Viṣṇu, bound King Bali with the ropes of Varuṇa. By the influence of Śukrācārya’s curse, the greatly powerful Bali appeared as though he was bereft of all opulence. A pure devotee who has surrendered everything in the service of Śrī Hari, even if he is in apparent danger or becomes bound, his intelligence remains uncorrupted; his attachment towards the service of the Lord does not diminish by the slightest. He passes the test the Lord has orchestrated and gets engaged in the service of the Lord with a higher level of attachment.

Lord Vāmanadeva said to the Varuṇa rope-bound Bali Mahārāja, “You promised to offer me three pieces of land. All the land has been covered by my first two steps. Please oblige and provide for me the land on which to place my third step. If you are not able to offer the promised charity, the scriptures dictate that you should remain in the *pātāla* realm. Your spiritual master Śukrācārya also advised you similarly. You should enter the realm of *pātāla*. You were proud to consider yourself very rich. Now, you have deprived me after promising charity to me. You will have to suffer the reaction of this false statement for one year.”

From a common man’s perspective, it may seem that Lord Vāmana acted very cruelly towards Bali. However, Bali remained undisturbed in his mind and engaged his body, mind, and words for the pleasure of Lord Viṣṇu. King Bali said to Vāmanadeva, “Bhagavān! Please kindly bless me by placing Your third step on my head! The punishment not provisioned by mother, father, brother or friends, dear worshippable Lord, I consider that punishment sanctioned by You to be most commendable for a living entity. You accomplish many activities by doing just one activity. My worshippable grandfather Prahlāda—one of Your devotees—took Your shelter, despite being continually harassed by Hiranyakaśipu in different ways. What is the need for such a body which leaves the living entity at the end of life? What is the need for service to the robbers in the guise of relatives, who are thieves of the wealth of devotional service? What is the fruit of association with a wife who is the cause of household life? What is the use of such a house where nothing but one’s lifespan is reduced; what is the use of such household life? Due to being engrossed in materialistic intelligence, a living entity cannot understand the temporary nature of life. Now, I have been brought to Your lotus feet, being forcefully dislodged from that material wealth, by Your divine intervention.”

While Mahārāja Bali was speaking these words to Lord Vāmana, Prahlāda Mahārāja who was very dear to the Lord, appeared on the scene. Since he was still bound by the ropes of Varuna, Bali could not show appropriate respect to his grandfather he would normally do before. With tears in his eyes, he still paid obeisances with his head. Prahlāda bowed down to the lotus feet of Vāmanadeva and said, “You awarded the position of Indra to this Bali and again today, You have taken it away. By doing so, you have shown great mercy to Bali. Learned persons, although they may be controlled in their senses, get deviated from the path of auspiciousness if there is madness about wealth.”

The wife of Bali, Vindhyāvali, with her palms folded prayed to Lord Vāmanadeva and said that only the Lord is auspicious. Those who are under illusion try to apply their intelligence in enjoying the things belonging to the Lord. Brahmā prayed to Vāmanadeva, “Non-deceptive persons attain the best of destinations just by offering water and buds of *durba* (a kind of small grass) to the lotus feet of the Lord. Therefore, why should this Bali who has offered the three worlds unto Your lotus feet without any hesitation, suffer the sorrow of being bound?”

In order to teach all living entities of the world, Śrī Bhagavān said to Brahmā, “Being mad with pride of wealth and coming under the influence of materialistic thought process, human beings ignore the three worlds, and even Me, who am the maintainer of all living entities. They forget about their eternal benefit. Therefore, I take away that kind of wealth from one to whom I bestow my mercy. After travelling through millions of species, birth after birth, one becomes fortunate enough to get a rare human birth. In this human life, if one does not become proud of one’s high birth, occupation, youth, beauty, knowledge, opulence, wealth etc., then that is my mercy to the living entity. However, there is also a reason behind My giving wealth to devotees like Dhruva and others. When I do this, I am demonstrating that despite having a high birth, knowledge, and wealth—which are counterproductive to all auspiciousness and are the root cause pride and lack of humility—My unalloyed devotees are not enamored by these things. King Bali has won over the unconquerable *māyā*. Even after being deprived of wealth, he did not deviate from the path of eternal good. Bali did not deviate from the truth and remained fixed in his vow even when being bereft of wealth, followers, and position; even after being insulted by his enemies and rejected by the elderly and his relatives; even while suffering the pain of being tightly bound by Varuṇa, and even after being criticized and cursed by his spiritual master. Despite some deceptive religious principles suggested to him, Bali still remained fixed on his vow.”

The main teaching from the character of Bali is full surrender. Without any condition whatsoever, he was causelessly offering himself unto the lotus feet of Śrī Bhagavān. Bali has taught the principle that even if the Lord deceives or deprives, one should not feel deprived by that but should sacrifice oneself on the lotus feet of the Lord. Even though Śrī Bhagavān may apparently put us in different kinds of dangers, deprive us of opulence, deprive us of wealth and beauty, bind us in ropes, take everything away, or from a materialistic point of view even show the extreme limit of cruelty, we should endeavor to follow in the footsteps of His pure

servants, like Bali who sacrificed himself in the service of Śrī Bhagavān without getting even slightly disturbed such obstacles.

The family priest's mindset was averse to the Lord, even though he may have been a very capable and great logician. Even if such apparently great personalities create different kinds of obstacle in offering everything onto the lotus feet of Lord Viṣṇu—even to the extent of cursing and depriving one of material wealth—a pure devotee would still offer everything onto the lotus feet of Lord Viṣṇu without getting perturbed. A spiritual master should not be called a spiritual master if he does not offer everything of his disciple's in the service of Viṣṇu, who is the only enjoyer. Even though such persons may be revered as a family priest from a worldly perspective, one should leave aside his ill advice and serve a bona fide spiritual master who instructs us on offering everything on the lotus feet of Śrī Viṣṇu. Even if Śrī Viṣṇu may usurp everything of the living entity's, that is in fact ultimately beneficial for him. Bali Mahārāja is the emblem of an uncontaminated heart offered onto the lotus feet of Śrī Bhagavān.

## 24. Mahārāja Ambarīṣa

Mahārāja Ambarīṣa was the sovereign emperor of the earth with seven islands. Even though it is definitely very rare for a living entity to achieve the amount of wealth that Mahārāja Ambarīṣa possessed, he always considered it comparable to an illusion because he was well aware of the reality that all these material objects are ephemeral. If one gets attached to such things, one is bound to drown in the ocean of illusion. Mahārāja Ambarīṣa attained the highest level of devotion towards Lord Vāsudeva and His devotees on the strength of considering this materialistic world nothing more than a lump of stone. Despite being the sovereign ruler of a sprawling kingdom, he was always engaged in the service of the Lord and His devotees with his mind, body, and soul. His mind was always absorbed in thoughts of the lotus feet of the Lord. He was never overpowered by thoughts of worldly possessions. His tongue was always engaged in glorifying the qualities of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa; his hands were engaged in cleaning the temple of Śrī Hari; his ears were always engaged in hearing the topics of the Lord; his eyes were engaged in seeing the temple of Śrī Viṣṇu, the transcendental deity from of the Lord, and the lotus feet of the pure devotees of the Lord; his sense of touch was engaged in touching the lotus feet of the pure devotees of Lord Mukunda; his nose was always engaged in smelling the *tulasī* offered at the lotus feet of Lord Viṣṇu and the fragrance of His lotus feet. He tasted nothing but food offered to the Lord; His feet were engaged in visiting the places of pilgrimage of Lord Viṣṇu; his head was engaged in bowing down at the lotus feet of Lord Śrī Hari; and his desire was fixed in various services of the Lord. In this manner, by engaging all his senses properly, he increased his love for pure devotees like Prahlāda. He used to rule the earth according to the advice of the *brāhmaṇas* who were devoted to Lord Viṣṇu and by engaging in his work in the spirit of devotion to Lord Kṛṣṇa. He used to please Lord Śrī Hari by engaging in his prescribed duties in the spirit of renunciation and by engaging in devotional service. In this way, he was never attached to his houses, wives, sons, friends, elephants, chariots, horses,

inexhaustible wealth, ornaments, clothes and infinite treasury. Satisfied with the fervent devotion of Ambarīṣa, Lord Śrī Hari gave him a formidable disc, which was capable of protecting the devotees and destroying the unfavorable ones. He observed the vow of *Ekadāsī* throughout the year, along with his wife, in order to worship Kṛṣṇa since Śrī *Ekadāsī* is the favorite lunar day of the Lord. If this day is observed by fasting in association with pure devotees and chanting the glories of Kṛṣṇa, then Kṛṣṇa is absolutely satisfied and devotion to the Lord is achieved soon. For this reason, great personalities have declared *Ekadāsī* to be the ‘Lunar day of Mādhava, the mother of devotion.’

One time during the month of Kārtika, Mahārāja Ambarīṣa fasted for three nights in Vṛndāvana. Upon completion of his fasting, he bathed in the water of Yamunā and worshipped Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Then, he gave varieties of commodities in charity to the assembled saints and *brāhmaṇas* and fed them sumptuously. Upon their advice, he prepared to break his fast with foodgrains offered to the Lord. Just as he was about to take *prasādam*, the great mystic *yogī* Durvāsā came to Ambarīṣa's house. Ambarīṣa humbly prayed to Durvāsā to kindly take some eatables at his home. Accepting Mahārāja Ambarīṣa's request, Durvāsā went to the bank of Yamunā to perform his midday ritual. Mahārāja Ambarīṣa waited for Durvāsā *muni* to return from Yamunā. However, Durvāsā *muni*'s return was somehow delayed and there was only half a moment of the *dvādaśī* fast-breaking time remaining. One should break his *Ekadāsī* fast with the *dvādaśī* fast-breaking time; otherwise, there is fault in the strict vows of *Ekadāsī*. Mahārāja Ambarīṣa was thus in a dilemma about whether he should break his fast at the recommended time or wait for Durvāsā *muni* to take his *prasādam* before taking his own. Therefore, he consulted with the assembled *brāhmaṇas* about the best course of action for him. With the *brāhmaṇas*' recommendations, it was decided that the best way for Mahārāja to break his fast and yet not take his *prasādam* before Durvāsā *muni* would be to break his fast by accepting just a little water. As considered by the *brāhmaṇas*, an *Ekadāsī* fast could be broken by accepting water; yet at the same time, one could still be fasting if he has just taken water. While meditating on Lord Kṛṣṇa, Mahārāja Ambarīṣa accepted the water and kept his *Ekadāsī* vows of fast breaking. Then, he waited for Durvāsā *muni* to return.

When Durvāsā came to know of the King's drinking water, he became furious at Mahārāja Ambarīṣa. Shivering with anger, Durvāsā rebuked the King, who was standing with folded hands, “Ah! How puffed up this person has become because of great opulence! He is thinking of himself as good as God! Even after becoming a devotee of the Lord, how he has transgressed religious principles! This person has eaten before offering food to his guests! I will now show the results of his misdeeds.” Saying this, Durvāsā's face became red with anger. Uprooting a bunch of hair from his own head, he created a demon that resembled the blazing fire of devastation to kill Mahārāja Ambarīṣa. Taking a trident in his hand, that blazing creature came charging toward Mahārāja Ambarīṣa. However, the King remained undisturbed and did not move from his position. The Sudarśana *cakra*, protector of the devotee, suddenly made His appearance and immediately burnt the demon into ashes.

Then, the Sudarśana disc started charging after Durvāsā *muni*. Fearful for his life, the *muni* began to run in all directions. Wherever Durvāsā ran, the Sudarśana disc inevitably followed him. In order to protect himself, Durvāsā *muni* fled in all directions—in the sky, on the surface of the earth, in the caves, in the ocean, on different planets of the rulers of the three worlds, and even to the heavenly planets. However, wherever he went, he was not able to escape the unbearably blazing Sudarśana *cakra*. When Durvāsā could find any shelter anywhere, he finally approached Brahmā and prayed to him to get relief from the unbearably effulgent disc. Lord Brahmā replied, “By a flick of Lord Viṣṇu’s eyebrows, the entire universe vanquishes, including Brahmāloka. Dakṣa, great sages like Bhṛgu, Lord Śiva and other great demigods are all surrendered to Lord Viṣṇu. By bowing their heads, they are all carrying out the orders of the Lord. One who disregards the devotee of that Supreme Lord Viṣṇu cannot be protected by me.” Hearing this from Brahmā, and still greatly afflicted by the blazing fire of the Sudarśana disc, Durvāsā approached Lord Śiva—who always resides in his abode Kailāsa—in the hope of finding shelter there. Mahādeva replied, “The Sudarśana disc of the Supreme controller, Śrī Hari, is unbearable to us as well. We all are under the subjugation of Lord Śrī Hari. Covered by the illusory energy of the Lord, we cannot understand how expansive that illusory energy is. Therefore, none of us, other than Viṣṇu Himself, can protect you from the Sudarshana disc.”

Greatly disappointed, Durvāsā *muni* went to Vaikuṅṭha *dhāma*, where the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Nārāyaṇa, resides with His consort, Goddess Lakṣmī. Falling at the lotus feet of the Lord, he confessed his guilt and begged for forgiveness again and again. He prayed earnestly to the Lord to save him from the clutches of the *cakra*. The Supreme Lord said, “Oh *brāhmaṇa*! I am completely under the control of My devotees. Just as Śiva and other demigods could not save you since they are subordinate to me, I, in the same manner, am not able to save you since I am controlled by my devotees. I have sold all my independent mindedness to my devotees. My pure devotees, who are not even interested in liberation, have captivated my heart. What to speak of My devotee, even those who are devotees of My devotees are very dear to me. Without saintly persons, for whom I am the only destination, I do not desire to enjoy My transcendental bliss and My six opulences. Since **pure devotees give up their homes, wives, children, relatives, riches, even their lives simply to serve me, without any desire for material improvement in this life or the next, how can I give up such devotees at any time?** As a chaste woman brings her gentle husband under her control by service, the pure devotees completely attached to Me in the core of their hearts bring Me under their full control. My devotees attain completeness in my service. They are not interested even in the four kinds of liberation, what then is to be said of such perishable happiness as elevation to the upper planetary systems? The pure devotee is always in the core of My heart, and I am always in the heart of the pure devotee. My devotees do not know anything else but Me, and I do not know anyone else but them. Oh *brāhmaṇa*! let Me now advise you the only way for your own protection. If the devotee that you have offended forgives you, that is the only way you will be saved. Therefore, you should go to him immediately, without a moment’s delay. For a *brāhmaṇa*, austerity and learning are certainly auspicious, but when acquired by a person who is not gentle, such austerity and learning are most dangerous.”

As ordered by Śrī Nārāyaṇa, Durvāsā returned to King Ambarīṣa, and fell to the ground, clasping the King’s lotus feet. When King Ambarīṣa, the great *vaiṣṇava*, saw that Durvāsā was attempting to offer prayers with a regretful heart, he immediately began offering prayers to the great weapon of Śrī Hari to it calm down and be peaceful towards Durvāsā *muni*. With the prayers of the pure devotee, the Sudarśana disc became peaceful. Having thus witnessed such a splendid feat, Durvāsā said, “My dear King, today, I have experienced the greatness of the devotees of Lord Viṣṇu. Although I have committed an offense towards you, you have prayed only for my good fortune. There is nothing impossible and difficult to renounce for the devotee who has attained the service of Śrī Vāsudeva. By the very hearing of His Holy Name, one is purified. Devotees of that Supreme Personality of Godhead are never in scarcity of anything. Overlooking my offenses, you have saved my life. I am saved because of your mercy.”

Expecting the return of Durvāsā *muni*, the King had not taken his food. Therefore, when the sage returned, he fed the *muni* sumptuously with many different food preparations. Due to his unalloyed devotion to Śrī Vāsudeva, he considered even the topmost planet of Lord Brahmā to be no better than the hellish planets.

The character of Mahārāja Ambarīṣa depicts the ideal code of life of a pure devotee. Even when the pure devotee is the ruler of the entire earth, including all oceans and seas, he is not attached to materialistic wealth. He renders unconditional devotional service unto Lord Kṛṣṇa and His devotees with all his belongings. The pure devotee does not have the pride of an ‘enjoyer.’ Pure servitorship pervades his entire mind. His entire physical form, along with all his senses—in unison with his mind, body, and words—are always engaged in exclusive devotional service unto Lord Hari. While associating with pure devotees, he considers hearing and chanting the pastimes of Lord Śrī Hari as more desirable than liberation itself. Despising even salvation, which allows one to live in the same abode as the Lord, he longs for eternal servitude towards the Lord as a faithful follower of a pure devotee. Thus, while a sincere devotee may live in the forest or dwell in a palace as a sovereign ruler of an expansive kingdom, he has already won the heart of the unconquerable Lord. Thus, being intoxicated with pride, if one offends a pure devotee of the Lord on the strength of high birth, wealth, scholarship, or bodily beauty, one is deprived of the mercy of the Lord or His Holy Name for such an offense. If one commits an offense against the Lord or towards the Holy Name, only a pure devotee can save one from such an offense. The offense towards the Lord is mitigated by the merciful incarnation of the Holy Name, **but the offense committed towards the lotus feet of a pure devotee is not eradicated even by the Lord Himself or the Holy Name.** Only the pure devotee, towards whom the offense has been committed, can forgive one and relieve one from the burden of that offense. Śrī Caitanyadeva, the Lord Himself, taught this principle through the life of Śrī Śacī mātā. Śrī Vṛndāvana, who was Vyāsadeva in the pastime of Śrī Caitanya, stated as follows:

*Je-vaiṣṇava-sthane aparadh hoye jar /  
Punah se-i khamile se ghuche, nohe aar //*

*Translation: “If one offends a Vaiṣṇava, the offense can be excused only by that Vaiṣṇava, no one else.”*

—Sri Caitanya-bhāgavata, Madhya 22/30

*Kanta futey jei mukhe, sei mukhe jaye /  
Paye kanta futiley ki skondhe bahiray //*

*Translation: “If one is pricked by a thorn at the foot, one has to treat the exact place where the thorn has entered the body. It is absurd to look for the thorn at the shoulder.”*

—Sri Caitanya-bhāgavata, Antya 4/380

The character that Ambarīṣa Mahārāja exhibited teaches us about the gravity of offending a pure devotee of the Lord and how to get rid of such an offense. Among all kinds of sinful activities, more sinful activities, and most sinful activities that are possible—such as, killing a mother, father, brother, one's wife, cow, embryo, etc.—the gravest is the offense committed at the lotus feet of Bhaktidevī. This is because the effect of all other kinds of sinful activities may manifest in the body and the mind. However, the offense against a pure devotee affects the very soul and it covers the constitutional nature of one's consciousness. Among all other offenses, the one committed against the *vaiṣṇava* is the most heinous one. The offense committed against the pure devotee—who is the only one who can protect us from all other offenses towards the lotus feet of Śrī Bhaktidevī, the Lord Himself, the Holy Name, the Holy land—debars us from any atonement and from attaining any other shelters. One should be very attentive and ardently prayerful towards the pure devotees of the Lord so that any kind of offense at their lotus feet can be avoided.

## 25. Sage Saubhari

Sage Saubhari was a very old *brāhmaṇa*, a great ascetic, and mystic *yogī*. One time, he was performing austerities by submerging himself in the waters of Yamunā. He saw a large fish copulating. The decrepit ascetic, who was attached to the bodily conception of life, became desirous of enjoying family life. He immediately gave up his austerities and emerged from the waters of the Yamunā. Then, he went to Mathura, to the palace of King Mandhātā, who had fifty beautiful daughters. Sage Saubhari approached Mandhātā and prayed to him for one of his daughters in marriage. The King agreed for the sage to marry any of his daughters, as long as she herself chooses him to be her husband out of her own sweet will. Sage Saubhari knew that he an old gray-haired man, who was already diseased. The skin of his limbs was wrinkled and sagging; his head was constantly shaking; and to add to it all, he was an ascetic. No young girl would ever desire such a person to be her husband. King Mandhātā had decided to tactfully reject him by holding this *svayamvara*<sup>38</sup> for the marriage of his daughters.

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<sup>38</sup> An event where a girl selects her own husband

Sage Saubhari wished to turn himself into a beautiful young man so that the princesses, or any other damsel for that matter, would be attracted to him. By using the power of his penance, the sage immediately attained youth and beauty. Seeing the handsome Saubhari, all fifty daughters of Mandhātā accepted him as their husband. Although they were siblings—and now co-wives of Saubhari—they became very jealous of one another. Big quarrels would ensue among them, with each woman fighting with another, saying, “This is my husband, not yours.” In order to gratify his senses with his fifty wives, sage Saubhari obtained various paraphernalia on the strength of his severe austerities. He frolicked with his wives surrounded by these paraphernalia—various valuable garments, ornaments, servants, many groves, lakes, gardens with fragrant varieties of flowers, chirping birds, best palaces, fine couches, beds, seats, jewelry, sandalwood creams, garlands, flowers, palatable dishes, etc. Seeing the sage’s activities in amazement, the emperor of the seven-island Earth, King Mandhātā, was forced to give up his pride of considering himself the sovereign emperor of the entire Earth. In his own house, Sage Saubhari was indulging with his wives all the time.

However, despite enjoying himself with his wives and his youthful beautiful body, Sage Saubhari’s heart was not at peace. Can fire be extinguished by pouring clarified butter? Lust cannot be satiated by more lustful activities; rather, it increases the nuisance further. Nobody has ever been successful in extinguishing the fire of lust by involving in more lustful activities. One day, when he was sitting alone, Saubhari began reflecting upon how he had fallen from the path of self-realization. He thought, “Even though I am a wise, intelligent, prudent scholar and ascetic, a mystic *yogī*, with years of experience, and expert in *mantras*, still, I was deluded by the mere sight of fishes engaging in bodily affairs!” The animalistic behavior of a low-born living entity, in this case a fish, had destroyed all his good intelligence. How severe is the effect of bad association? He was himself the reason of his own downfall. He misused the freedom that was awarded to him by the Lord. This misuse of freedom led to his downfall into the hellish realm. When one takes a dip into the holy water of the Yamunā, with ascetic vows like that of a sage, Kṛṣṇa consciousness is likely to be awarded to him. On the contrary, while dipping in that same Yamunā waters, how animalistic propensities had overtaken him! Instead of attaining benediction from the *Vaishnavi* Yamunā—who is very dear to the Lord—he received the bad association of aquatics. The outcome of his austerities should have been purification of the mind and attainment of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. On the contrary, his mind was perverted and afflicted by animalistic propensities. Therefore, those who are desirous of spiritual upliftment should never associate with materialistic householders. One should not engage his senses in subject matters outside of Kṛṣṇa conscious activities. One should not be content with the strength of his own austerities and sacrifices. One should always seek the association of saintly personalities. Only such a person can save someone who is about to fall down. In the association of saintly personalities, one should always hear about the topics of the devotees of the Lord. It is also not recommended to stay in isolation completely and take charge of one’s own spiritual upliftment. Always staying in the association of devotees is the ultimate good for the self.

Saubhari was remorseful and started reflecting, “Earlier, I was inclined toward performing penances in seclusion. However, I got married and became the husband of fifty wives. This is completely because I followed the bad association of an aquatic in the water. I have begotten a hundred sons from each of my wives and now, I have expanded to five thousand. I am completely deluded by the spell of the illusory energy! I have developed an inclination for enjoying matter. I find myself in an abyss of endless desires, which extend from this life to the next. Alas! How evil is the effect of bad association!” Thinking in this way, sage Saubhari entered into a forest and accepted the third order of life.<sup>39</sup> All his wives followed him. Abandoning all kinds of ideas to indulge in materialistic happiness, sage Saubhari completely devoted himself in the worship and topics of the Lord and meditation upon Him. All his wives followed in his footsteps and they, too, were absorbed in the service of the Lord.

The lesson taught by the character of sage Saubhari is that mystic *yoga*, strength of austerity, meditating in seclusion, etc. cannot save the living entity from lustful propensities. There is no other way of protecting oneself than surrendering exclusively—with utmost obedience—at the lotus feet of the devotees of the transcendental Lord of love. Even for a great ascetic, learned scholar, or an aged person, it is not advisable to associate with people that have uncontrolled attraction toward the opposite sex, or with those that are following a lifestyle like that of an animal.

Some people use the example of sage Saubhari to conclude that one can imitate him and reach the ultimate stage of detachment, renunciation and welfare even by accepting the path of enjoyment. However, sages who had practical experience in the science of Kṛṣṇa Consciousness have categorically advised against following the path of renunciation or to falsely rise to the platform of detachment while still enjoying materialistic happiness. This is because all such activities inevitably lead to impersonalism and destroy the eternal, constitutional position of a soul. If one imitates examples of accidental falldown of personalities like Bilvamaṅgala, or Ajāmila and imagines oneself to have attained the platform of detachment from worldly affairs through the process of materialistic enjoyment, then, one inevitably falls down into delusion forever by committing an offense at the feet of these exalted devotees. This is also an offense against the Holy Name of the Lord because one indulges in the tendencies of materialistic enjoyment on the strength of chanting the Holy Name of the Lord. As soon as the indomitable lustful propensities arise in the heart—by illegally imitating these exalted personalities—one gets drowned in the mud of material enjoyment and can never be delivered. Therefore, the highest welfare is when one is engaged in the service of the pure devotees of the Lord and associates with them, abandoning all ideas of impersonalism.

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<sup>39</sup> This order is meant for the spiritual upliftment of a householder who voluntarily leaves his household duties and moves to the forest and starts living a life without luxury.

## 26. Khaṭvāṅga, The Saintly King

Khaṭvāṅga, the son of King Viśvasaha, was very dear to the demigods. He was a worshiper of the three hundred thirty million demigods and was devoted to them. He was unconquerable in battle and on behalf of the demigods, he had destroyed many demons in battle. The demigods were very pleased with Khaṭvāṅga for his devoted service and wanted him to ask for a boon. Before he asked for a boon, he inquired from them how many years he had left to live; he would ask for a boon accordingly. When the demigods informed him that only a moment of his life was remaining, without wasting any time, Khaṭvāṅga immediately returned to his capital by an airship given to him by the demigods. There, he engaged his mind exclusively in the service of Lord Viṣṇu, who is the Lord of the Lords.

Khaṭvāṅga considered, “How will my ultimate welfare be met by fulfilling worldly desires with the help of the boon bestowed by the demigods, who were the lords of the three worlds? The demigods can indeed fulfill all desires related to religion (*dharma*), wealth (*artha*), or lust (*kāma*), but how will this give rise to pure devotion unto the Lord inside the heart? Since the senses and intellect of the demigods are scattered all over, they were oblivious to the presence of all-pervasive Lord Śrī Hari, who resides inside their hearts. The conditioned living entity is naturally inclined toward the plethora of materialistic displays—which resemble the abode of *Gandharvas*<sup>40</sup>—created by the illusory energy of the Lord.” He further contemplated, “By fixing my mind onto the Supreme Lord and renouncing all affinity toward material enjoyment, I am taking complete shelter of Him in full Kṛṣṇa consciousness. The ultimate welfare of a living entity is to become a servitor of the Supreme Lord. There is no other welfare. Abandoning the idea of identifying the body as the self, the only desirable object for a living entity is to take complete shelter of Śrī Vāsudeva. All other desires are simply causes of material existence.”

When only a moment of his life was remaining, the saintly King Khaṭvāṅga immediately gave up worshipping various demigods, wealth and opulence, desire for religious merit, greed for various benedictions, and identification of the self with the body. He took exclusive shelter of Śrī Vāsudeva and became His eternal servitor within just a moment.

There are two great lessons to be learned from the saintly King Khaṭvāṅga. Life is ephemeral in nature. Who knows how much time is left in anybody’s life? One should, therefore, not waste any time endeavoring for any worldly possession other than obtaining exclusive devotional service onto Śrī Vāsudeva. The majority of our lives has been spent in vain. Therefore, it is difficult to begin devotional service at this point. Those who are in their youth may think that they still have a long duration of life remaining. One should not waste a single moment in such considerations. Everyone should engage in devotional service immediately. By earnest effort, one can be delivered even by a moment’s devotional service.

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<sup>40</sup> Celestial beings in the heavenly realm who are expert singers and dancers.

Any moment that is spent on something other than devotional service should be considered to have been wasted. An intelligent person never waits for tomorrow or for the future to begin devotional service unto Lord Vāsudeva. Our endeavors for material gain can be postponed. However, not a single moment should be wasted by postponing our engagement in devotional service. If one begins lamenting that much of one’s lifespan is already wasted, that is no use since one would not be able to get back that time which is already gone. In a state of lamentation, whatever time is left may also be squandered, instead of being utilized properly. Therefore, under all circumstances, one should begin devotional service right from this moment.

The other lesson from the example of King Khaṭvāṅga is that one cannot get liberation by approaching the Lord directly or by learning devotion on their own. The love of Supreme God, Śrī Vāsudeva, can be attained only by devotional service unto Him. The lotus feet of the Lord are the only shelter of the living entity. The devotees of the Lord neglect religiosity, wealth, desire or *sālokya* liberation<sup>41</sup>, and pray only for love of God. The demigods cannot deliver one from imminent death and therefore, they are not to be entitled as the Supreme Lord. Only Śrī Vāsudeva can protect the living entity from the fangs of death. The demigods can bestow their mercy upon the living entity by awarding them religiosity, wealth and fulfillment of material desires. This type of kindness from the demigods is deceitful in nature. If, however, they turn the attention of the living entity toward Śrī Vāsudeva, then, it is considered an absolute merciful gesture.

## 27. Bhṛgu

Bhṛgu, the son of Brahmā, was a great *vaiṣṇava*. One time, Bhṛgu kicked the chest of Viṣṇu. This incident can be confusing to many. Most cannot understand how Bhṛgu can be called the best of the *vaiṣṇavas* when he kicked the chest of that Lord. How can Bhṛgu behave this way toward the Lord, who is eternally worshippable by him, and who Bhṛgu always thinks of in his heart. Due to illusion, some people think that Śrī Viṣṇu (or Śrī Kṛṣṇa) has held the footmark of Bhṛgu on His heart, just to show respect to the *brāhmaṇa*. However, from the anecdote of Durvāsā Muni and Mahārāja Ambarīṣa, we can learn that when Durvāsā was begging for mercy from Lord Viṣṇu, the Lord said that even the Lord Himself does not have the capacity to forgive a person who insults a *vaiṣṇava*. This is because the *vaiṣṇava* is the heart of Bhagavān and Bhagavān is the heart of a *vaiṣṇava*. Bhagavān is always under his pure devotee. Worship of the devotee is higher than the worship of Bhagavān. An offence to a devotee is more dangerous than one toward the Lord. If an offence is committed against Bhagavān, the Holy Name can relieve one from it. However, if an offence is committed against a devotee, then not even Bhagavān Himself, nor the Holy Name, nor even one’s spiritual master can provide protection. Therefore, *brāhmaṇa* Durvāsā had to seek forgiveness from Mahārāja Ambarīṣa by

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<sup>41</sup> A form of liberation in which one is able to live with God in the same abode.

holding the latter's feet. A *vaiṣṇava* is, therefore, superior than a *brāhmaṇa*. **It is actually to show the superiority of the *vaiṣṇava* that Bhagavān Viṣṇu is always holding the mark of the kick of Bhṛgu on His chest.** On the part of Bhṛgu, it was actually to reveal the quality and superiority of Bhagavān that he kicked the chest of Bhagavān. This was a service to Bhagavān. Bhṛgu did not engage in such action to gratify his own senses, or out of pride, or in order to publicize the pride of his family. Bhṛgu's actions were to reveal and promote the qualities of Lord Viṣṇu: that He is the supreme; that He is the reservoir of unlimited mercy; and that devotees are very dear to Him. The Lord inspired and sanctioned the enactment of this pastime from within Bhṛgu in order to reveal the glory of the devotee.

Millenia ago, a group of exalted sages once initiated a great fire sacrifice on the bank of river Sarasvatī. In the assembly of that sacrifice, the sages were hearing recitation of *purāṇas* and deliberating on the scriptural subject matter amongst themselves. In some scriptures, the glories of Brahmā were described more prominently, and in other *purāṇas*, Lord Śiva was described as the supreme amongst everyone, and yet in some *purāṇas*, Lord Viṣṇu was described as the supreme. Disagreements arose amongst the sages on this topic. In order to reach some kind of common meeting ground amongst all the different opinions, some of sages tried to propound ideas that took elements from each of the different opinions, and gave birth to an entirely new opinion. They said, "What is the benefit of having disagreements amongst us? Whoever has a spiritual master, it is upto the spiritual masters to decide. And whoever has a worshippable deity, it is upto them." Propounding such an idea of considering all as equal, this new idea of equality germinated amongst the sages. This is called impersonalism. In modern times, when so-called coordinationism is being promoted, we can see that these are repercussion from those olden impersonalism. This is the '*ism*' of mish-mash generated from mixing and matching a variety of different ideas. According to this '*ism*,' puffed rice and candy are both equal. Similarly, according to this '*ism*,' a demigod gifted with special powers from Bhagavān, a simple living entity, and the Lord Himself are all put on an equal platform.

In order to quell their doubts, the intelligent sages gave the responsibility to Bhṛgu—the son born from the mind of Brahmā—to resolve this matter conclusively. Complying with the request of the sages, Bhṛgu first visited the assembly of Brahmā. When he reached the assembly, Bhṛgu did not pay obeisances or offer prayers to Brahmā. *Brāhmaṇical* etiquette would have required him to pay his obeisances to Brahmā, who was his father as well as a worshippable superior. Instead, Bhṛgu simply stood there with great pride. Brahmā noticed the disrespect and misbehavior of his son and became furious, appearing as though he was going to burn Bhṛgu in the fire of his rage. Seeing his father thus infuriated, Bhṛgu quickly fled from the assembly, understanding perfectly Brahmā's disposition.

Next, Bhṛgu visited Lord Śiva in Mount Kailāsa. When Lord Śiva saw Bhṛgu approaching, he got up, along with Pārvatī, in order to show respect to Bhṛgu. Considering Bhṛgu as his younger brother, Lord Śiva went to embrace him. However, Bhṛgu stopped him in his steps and said, "Maheśa, please do not touch me. You have taken up the garb of a *pāśaṇḍī* (atheist), and you have kept all these ghosts, goblins, vampires, and untouchable atheists near

you. You are a deviant. In which scripture are smearing ash on one's body and holding bones touted as a virtue? If one touches you, one has to take bath immediately to get purified. Please stay away from me.” Bhṛgu was, of course, saying these words in line with the mission that the sages had entrusted him with to determine who the most supreme is. An exalted *vaiṣṇava* like Bhṛgu can never criticize Lord Śiva! When Rudradeva heard the words of Bhṛgu, he became very angry. He grabbed his trident and prepared to destroy Bhṛgu. Pārvatīdevī held Lord Śiva's hand. Holding unto his feet and using sweet reasoned words, she prevented Śiva from committing such an act.

Finally, Bhṛgu proceeded towards Vaikuṅṭha. When he reached there, he saw Viṣṇu laying on a bed bedecked with precious jewels, with Śrī Lakṣmīdevī serving His lotus feet. Bhṛgu suddenly charged toward Lord Viṣṇu and kicked Him on the chest. Viṣṇu awoke and got up from His bed. Viṣṇu along with Lakṣmīdevī, then respectfully paid obeisances to Bhṛgu, and proceeded to wash Bhṛgu's feet. Offering Bhṛgu a very nice seat, Lord Viṣṇu smeared Bhṛgu's body with sandalwood paste with His own hands and begged for forgiveness for His offence. Viṣṇu said to Bhṛgu, “The water from the lotus feet of a *vaiṣṇava* can purify an unclean place into a pilgrimage. Whatever number of universes and universal controllers there are in My body, they are all now purified by being sprinkled with the water from the feet of a devotee.” To eternally remember this character of a devotee, Viṣṇu holds the footmark of His devotee on His chest. This is the reason that He received the *śrīvatsa-lāñchanaḥ*.

Seeing this behavior of Viṣṇu, Bhṛgu got surprised and by getting immersed in the nectar of devotion, started dancing in front of Viṣṇu. In the body of Bhṛgu different kinds of ecstasies of love were getting manifested. Bhṛgu went back to the assembly of the sages and narrated the behavior of Brahmā, Śiva and Viṣṇu to everyone. Taking vow of truth three times Bhṛgu said to everybody-

*sarva-śreṣṭha—śrī-vaikuṅṭha-nātha nārāyaṇa*  
*satya satya satya ei balila vacana*  
*sabāra īśvara kṛṣṇa—janaka sabāra*  
*brahmā, śiva kareṇa yāñhāra adhikāra*  
*kartā-hartā-rakṣitā sabāra nārāyaṇa*  
*niḥsandehe bhaja giyā tāñhāra caraṇa*  
*dharma, jñāna, puṇya-kīrti, aiśvarya, virakti*  
*ātma-śreṣṭha madhyama yāhāra yata śakti*  
*sakala kṛṣṇera, ihā jāniha niścaya*  
*ataeva gāo bhaja kṛṣṇera vijaya”*

—Śrī Caitanya Bhāgavata Antya-khaṇḍa 9|370-374

**Translation:** *Nārāyaṇa, the Lord of Vaikuṅṭha, is the greatest of all. This is the truth, the truth, the truth. Kṛṣṇa is the controller and father of all, even Lord Brahmā and Lord Śiva work under His direction. Lord Nārāyaṇa is the doer, creator, and protector. Therefore one should worship His lotus feet without doubt. Know for certain that religiosity, knowledge, pious activities,*

opulences, and renunciation, as well as one's exalted position and influence all originate from Kṛṣṇa. Therefore sing the glories of Kṛṣṇa and worship Him.

## 28. *Avadhūta* and his twenty-four teachers

Once, Śrī Kṛṣṇa narrated an anecdote to Uddhava about an *avadhūta*<sup>42</sup> and Yadu. Yadu once observed a strange *brāhmaṇa* who was walking around like an overjoyed mad man. He approached the *brāhmaṇa* and asked him the reason for such satisfaction and joy in his heart. The *brahmama* informed Yadu that he had accepted twenty-four teachers in this world and that the superior knowledge and education that he had learned from their conduct enabled him to travel anywhere within the world with a free spirit. The twenty-four entities that the *avadhūta* accepted as his teachers were: (1) Earth (2) Air (3) Sky (4) Water (5) Fire (6) Moon (7) Sun (8) Dove (9) Python (10) Ocean (11) Insect (12) Bumblebee (13) Elephant (14) Honey-collector (15) Deer (16) Fish (17) The prostitute named Piṅgalā (18) Eagle (19) A Young Boy (20) Maiden (21) Arrow maker (22) Serpent (23) Spider and (24) Female Insect.

(1) From mother earth, the *avadhūta brāhmaṇa* learned the quality of tolerance. No matter how much people exploit the earth by deep-oil drilling, cultivating, and enjoying it in various ways, the earth remains unmoved and continues to benefit everyone. Therefore, even though other living entities may persecute one in different ways, one should never deviate from the path of religiosity, knowing that all of one's circumstances are a providential arrangement. One should be forgiving even towards an aggressor and act in ways that are beneficial for a person. One should not be intolerant towards any kind of transient pain and suffering.

A saintly person can learn a lot from trees and mountains born from the earth. Trees, grasses, and mountains dedicate their lives for the benefit of others. Trees provide shade and produce sweet fruits, even if a lump of stone is hurled at it. Even when cut down with sharp weapons, a tree never protests. Even while being burnt in fire, it continues to benefit even its aggressors with its own body in the form of firewood. Tolerating adversities like the harsh sun, torrential rain, summer and winter, the tree still benefits friends and enemies indiscriminately with its own body. The grass is always trampled upon by animals, such as, cows, mules, and others. Yet, it serves them, even when it is parched and dried itself. Mountains produce rivulets and streams and nurture hundreds of medicinal plants on themselves. They are not envious towards wild animals that move about their surface. If one can be as tolerant as a tree and as imperturbable as a mountain, then it is possible to be engaged in devotional service.

(2) From the moving wind, the principles that the *avadhūta* learned is that one should be unattached, even after coming in contact with various kinds of matter. Despite carrying all kinds of aromas, the wind never gives up its own property and never mixes with those different

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<sup>42</sup> A mystic or saint who is beyond egoist-consciousness, duality, and common worldly concerns, and who acts without consideration for standard social etiquette.

smells. Similarly, a person who wishes for the welfare of others is engaged in the service of the Lord. He is not attached to the bodily concept of life and accepts material objects, but in a detached manner.

(3) The sky taught the *avadhūta* that one should not be involved in conducts based solely on the bodily concept of life and gross matter. The sky extends everywhere and everything rests within it, but it does not mix with anything.

(4) From water, the lesson he learned is that one should follow such saintly persons whose character is as pure, natural, comely, and as sweet as water. Such saintly persons sanctify everyone with their appearance, touch, and glorification of the Lord.

(5) The lesson he gathered from fire is that a saintly person never falls down, rather he delivers the fallen. This is similar to fire purifying matter without getting blemished at all. As fire consumes everything, a saintly person may—by providential arrangement—appear to come in contact with abominable things. However, such saintly persons are never blemished; rather, they purify others by their effulgence. A saintly person is indifferent about propagating his own glories. Just as fire is covered by ashes, he remains dormant. He may sometimes glorify himself as an effulgent fire for the sake of educating the common mass. He is simply following the orders of his spiritual master to benefit others. Common people fail to understand that there is fire in wood. The conditioned living entities cannot always realize the true stature of a saintly person.

(6) From the moon, he learned the following. Even though crescents of the moon increase or decrease under the influence of time, there is actually no change to the moon. Similarly, the body undergoes changes from birth to death, but the soul remains unchanged.

(7) He learned from the sun that devotees never get attached by gross matter even if they may accept such things, just as the sun draws water from the earth with its rays and sends it back as rain to earth. The sun is self-effulgent and ever-present. Just because the sun always rises from the east, no intelligent person would infer the conclusion that the east is the mother of the sun. While travelling around the earth, the sun only appears to rise in the east and set in the west. Sometimes it also appears to be covered by a patch of clouds. These perspectives are dependent on the viewer and his vision.

(8) From the dove, he learned that one should not be overly attached or excessively affectionate towards any conditioned living entity or earthly objects. Once upon a time, there was a dove who built a nest on a tree in the forest and was living happily with his she-dove for a few years. Neither could not live without seeing the other; both of them slept, sat, traveled, stayed, talked, played and ate together. Whatever the she-dove demanded, the dove would bring it regardless of how difficult it was for him. In due course of time, the she-dove gave birth to many offspring. Being enamored by their sweet sounds, the dove began to care for them happily. Together, the male and the female dove raised their offspring with utmost care. One day, the couple flew away from their nest to search for food for their children. Meanwhile, a

hunter spotted the baby-doves and trapped them in his nest. When the doves came back, they were beyond aggrieved at the sight of their entrapped babies who were crying in fear. Crying, the she-dove dashed towards her babies in the hunter's net and got entrapped herself. The dove lamented miserably seeing his dear most ones trapped in the net and fighting for dear life. He, too, fell into the net. The hunter tightened his net and returned home with the whole dove family.

Just like this dove, persons who are engaged in sense enjoyments of family life and are attached to the maintenance of their dependents finally fall prey to death along with their kinsmen. If a living entity—even after ascending to the human form of life—gets attached to household life like the dove, learned scholars consider such a person to have fallen in the well of material existence even though he may pose himself as progressing on the path of liberation.

(9) From the python, he learned that material endeavor is fruitless. It is wise to simply be engaged in devotional service of the Lord. For bodily maintenance, one should accept whatever food comes of its own accord by the Lord's will, whether such food is delicious or tasteless, plentiful or little. One has to take shelter of the Supreme Lord and without any selfish motive for one's own sense gratification, one should serve *guru* and Kṛṣṇa. Those who always hanker to fulfill the urges of the tongue and belly can never get the service of Lord Sri Kṛṣṇa.

(10) The lesson he learned from the ocean is that a sage is externally gracious, but internally he is grave, limitless, inviolable, untouched, and unaltered by space and time. He remains still like the sea. As the ocean cannot be measured, the Lord's devotees can never be subjected to any kind of judgment. The ignorant, conditioned living entities are incapable of touching the depths of the hearts of liberated personalities. The ocean never overflows beyond its limits even while continually consuming rivers in the rainy season, and it never dries out in the absence of such full-flowing rivers in the summer time. Similarly, the devotees of the Lord are not dependent upon worldly things to become complete; they do not become incomplete in absence of something worldly. They are always complete, liberated, ever-perfected souls.

(11) The moth loses its life by being attracted to the beauty of the effulgence of the fire and blindly rushing into its flames. Similarly, conditioned living entities fall prey to death due to lack of knowledge and being allured by the desire of enjoying women, wealth, clothing, ornaments, etc.

(12) A *brāhmaṇa* goes from place to place to collect alms for the maintenance of his body, just as a bumblebee collects honey, drop by drop, from various different flowers. A bumblebee may sometimes get attracted to a specific kind of aroma from a lotus and may get trapped inside while the lotus is closing at sunset. Similarly, a *brāhmaṇa* who thinks that the houses he visits for alms are his refuge will also be entrapped by the materialistic way of life and gradually perish in that condition. The bumblebee collects honey from all sorts of flowers—large or small—similarly, a person expert in absorbing the essence of life can assimilate the science of devotional service to the Lord from all kinds of scriptures. This was the lesson that the *avadhūta* learned from the bumblebee.

There are many other lessons that can be learned from bees and flies. Unlike the bee that drinks honey exclusively from flowers, the fly tastes all kind of things. A fly is indiscriminately attracted to the sweet smell of ripe mangoes, jackfruit, palm fruit juice etc. as well as the rotting pungent smell from a trash can. For the fly, the pleasure derived from tasting disgusting things, such as open wound, oozing leprosy, the blood and flesh of a corpse, pimple, cough is the same as that it gets from tasting sweet rice, for instance. It does not discriminate between the odor of stool or the heavenly fragrance of sandalwood; raw meat or sacred offerings; acidic substances or fruits and honey. All are equally appealing to the fly. The fly represents those who blend transcendence with materialism, whereas the bumblebee symbolizes the pure devotees of the Lord. The impersonalists or *māyāvādīs* consider all the following things to be equal and comparable: namely, the Lord and the conditioned soul; the animate and inanimate world; pure goodness which is beyond the primordial qualities and the mixed qualities of material nature; designation and non-designation; transcendental dynamism and desire for material sense gratification; transcendental and material; liberated and conditioned; or the perfected and the practitioner. This is the so-called doctrine of unification. Health scientists and medical professionals agree that a single fly can pose a much bigger threat as the root cause of a pandemic to the common mass, in comparison to a highly venomous snake which can only kill a single person. The so-called intelligent class of men—who always try to deride the transcendental form, name, quality and pastime of the lotus feet of Lord Śrī Hari—afflict pain, instead of happiness in the heart of a spotless, pure, wise and saintly personality. Such persons' monotonous evil arguments are always blemished with attributing material qualities to transcendental subject matters; in other words, they try to blemish transcendence by equalizing it with the material realm. The impersonalists demonstrate their lower propensities, just like that of a fly. Therefore, one who desires to protect oneself must completely abandon the bad association of the fly-like impersonalists.

(13) Wild male elephants are entrapped after being enamored by she-elephants. The male elephant, in order to get a female companion, succumbs to subordination for the rest of his life. A conscientious person will never desire for the association of a charming woman; if he does, he will also forever be bound by stringent laws of illusory material nature. This was the lesson that the *avadhūta* learnt from the elephant.

(14) A greedy person painstakingly collects wealth but that wealth is robbed by others, if not used properly or given in charity. Honeybees collect honey with great difficulty, but as soon as the honey-thief finds the stored honey, he steals it away. Therefore, it is not wise to store more than necessary for oneself. One should engage one's honey (meaning, money and wealth) in the service to the devotees of the Lord.

Just like the honey-thief steals the honey collected by other living entities, renunciates are entitled to accept major portions of the hard-earned wealth of a family man in the service of the Lord. The *avadhūta* learned this lesson from the honey-thief.

(15) The deer is enamored by the sound of the hunter's flute. Unlike the deer's fascination with the sound of the hunter's flute, however, a true renunciate should abstain from hearing mundane talks and songs even if they may be very attractive to the ears. In general, people take great interest in amorous songs for material enjoyment or to experience mundane poetic appeal. Even such an activity can entrap a living entity. R̥ṣyaśṛṅga *muni* got very attracted to the dancing, singing and playing of musical instruments by some charming ladies. In time, he came under their control. If one indulges in mundane conversations, songs and talks—just as the deer is bewildered by the flute sound—he gets completely bound. This was the lesson that the *avadhūta* learned from the deer.

(16) Incited by the desire to enjoy through its tongue, the fish gets caught in the fishing hook and loses its life. Similarly, foolish people fall prey to the uncontrolled pursuit of the urges of the tongue. Wise sages who are capable of subduing all other senses may find controlling the tongue to be very difficult. The practice of fasting is recommended for control of the tongue. In reality, fasting may in fact increase the urges of the tongue, even more than before. For this reason, until and unless one has not conquered the urges of the tongue, he cannot be called a *Gosvāmī* or the 'master of the senses,' even though he might have gained control over all other senses. When the tongue's urges are controlled, then, all other senses are conquered. The *avadhūta* has learnt this lesson from the fish.

(17) In ancient times, there was once a prostitute named Piṅgalā in the city of Videha. One evening, she dressed herself in fine clothes and ornaments and waited at the exterior doorway of her house in the hopes of finding a paramour. She looked expectantly at every man that walked by her courtyard to see if he would be her next customer. Even as midnight approached and one man after another passed by her doorway, none stopped for the prostitute's services. Piṅgalā became extremely hopeless and morose. A sense of renunciation arose in her heart due to this situation. She began to repent that she had sold her body for the greed of wealth and served womanizing, lustful men and got gotten attracted to perverted male bodies. She began speaking to herself thus, "Nobody, other than Lord Śrī Hari Himself, can be the enjoyer of this pure living entity called the soul. We are all originally created to be enjoyed and the Supreme Lord is the ultimate enjoyer." As such considerations arose within her heart, she sacrificed all worldly desires and hopes and desired only to serve Lord Hari. From this prostitute, Piṅgalā, the *avadhūta* learned that the wisest thing one can do is to abandon all worldly hopes and aspirations and take full shelter and refuge of the lotus feet of Lord Śrī Hari.

(18) A smaller weaker eagle was once flying with a piece of meat when he was attacked by a group of larger, more aggressive eagles. To avoid the danger to his life, the weaker eagle dropped the piece of meat. While doing so, however, the smaller hawk experienced actual peace in his heart. The *avadhūta* learned from that eagle that when a living entity abandons enviousness towards another living entity, he is also treated in the same non-envious manner by others. No one is inimical towards those who are eager for the love of God. In other words, even if other people may be inimical or envious towards the devotee, there is no lack of happiness in the heart of the devotee.

(19) Those who are equipoised in the face of respect and dishonor and who do not hanker after material gains, such as, house, family, and wealth, such persons can always wander anywhere in satisfaction. An ignorant child and a highly learned devotee of the Lord can move about blissfully without any worries. The more one concentrates one's mind on worldly subject matters, the more he is subjected to suffering. Real peace can only be achieved by being indifferent—just like a young carefree boy—and being immersed in the service of God. This the *avadhūta* learned from observing a young boy.

(20) There was once a girl of marriageable age who happened to be home alone one day. Just then, a few men arrived at her home desiring her hand in marriage. Since nobody was home, the girl had to attend to the guests herself. She went to the kitchen and started husking the paddy in order to prepare a meal for the guests. While husking the paddy, her bangles jingled as they bumped into each other. Considering that the guest might think that her father is a poor man—needing the daughter to husk the paddy herself—the intelligent maiden removed her bangles one after another. She only kept two bangles in each hand. As she started to husk the paddy again, even those bangles clinked against each other. Then, she removed one bangle from each hand, and how had only one bangle in each of her hands.

From this maiden, the *avadhūta* learned that conflict is inevitable whenever more than one person lives in the same place, particularly if they are of different mindsets. Where persons with different motivations and desires gather together, the idea of association is not pragmatic. If likeminded people, or people united under the shelter of the same bonafide spiritual master, discharge loving devotional service onto Śrī Kṛṣṇa and sing His glories, only then is harmony not hampered. Real seclusion means execution of devotional service along with likeminded people. Otherwise, the poison of conflict and discordance keeps growing within the heart, even though one stay externally in seclusion.

(21) A blacksmith was once making arrows. He was so engrossed in his work that he did not even notice that the king, along with many followers and musical convoys, was passing by. The lesson that he learned from this blacksmith is that one who has taken shelter of the lotus feet of the Lord is not absorbed in external affairs. He conducts his necessary activities out of daily practice. His mind is always engaged in the glorification of the name and fame of the Lord, and in the service to saintly persons.

(22) The serpent moves about alone; he does not have a fixed place of residence. It is always alert. It does not make any sound; no one can be aware of its movements. It enters hole made by others and grows there happily. The lesson the *avadhūta* learned from the serpent is that one should not receive service from others or be dependent on them. One should move about alone while performing devotional service to the Lord. A person in renounced order of life should not have a designated dwelling place like a householder. One who takes to devotional service should always be alert, just like the serpent. If one is not protected by the association of devotees, while performing devotional service, the illusory energy of the Lord can cover that person at any moment. Devotees of the Lord should not engage in mundane

conversations; rather, they should only relish the topics of Śrī Hari. Devotees of the Lord will not undertake the trouble of making a house for their living. There are palatial buildings, monuments etc., built by people who are inclined towards carrying the burden of worldly affairs at the cost of various tribulations and with the use of modern scientific inventions, such as electricity, vehicles, etc. All such things of modern civilization should be engaged in devotional service by the devotees of the Lord. This is how the true essence of everything can be restored.

(23) The spider creates a web through its mouth, roams about in that web, and again swallows the web in due course. Similarly, the *avadhūta* learned from the spider that God creates this universe with His illusory potency, and like the spider, dissolves it in due course. Therefore, one should not be mad after enjoying this illusory material world. Instead, one should be engaged in the devotional service of the Lord.

(24) A wasp brings another weaker insect into its hive and keeps it trapped. The entrapped weaker insect is in constant fear of the wasp, and by thus meditating upon the stronger wasp, eventually achieves the same state of existence as the wasp without leaving its current body. The lesson that the *avadhūta* learned from the wasp is that a devotee who is following the process of devotional service to increase his attachment towards the Lord—though the process of being engaged in hearing, chanting and remembering the glories of the Lord—attains liberation very quickly and easily, even while existing in his current body of bliss and knowledge. His body attains the stage of eternity, knowledge and bliss, like the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu expressed in this regard:

*diksha kale bhakta kare atma-samarpan/  
seikale Kṛṣṇa tare kore atma-sama||  
sei deha kore tar, cidanandamoyal  
aprakṛta-dehe Kṛṣṇer carana bhajay||*

—Caitanya-caritāmṛta Antya-līlā 4.192-193

The *avadhūta* gained this knowledge by considering these twenty-four entities to be his teachers. He also learned a lot from his own body. We are so attached to this body that we have forgotten our eternal good. We do not realize that this body will ultimately be a great feast for the dogs, jackles, insects, etc. The *avadhūta* was thus roaming about from one place to another in search of the Truth of God, considering his current body to be the property of others. Conditioned living entities expand and maintain their wealth, houses, family, wife, children, animals, and servants with their hard-earned money. A tree produces seeds before dying; similarly, our body perishes after generating some actions and reactions in the form of producing offspring—a byproduct of this body. Just like a householder who has many wives is attracted to each of them individually, a person who is attached to his body is always afflicted by the urges of his different senses, such as, the eyes, nose, ears, tongue, skin, stomach, etc..

The conditioned living entity gets this human form of life after transmigrating through 8.4 millions of life forms. Among these life forms, 0.9 million births are reserved as aquatics; 2

million births in the form of non-moving living entities; 1.1 million births as various insects and reptiles; 1 million births are for different kinds of birds; 3 million as different kinds of quadrupeds; 0.4 million births as different species of human form of life. During the human form, a living entity may finally be fortunate enough to associate with pure devotees of the Lord and receive their instructions. This human form of life is more suitable for practicing Kṛṣṇa Consciousness than that of demigods. Since demigods are always mad after sense gratification in the heavenly realms, they are not worried about the ultimate goal of life. An intelligent person will always be conscious about engaging in the service of the Lord only, fully utilizing his human form of life. It is not wise to lament over not being able to gratify the senses properly since sense gratification is available even in the lower species of life. In every form of life, enjoyable things are available that give satisfaction to the body and the mind (in the form of kith and kins, in the form of objects, etc.). However, it is not possible to achieve devotional service to Śrī Kṛṣṇa and a bonafide spiritual master in any other birth than in this very human form of life!

## 29. The *Tridaṇḍi Brāhmaṇa* of Avantī

In the Malwa region, there was a country named Avantī, where there once lived a *brāhmaṇa*. The *brāhmaṇa* had earned immense wealth through agriculture and commerce. Although rich, the *brāhmaṇa* was extremely miserly. He did not offer an ounce of his riches to the demigods, neither did he share his savings with his relatives or well-wishers. His own wife, children, relatives, and even the demigods compared his avariciousness to that of *Yakṣa*. Since the *brāhmaṇa* was not offering any sacrifices to the demigods, they were not satisfied at all.

As the wheel of time churned, by the will of Providence, the *brāhmaṇa*'s wealth gradually eroded. A house fire, theft, harassment from government authorities, cheating by ordinary men—several incidents one after the other led the *brāhmaṇa*'s entire fortune to slowly dissipate. The *brāhmaṇa*'s miserliness was already disliked by his own family members and well-wishers. And now that he was completely impoverished, they began to disavow him one after the other. This unexpected behaviour of his own family members broke the *brāhmaṇa*'s heart and he was overtaken by a powerful sense of renunciation.

He lamented and reminisced as follows, “Alas, what great misfortune! All these years, I simply toiled uselessly and tormented myself for no good reason. I struggled so hard for money that I did not spend on religiosity or even on material enjoyment.” As he thought about the futility of his prior engagements, profound realizations unfolded in his heart. He thought, “There is always huge endeavour in earning and attainment; and then fear in expenses. Then, one is always in anxiety thinking about how to protect and consume what one has attained. When one's accumulation is lost, then there is great delusion. There are fifteen undesirable qualities that contaminate men—theft, violence, untruthfulness, duplicity, lust, anger, perplexity, pride, quarrelling, enmity, mistrust, envy, the dangers caused by women, gambling, and intoxication. The root from which all these undesirable qualities arise is greed for opulence, particularly for wealth. Even a man's brothers, wife, parents and friends—who are otherwise

united with him in love—will not hesitate to break off their affectionate relationships and become enemies over a single penny. Is there any fool like him, who, having attained this extremely rare human form of life, falls in the undesirable trap of acquiring wealth and leaves the devotional service of the Lord?” Then, the *brāhmaṇa* began to reflect on his circumstances as the mercy of the Lord. He thought, “The Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Hari, must somehow be satisfied with me. By His grace, I have been put into this miserable condition, which has triggered an experience of detachment in my mind. This detachment is the boat that will carry me over this ocean of material existence. By doing devotional service, Mahārāja Khaṭvāṅga was able to achieve the spiritual world in a single moment. Therefore, if the all-merciful Lord showers His mercy on me, it is not impossible for me to attain all auspiciousness in whatever little time I have remaining in this life.”

Contemplating in this way, the *brāhmaṇa* from Avantī decided to accept *tridandi* (holding three rods) *sannyāsa*. In this way, he travelled just like a mendicant from place to place. The body, mind and words are always engaged in either enjoying the world or in renouncing the world. Those who accept *tridandi sannyāsa*, however, withdraw the body, mind, and words from both enjoyment and renunciation. Instead, they engage them to chant and remember the Lord constantly, and therefore fulfil the purpose of *tridandi sannyāsa* by engaging in the service of the Lord. Worldly people are accustomed to engaging their body, mind and words simply in the service of the material world. If they see somebody engage in the service of the Lord, they consider him an outcast and try various ways to harass or deride him.

Indeed, when some unruly persons saw the *brāhmaṇa* of Avantī, they would consider him an old dishevelled beggar and would often harass him. Lacking the understanding that the *tridanda* is Lord Nārāyaṇa Himself, these unscrupulous men would consider it a mere bundle of bamboo sticks and would snatch it away from the *brāhmaṇa*. Some would grab his water pot and some would nab his chanting beads, clothing, eating bowl, or another of the *brāhmaṇa*'s few possessions. Every day, the *brāhmaṇa* would offer whatever alms he collected to the Lord. When he would then sit down on the bank of a river to honour the *prasādam*, the sinful rascals would engage some boys to go and sully the food with spit, urine, dirt, ash, or sand. They would pass air near him, and try various other methods to torment him. Knowing that the *brāhmaṇa* had taken a vow of silence, the crooked hooligans would try to coerce him into speaking by torturing him in different ways. Even though the ignorant thugs regularly engaged in such despicable acts against him, the *tridandi brāhmaṇa* was never disturbed, not even to the slightest. In his heart, he considered these incidents as apt punishment for his misdeeds by providential arrangement and accepted them as the Lord's mercy on him. Even while being insulted by these low-class men who seemed bent on condemning, criticising, and defaming him, he remained steady in his spiritual practices. Being resolute in the mode of goodness and steadfast in his own spiritual duty, he began to chant the following song.

The *brāhmaṇa* sang, “These people, the demigods, my own body, the planets, my past work, or the time factor are not the cause of my happiness or distress. Rather, it is the mind alone that causes happiness and distress and perpetuates the rotation of material life. This mind is more powerful than the strongest, and is dangerous even to the ascetics. **Therefore, anyone**

who can bring the mind under control becomes the master of all the senses. Without subduing this insurmountable enemy in the form of the mind, if one unnecessarily engages in quarrel with others by accepting the six internal enemies—lust, anger, greed, arrogance, delusion, and envy—as friends, such a person is the greatest fool. Without deep attraction for the service to the lotus feet of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the mind cannot be conquered through any other means. Therefore, I shall cross over the insurmountable ocean of nescience by being firmly fixed in the service of the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa and taking shelter of transcendental knowledge propounded by the previous *ācāryas*.” Contemplating in this way, the *tridandi* sannyasi of Avantī started chanting the Holy Name incessantly and began traveling all about the earth.

Every individual has something to learn from this character of the *tridandi* sannyasi. Those who seek favour from the general public or public opinion are gross enjoyers, fruitive workers or reputation seekers. An associate of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu—Śrīla Jagadānanda Goswāmī Prabhu—has said, “*Gaur-bhaja, loka-rakkha, ekatre nishphaḷ*”, which means “Devotional service to Gaurāṅga Mahāprabhu together with association with materialistic people is fruitless.” If one maintains veneration for materialistic people, one cannot worship the Lord in earnest. From the moment one begins practising devotional service of the Lord, materialistic people will try to deviate the person from the path of truth by lampooning and tormenting him. It is only when such persecution starts that real devotional service to Lord Hari commences. It is mentioned in the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam that living entities of the entire universe from the exalted Lord Brahmā down to the lowly clump of grass may take an inimical stance toward the devotees. The demigods may think that devotees are surpassing their position and planetary realm to ascend to the realm of Vaikuṅṭha. Therefore, it is not just the demons but also the demigods that may create various impediments to disrupt the devotee on the path of devotional service. To crush all such impediments under one’s feet and reach the realm of Vaikuṅṭha, one has to follow the path enunciated by the previous great sages. The *tridandi brāhmaṇa* of Avantī found this path for himself and illustrates this path for us by his example. Without finding fault in others, he governed his own mind. By his example of educating his own mind, the *brāhmaṇa* of Avantī has imparted this teaching to the whole world. The teaching is to ignore hundreds of tortures, persecution, condemnation, injustice, and defamation by the people of the world and remain steadfast in the service of Mukunda. This is the most auspicious engagement for the soul. Being persecuted in this material world is not disadvantageous for devotional service to Hari. On the contrary, it is rather favourable!

## 30. The Hunter Who Became A Devotee

One day, Śrī Nārada Goswāmī set out on a pilgrimage to Prayāga. When he was walking through a forest, he saw a deer writhing in pain due to an arrow pierced into its body. Further ahead, he found a hog—half dead—which was also squirming in acute pain due to a similar arrow pierced into it. As Nārada Muni walked a little further, he saw a rabbit in the same condition. The sight of such suffering of these animals caused great pain in the compassionate heart of Nārada. As he was wondering who could have killed all these animals so cruelly, he saw a hunter hiding silently behind a tree, ready to strike another animal with his bow and an

arrow. The hunter looked terrifying—with blood-shot eyes, dark-skinned, holding a bow in his hand—as if he were a messenger of death personified.

Nārada walked toward the hunter, and as he did so, the leaves around and beneath him ruffled and made noises. Hearing the noise, all the animals quickly fled. The hunter, who had patiently positioned himself to strike another animal, was greatly vexed by this disturbance. However, when he saw Nārada's effulgent appearance, he could not utter single word against him. Within his heart, however, the hunter was burning with anger. He said to Nārada, “Oh master of the senses! Why have you come here toward me into the forest? Have you strayed from your path? Because of you, my target animals ran away.”

Nārada said, “I have come to you to inquire about a doubt that has arisen in my heart. While I was on my way, I saw some half-dead animals flopping about in agony. I think these are animals that you shot with your bow and arrows. If you are hunting the animals, why are you leaving them half-dead? Wouldn't you fulfil your goal if you killed them completely?” The hunter replied, “Oh Goswāmī! My name is Mṛgāri! I hunt in the way that my father taught me to, leaving the animals half-dead writhing in pain. Nothing makes me more joyful than to see the half-dead animals thrashing around in agony. I do not get that kind of pleasure when I kill them right away.” Nārada replied, “Oh hunter! I beg something from you.”

The hunter replied, “Well, if you want an animal, I will give it to you. If you want deerskin, let us go to my house. Deer skin, tiger skin—whatever you want—I will give you everything.”

Nārada said, “I do not want these things. I request for just one thing: from tomorrow onward, whatever animal you kill, kill them instantly. Please do not leave them half-dead.”

The hunter said, “This is what you are begging for! What benefit will you get from it? What happens if the animal is left half-dead?”

Nārada replied, “The living entity suffers tremendously when you kill them in this way. You will also have to suffer the same fate as the half-dead animals that you have hurt. It is very sinful to kill any living entity. But it is unlimitedly more sinful to kill them by inflicting so much pain upon them. In your next life, these animals will kill you, inflicting the same pain upon you that you are killing them with now. One will be treated in the same way that he treats others.”

Nārada Muni's words frightened the hunter. He had tortured so many animals—day in and day out—by leaving them half-dead. He became restless at the thought of the many births he would have to take and the suffering he would have to undergo as his karmic reaction. The hunter asked Nārada Muni, “Oh Goswāmī! I have been doing these sinful acts since my childhood. How can a sinner like me be saved from this sin? I beg at your feet, please relieve me from my condition.”

Nārada Muni: “If you act according to my instructions, I can save you from this sin.”

Hunter: “I will do whatever you say.”

Nārada Muni: “First, you break your bow immediately. Then, I will speak further.”

Hunter: “What will I do for my livelihood if my bow is broken? How shall I live?”

Nārada Muni: “I will take care of your regular meals.”

At Nārada Muni’s words, the hunter immediately broke his bow and fell at Nārada Muni’s lotus feet. Nārada Muni picked the hunter up from his feet and instructed him, “Oh hunter! Go home and distribute all the wealth that you have earned sinfully to the *brāhmaṇas*. Along with your wife, renounce your house and wear just a single set of clothes. Build a hut at the bank of a river, make a *tulasī* altar in front of it, and plant *tulasī* in it. Serve *tulasī*, circumambulate her, and chant Kṛṣṇa’s names all the time. You do not have to worry about your meals. I will send you enough food. You can eat as much as you wish.”

Then, Nārada healed the half-dead deer, hog, and rabbit. The hunter was amazed to see this and became firmly devoted to the lotus feet of his spiritual master, Nārada Muni. After Nārada Muni’s departure, the hunter returned to his home and did everything according to the Muni’s advice. The news spread all over the village that the hunter had become a *Vaiṣṇava* by the grace of his spiritual master. The villagers began to bring food for the hunter. Everyday, ten to twenty villagers brought many delicious food preparations. However, the hunter would only accept as much as he needed for his wife and himself. He never indulged in accumulating more.

After a few days, Nārada Muni visited the hunter along with Parvata Muni. The hunter saw his spiritual master from a distance and started moving slowly toward him by repetitively lying prostrate on the ground. When he noticed ants moving on the ground, he cleaned those places with his clothes and then began to prostrate. Witnessing such a feeling of non-violence in the heart of the hunter, Nārada Muni addressed him as follows, “Oh hunter! It is not surprising that you have been through such a change. Those whose hearts have become devoted to Lord Śrī Hari never hurt others. Non-violence is inherent in the nature of a devotee of the Lord.

The hunter brought two seats made of *kuśa* grass and spread them before his spiritual master and Parvata Muni with devotion. He respectfully requesting them to be seated. He fetched water with which he washed their feet and—along with his wife—accepted that water upon their heads. By the process of chanting Kṛṣṇa’s names, feelings in the mode of goodness manifested in the body of the hunter. The hunter started dancing and singing with his arms raised up in love for Kṛṣṇa. Seeing such love of the hunter, Parvata Muni told Nārada, “You are ‘touchstone’; by your touch, even iron has turned into gold.”

The example of the hunter—who turned into a devotee—teaches us how even a very violent person can attain the supreme benediction as a result of association with a saintly person. Highly realized souls are true ‘touchstones’. If one abstains from committing offense at the lotus feet of such personalities, and observes their advice sincerely, then, even the most

sinful person—like the hunter, who is envious toward others—can be blessed with devotion to the Supreme Lord. Devotion to the Supreme Lord is the ultimate and absolute necessity of life. There is something that we can learn from the example of the hunter's wife, too. Sometimes, we see that the heart of the husband is bent toward devotion and the wife is not ready to follow because she thinks she might be depriving herself of some enjoyment. Similarly, the husband is sometimes fearful of devotional services because he thinks it might deprive him from enjoying sense gratification. In this example, we see that the wife of the hunter is favorable toward devotional service. In fact, a wife who follows in the footsteps of her husband who is devoted to the Lord; who assists her husband in all different ways; accepting tribulations; and being deprived of worldly pleasures—such a wife is fit to be called a ‘chaste woman’. On the other hand, a husband who does not engage his wife in devotional service of the Lord, he is definitely not to be called a ‘husband’. He is savagely envious toward his wife and is more harmful than a ferocious beast.

## 31. Unethical codes, Ethical codes and Devotional codes

Śrī Rāmānuja is one of the most prominent *ācāryas* in the *Śrī vaiṣṇava sampradāya*. He appeared in the year 1016 AD in a town named Mahabhutpuri or Paramavedur, near Chennai (previously known as Madrās). Before his advent, many liberated personalities appeared to preach the philosophy of *Śrī vaiṣṇavism*. These personalities are called ‘*Ālvars*’ in Dravidian language. Some people believe that there were a total of ten *Ālvars*. Others, however, think that there were twelve, including Śrī Rāmānuja. Among the *Ālvars*, Tirumaṅgāi *Ālvar* is quite renowned. It is believed that he appeared in the eighth century AD. “All the objects of this world have been created to be engaged in the service of Lord Nārāyaṇa. It is, therefore, obligatory to serve Lord Nārāyaṇa properly with these created objects. No object or living entity is complete without being properly engaged in the Lord's service.” This is Tirumaṅgāi's ultimate conclusion.

Ever since Tirumaṅgāi was a very young boy, he used to visit all the places of pilgrimage to execute devotional service. While he was on pilgrimages, four genius personalities became his disciples. The first disciple was 'Todabadakkun'—the best in argumentation—who was undefeatable in arguments. The second disciple was 'Tadaduan'—who could open locked door just by blowing air from his mouth. The third disciple was 'Nedolai Merippaan'—a manipulator of shadow—who could render somebody immovable if he touched their shadow with his foot. The fourth disciple was 'Neelamelappan'—who could walk on water. With these four disciples, Tirumaṅgāi used to visit many places of pilgrimage. One day, he arrived at a very ancient, dilapidated temple of the four-handed Lord Śrī Raṅganātha, who was reclining on the bed of the Śeṣa serpent. The temple was so old and derelict that different kinds of birds and animals had made it their shelter. Overgrowth woods and creepers surrounded the temple in all

directions and it had become a favorite hunting spot for wild animals. Somebody would come and offer a few flowers and water to Lord Śrī Raṅganātha once in a day and return as quickly as possible in fear of the wild animals. Seeing such an unkempt temple of the Lord, a desire arose in the heart of Tirumaṅgāi, who wished to build a very large and beautiful temple for Lord Śrī Raṅganātha. To this end, he—along with his disciples—visited various wealthy individuals in different countries to seek donations. Wherever he went, however, the rich disregarded him, calling him names, such as, hypocrite, greedy, thief, etc. Nobody donated even a single penny.

Even so, Tirumaṅgāi was undeterred. He was desperate to serve Lord Śrī Raṅganātha. He called his four disciples and said, “Oh children! Just see the inclination of the heart of such arrogant people who are blinded by wealth! The husband of Mother Lakṣmī, Lord Nārāyaṇa, has entrusted some portion of His opulence to these people. They should serve Lord Nārāyaṇa with that wealth. However, just see how they embezzle the entrusted wealth, thinking themselves to be masters of that wealth! How they have turned away from the worship of Lord Śrī Nārāyaṇa by living a luxurious life on milky beds in grand palaces! Lord Śrī Nārāyaṇa, in deity form, is lying in the woods inside the ruined temple. This is disrespectful to Him. Alas! They are neglecting Him! It is the duty of rich householders to worship Viṣṇu. Otherwise, their journey to hell is inevitable. It is necessary to do good to these people who are intoxicated with riches.”

Desiring the welfare of the materialistic men, Tirumaṅgāi put the mystic powers of his four disciples in good use for the service of the Lord. He instructed Todabadakkun—who was undefeatable in arguments—to entangle the rich materialists in a web of arguments. Then, while the rich were distracted in heated arguments, Tadaduan—the disciple who could open any locked door—would open their treasury doors and gather their wealth. Nedolai Merippaan—who could manipulate shadow—would stop the wealthy on their tracks as their wealth was being collected. Finally, Neelamelappan—who could walk on water—would take away the wealth from the rich’s grand palaces, which were encircled by water. In this way, Tirumaṅgāi collected immense riches, not for himself, but for the sole purpose of service to Lord Śrī Raṅganātha. With such activities, it appeared as if Tirumaṅgāi had become a leader of a band of robbers.

With the collected resources, Tirumaṅgāi renovated the temple by engaging the best artisans from various countries. As a result of the four years of work of thousands of artists, the work of the first exterior was completed, the second and the third exterior were completed in another two years, the fourth in eight years, the fifth in twelve years and the sixth exterior was completed in eighteen years. It took a total of sixty years to build the entire temple, at which time, Tirumaṅgāi was eighty years old! After construction of the temple interior was completed, nearby Kings set out to help Tirumaṅgāi. Those that appreciated how Tirumaṅgāi had amassed such riches solely for engaging it in the Lord’s service were benefited by their appreciation of such a great soul. Even those that helped him out of fear were, nonetheless, benefited. Tirumaṅgāi did not endeavor independently from the Lord to gratify his own senses. His one

and only motivation was to serve Lord Śrī Raṅganātha, even though the means with which he did it was robbery. He never accepted a single penny from that wealth for his personal enjoyment.

The construction of the temple of Lord Śrī Raṅganātha, surrounded by seven exteriors, was finally complete. He paid everyone a fair wage, after which he did not have a single penny left over. At that time, almost a thousand robbers—who had earlier helped him in robbing the rich—came forward and demanded that he give them the looted wealth. He secretly indicated to Neelamelappan—the water walking disciple—to take the robbers by a vessel used to bring huge stones for constructing the temple. Tirumaṅgāi told the robbers that Neelamelappan would take them to the place where the looted treasure was buried. It was the rainy season and the vessel was taken to the middle of the *Kāverī* river. In the middle of that deep *Kāverī* river, Neelamelappan allowed the vessel to sink with the robbers—who had come to kill Tirumaṅgāi—still inside. Since, he would walk on water, he managed to escape unscathed and returned to his spiritual master. The great soul, Tirumaṅgāi, remarked to Neelamelappan upon his return, “The robbers are buried in the waters of mother *Kāverī*, who is the destroyer of sins and the bestower of devotional service unto the Supreme Lord. They have definitely been considered in favor of Lord Śrī Raṅganātha, so, do not worry. Instead of their proclivity for robbery and envy toward *Vaiṣṇavas*, you provided them an opportunity to go to *Vaikuṅṭha*. Is this not a boon for them? We took their help for the service of the Lord. **If someone personally imitates such an act for his own enjoyment, it would be considered a heinous sin. Such an act leads them to hell. There is no doubt about this.**” The northern part of the *Kāverī* river where the robbers were forced to drown is still known as ‘Coliron’, which means ‘the place of killing’.

The lesson from this anecdote of Tirumaṅgāi *Ālvar* is that devotional service or service to the Supreme Lord is incomparable and far above any worldly sense of morality or immorality. If the so-called morality or immorality is not pleasing to Lord Śrī Hari, then neither is devotional. We have to renounce conventional ideas of sin and piety and work for the pleasure of Lord Śrī Hari. The following two scriptural sentences are seen in paragraph 148 of *Bhakti Sandarbha*, composed by Śrīla Śrī Jiva Goswāmī Prabhu. Among them, in Rebakhanda of Skanda-purāṇa, are the words of Śrī Brahmā,

*sa karta sarva dharmanam, bhakto jastav Keshava /  
sa karta sarva papanam, yo na bhakta stava acyuta //  
papam bhavati dharmohapi, tava bhaktai krto hare /  
nishesha dharma karta bapya bhakto narake hare/  
sada tisthati bhakta ste, brahmahapi vimyucyate //*

*“O Kesava! He who is your devotee performs all religious rites. O Infallible! He who is not your devotee commits all kinds of sins. O Lord Hari! Even the religious activity performed by non-devotees is considered to be sin. Even though the non-devotees follow religious codes completely, their destination is always hellish abodes. But your devotees are freed from the sin of even killing brāhmaṇas.*

In the Padma-purāṇa, the word of the Lord goes as follows:

*mannimittam kritam papam, api dharmaya kalpatel  
Mamanadriya dharmohapi papam syanmat prabhavatahal*

*“For my pleasure, even the sins committed by the devotees are considered as religion.  
Whereas the religious activities performed disregarding my pleasure, under my influence,  
become sinful deeds.”*

Prabhupada Śrī Śrīla Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Goswāmī Mahārāja used to narrate this legend and say that the character of true devotees of Lord Hari cannot be estimated within the tiny boundaries of our senses (perceptive knowledge). This is because all their endeavors are exclusively dedicated to bring pleasure to the senses of Lord Śrī Hari. Everything within the jurisdiction of devotion can be properly utilized in service. The devotee of the Lord is like an expert snake-charmer; he can perform amazing feats even with serpent-like crooked and deceitful people. If others imitate his act, they will surely meet with destruction.

The transcendental teachers, who teach with their own examples, sometimes exhibit pastimes where they apparently accept people who are filled with desires other than service of the Lord. They perform such wonderful deeds in order to complement their own devotional service and bring about good merit into the lives of others. When such people take refuge of mercantile mentality toward the spiritual master or devotees, then the latter destroys the former for the former's own good. The example of the destruction of the Yadu dynasty by Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself and the example of the robbers—who indirectly helped in the construction of Lord Śrī Raṅganātha temple—being killed by Tirumaṅgāi in the river Kāverī propagate such truth.

## 32. The Pretentious Brāhmaṇa

One day, in the courtyard of a rich man's house, there was a snake charmer who was possessed by *Vasuki*.<sup>43</sup> The snake charmer was dancing in the mood of *Vasuki* and his associates were singing of the pastime of Kaliya being chastised by the Supreme Lord, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, in a tune that evokes *karuna* (compassion). Coincidentally, Ṭhākura Haridāsā<sup>44</sup> happened to come there at that very moment. Hearing the song of Kaliya's pastime, the best of the pure devotees, Ṭhākura Haridāsā, lost his consciousness and fell to the ground. After some time, he regained his consciousness and roared gladly and began dancing. Seeing the transcendental mood and bodily expressions of Ṭhākura Haridāsā, the snake charmer moved aside with great reverence. Symptoms of strange tears, ecstasy, and trembling manifested in the lotus body of Ṭhākura Haridāsā. Everyone surrounded the ecstatic Haridāsā and began chanting the Holy

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<sup>43</sup> A celestial serpent

<sup>44</sup> Even though Srila Thakur Haridas appeared in a Muslim family, as the *acarya* of the Holy Name, he was one of the dear-most associates of Sri Caitanyadeva.

Name of Kṛṣṇa. After some time, when Ṭhākura Haridāsā came back to his external senses, the snake charmer began dancing again. Seeing the pure ecstatic love of the great devotee Ṭhākura Haridāsā, every one took the dust from his lotus feet on their heads and smeared it all over their bodies.

In the audience, there was a cunning and deceitful person born in a *brāhmaṇa* family, who had witnessed this entire incident. He thought to himself, “I am a *brāhmaṇa* and an aristocratic person, and Haridāsā is only a beggar born in a non-Hindu family. Nowadays, people seem to be watching the dance of and following even such foolish and barbaric beggars. So, if an aristocratic *brāhmaṇa* like myself were to show such sentiments, then one would definitely get much more respect.” Being envious of all the attention being showered upon Ṭhākura Haridāsā, the so-called *brāhmaṇa* thought in this way and began displaying his artificial sentiments. He fell to the ground and pretended to be unconscious. The snake charmer, however, understood that this pretentious *brāhmaṇa* had begun displaying such kinds of external sentiments simply out of an envious competitive spirit against Ṭhākura Haridāsā. He, therefore, took a large stick and began beating up the body of the impostor *brāhmaṇa*. Unable to tolerate the pain, the impostor began calling out for his father and ran from the scene. In this way, the real identity of that imitator was revealed to the public: that he was a *prakṛiti-sahajīya*.<sup>45</sup>

Then, the snake charmer began to dance freely. The spectators, who had been watching the incident, folded their hands and asked the snake charmer, “When Ṭhākura Haridas was dancing, why did you stand aside with folded hands in reverence? But then, when the *brāhmaṇa* started to dance, why did you beat him up with a stick?” The snake charmer, who was still possessed by the *Vaiṣṇava* snake Vasuki, replied, “That son of a *brāhmaṇa* was an impostor! He only showed his artificial symptoms out of envy and competition against Haridāsā Ṭhākura. He just wanted to distinguish himself from others. However, when Ṭhākura Haridāsā dances, Kṛṣṇa Himself dances and by seeing His dance, the whole universe becomes purified. Thus, all living entities get relieved from *mayā*’s illusory binding. Whoever imitates the sentiments of devotees—out of greed for worldly fame and respect—is called a *sahajīya*. The actions of such a person is nothing more than a sham.

*haridāsa-saṅge sparaddhā mithyā kari’ kare  
ataeva śāsti bahu kariluṅ uhāre  
“baḍa loka kari’ loka jānuka āmāre”  
āpanāre prakatāi dharma-karma kare  
e-sakala dāmbhikera kṛṣṇe prīti nāi  
akaitava haile se kṛṣṇa-bhakti pāi*

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<sup>45</sup> One who imitates the eternally liberated great personalities and displays artificial non-permanent sentiments and expressions to bewilder the public, but in their hearts, enemies like lust, desire to be worshipped, desire to be distinct, etc. reside.

*“Out of audacity, he tried to imitate Haridāsa, and therefore I punished him accordingly. He presented himself as an important person by imitating some religious sentiments. Actually, that arrogant and deceitful brāhmaṇa has no love for Kṛṣṇa. To achieve the devotional service of Lord Kṛṣṇa one has to be free from duplicity.”*

—Śrī Caitanya-bhāgavata Ādi-khaṇḍa: 16/227-229

### 33. Result of Envy Toward a Devotee

This anecdote refers to the period after Lord Śrī Caitanya’s disappearance. In a village named Kheturī, situated on the bank of the river *Padmavatī*, there was the capital of King Kṛṣṇanānda Dutta. Dutta was the ruler of the land of Varendra in the province of North Bengal. Śrīla Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura appeared as the son of Kṛṣṇānanda, who had an elder brother named Puruṣottama Dutta. Puruṣottama also had a son, whose name was Santoṣa. Santoṣa was well versed in all the scriptures and was an expert in taking care of the affairs of the kingdom and its citizens. Śrī Narottama, on the other hand, was deeply devoted to the *Vaiṣṇava* philosophy propagated by Lord Caitanya, and left behind his immense inheritance and wealth from the kingdom. Santoṣa appreciated Narottama’s renunciation so much that he became a disciple of Śrī Narottama.

Ṭhākura Narottama had a best friend named Śrī Rāmacandra Kavirāja. Both were highly realized souls, erudite in scriptural injunctions. Śrīla Narottama Ṭhākura was a resident of Kheturī village and was engaged in devotional service. Śrī Rāmacandra Kavirāja sometimes used to stay at Narottama’s home and would perform devotional services together. Such was their relationship that people used to call them ‘soul mates’.

Just a few days before the autumnal *Durgā-pūjā*, one year, Śrīla Narottama Ṭhākura was going to take bath in the *Padmavatī* river along with Śrī Rāmacandra Kavirāja. On their way, they met two exceptionally handsome *brāhmaṇa* boys. The boys were enthusiastically making their toward river *Padmavatī*, accompanied by some followers as well as some goats, sheep, and buffaloes. Seeing this, Śrī Narottama remarked to his friend Śrī Rāmacandra, “It seems that these two sons of a *brāhmaṇa* are very intelligent. If they could be engaged in devotional service, then their birth in high family, opulence, knowledge, and beauty would all be successful.” Śrī Rāmacandra agreed and both began thinking about how to approach and convey the ultimate spiritual message to these boys who were not seeking such messages from them. Seeing the goats, sheep and buffaloes, It appeared—from the number of goats, sheep, and buffaloes accompanying the boys—that they belonged to a family devoted to the worship of the energy potency of the Lord. In such a situation, if the boys are approached by strangers preaching about *Vaiṣṇava* philosophy, they might reject it with disrespect. Yet, Śrī Kavirāja wished for the ultimate eternal good for them; so, he devised a clever plan.

Śrī Kavirāja and Narottama Ṭhākura began walking very slowly, and discussing various scriptural subject matters in a voice that was clearly audible to the *brāhmaṇa* boys. As the boys overheard the thoughtful discussions between the two friends—complete with references to authorized scriptural injunctions—they were intrigued and began hearing more carefully. Just from that conversation between Śrī Kavirāja and Narottama Ṭhākura, all doubts that they had about *Vaiṣṇava* philosophy were completely dispelled. Their minds became totally uncontaminated. Then, the two *brāhmaṇa* boys began discussing amongst themselves, “I have heard a lot about the greatness of Śrī Narottama Ṭhākura and Śrī Rāmacandra Kavirāja *mahāśaya*.<sup>46</sup> Judging from the spiritual acumen of these two personalities conversing near us today, it seems to me that they are none other than the highly-elevated souls, Śrī Narottama Ṭhākura and Śrī Rāmacandra Kavirāja, themselves. This is a very auspicious morning for us since we were able to see such exalted personalities face to face. But alas! We have these goats, sheep and buffaloes with us, which indicate that we are worshipers of the goddess of power. How, then, could we possibly approach these two exalted *Vaiṣṇavas* face to face?”

The two *brāhmaṇa* boys decided to keep their goats, sheep, and buffaloes at a distance and approach Śrīla Narottama Ṭhākura and Śrīla Rāmacandra Kavirāja *mahāśayas*. In an extremely apprehensive mood, with their throats drying up, they went in front of Narottama Ṭhākura and Śrī Rāmacandra Kavirāja. Śrī Narottama asked them who they were. The elder of the two *brāhmaṇa* boys spoke, “My name is Harirāma Bhaṭṭācārya and my younger brother's name is Śrīrāma Kṛṣṇa Bhaṭṭācārya. We are the sons of Śrī Śivānanda Bhaṭṭācārya.” Then, the noble-minded Śrī Narottama Ṭhākura asked him, “Where are you going with all those goats and buffaloes? Are you going to kill them?” Harirāma replied, “Every year, my father very opulently worships goddess *Durgā*. Although he does not personally rejoice in killing animals, he believes that sacrificing them is the way to gain religious merit, with which he may attain the inexhaustible heavenly realm. Overwhelmed with such a desire, he make these sacrifices annually to goddess *Durgā*. Upon his order, we have bought these animals from the market as paraphernalia for the worship. We know the exalted *Vaiṣṇava*, Śrī Balarāma Kavirāja, from whom we hear *Vaiṣṇava* philosophy. We are familiar with the teaching that animal killing is a very sinful act. And today, when we overheard your scriptural discussions, all the doubts in our hearts were completely eradicated. Kindly manifest the glories of your magnanimous identity as *patita-pāvana*, the deliverer of the fallen, by giving these two rascals shelter at your lotus feet. We will never be violent toward ourselves and other living entities. We do not want to take these goats and buffaloes before our father. We want to leave them here so that they cannot be sacrificed to goddess *Durgā*. We have become enlightened by your mercy.” Harirāma Bhaṭṭācārya then called for his assistants and ordered them, “Release these innocent animals. Then, you go immediately to the other side of river *Padmavatī*. We prefer to stay right here.”

The servants were astonished by the order of their master's elder son. They were disappointed because they were eagerly looking forward to the sacrifice of the goats, sheep and buffaloes before goddess *Durgā*. The servants began to talk amongst themselves, “Have our

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<sup>46</sup> A great personality.

master's sons gone mad? Did they get tricked by the enchanting words of the two *Vaiṣṇavas*? Do these *Vaiṣṇavas* know some kind of magic spell? These animals were meant to be sacrificed before goddess *Durgā*, it would be very sinful to let them go. If our master finds out that we let the animals so, he will definitely punish his two sons along with us. Besides, what will people say? The noble *Bhaṭṭācārya* himself, along with the priest, are waiting for these sacrificial animals for their worship. If we do not take these for the worship in time, how can the offerings be made properly? Everything will be ruined.” While the servants of Śivānanda were talking amongst themselves, *Harirāma* again ordered them to release the animals immediately, without paying heed to their talk. The servants had to obey their commands. They released the animals and crossed the river to the other side of the river.

On this side of the *Padmā*, the intensity of eagerness of *Harirāma* and *RāmaKṛṣṇa* to obtain the mercy of their spiritual master was increasing many folds. In abject humility, tears began flowing incessantly from their eyes. Lying prostrate on the ground, they began praying for the mercy of the spiritual master and other *Vaiṣṇavas*. Then, the noble-minded *Ṭhākura* and *Kavirāja* lifted them up from the ground and embraced them, providing them assurance. After taking bath in the river *Padmavatī*, they took the two *brāhmaṇa* sons along with them to a temple in *Kheturī* village.

The temple was decorated with the six deities established by *Ṭhākura Narottama*. The deities are Śrī *Gaurāṅga*, Śrī *Vallabhikanta*, Śrī *Kṛṣṇa*, Śrī *Vraja Mohan*, Śrī *Rādhā Ramana*, and Śrī *Rādhā-Kanta*. At the very first sight of a bonafide spiritual master, one must be eager to receive his mercy, without even a moment's delay. Being well aware of this fact, Śrī *Harirāma* took *mantra* initiation from Śrī *Rāmacandra Kavirāja* and Śrī *RāmaKṛṣṇa* took initiation from Śrī *Narottama Ṭhākura* on that very day. They considered both Śrī *Rāmacandra* and Śrī *Narottama* to be on the same spiritual platform. In other words, they took them as their spiritual masters without any discrimination. By constantly hearing about the conclusions of devotional service from the two highly elevated personalities and being empowered by them, *Harirāma* and *RāmaKṛṣṇa* became perfect in scriptural injunctions and unflinchingly reverential.

Carrying the dust of the lotus feet of their spiritual masters on their head, *Harirāma* and *RāmaKṛṣṇa* departed from the village *Kheturī* on the *Ekādaśī* day that followed *Vijayā-daśamī*<sup>47</sup> and visited the village of *Gnovas* to meet *Balarāma Kavirāja*. They stayed at the residence of Śrī *Balarāma Kavirāja* that night and narrated the entire sequence of events of how they had met Śrī *Rāmacandra* and Śrī *Narottama* and what transpired between them. *Balarāma Kavirāja* also spoke to them about Śivānanda *Bhaṭṭācārya*, their father.

The next morning, *Harirāma* and *RāmaKṛṣṇa* went to meet Śivānanda *Bhaṭṭācārya*. Śivānanda was infuriated at the very sight of his two sons, particularly because they were dressed like *Vaiṣṇavas*. Boiling with anger, he started hurling abusive words toward his sons in front of hundreds of people. “You rascals! Black sheep of the family! You have tarnished the

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<sup>47</sup> The day celebrating the conquest of Lanka by Lord Śrī *Rāmacandra*.

prestige of such a high-class family like mine by taking birth in it! Both of you have shamed my ancestors! One has to bathe in the flowing *Gaṅgā* to atone for the very act of just seeing you. I would have been able to console my mind, had you accepted some religion outside of Hinduism. But you have abandoned *Brāhmaṇism* and adopted *Vaiṣṇavism*! I cannot tolerate such stupidity and hypocrisy. You rascals! The all-pervasive goddess *Durgā* has given you appropriate punishment so far. You hypocritically identified yourself as *brāhmaṇas*. This human life is in vain without the worship of *Bhagavati*.<sup>48</sup> Since you deprived the goddess of the sacred sacrificial animals, you were both deprived by the deceitful *Vaiṣṇavas*. I have never seen such a *Vaiṣṇava* who wants to make a *brāhmaṇa* his disciple. Very soon, I will curtail your spiritual masters' pride with the help of the scholarly society. Let us see how much of an erudite scholar they are. By the mercy of the goddess, you will witness how your spiritual masters are going to be humiliated. Where have you heard that a *Vaiṣṇava* is greater than a *Brāhmaṇa*? Lord Viṣṇu carries the footmark of a *brāhmaṇa* on His chest. Your worshipable Lords—Kṛṣṇa, Caitanya—are always very respectable toward the *brāhmaṇas*. As a *kṣatriya*, Kṛṣṇa has worshipped many *brāhmaṇas*. Your Caitanya has drunk the water that washed the feet of a *brāhmaṇa*. How have your spiritual masters accepted two *brāhmaṇas* as their disciples? Do they think that Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Śrī Caitanya—who are themselves worshipers of *brāhmaṇas*—will excuse them? For sure, I will crush such preposterous hypocrisy by the judgment of the learned society. *Vaiṣṇavas* say that the worshipers of the goddess kill animals in sacrifice. But when your *Vaiṣṇavas* hold big festivals and cut pumpkins and gourd plant, is this not killing of living entities? What kind of scriptures do the *Vaiṣṇavas* have? They are given to absurd speculation and theirs is a fledgling non-*Vedic* religion. The duties and activities of a *brāhmaṇa* are the oldest and based on the eternal traditional Vedic religion.”

Upon hearing Śivānanda's words, Harirāma replied strongly, “You are boasting of defeating our spiritual masters by bringing some scholars. May I propose that those scholars argue with me first? You can ask the greatest scholars to come forward, as you may please. If they can defeat me in scriptural arguments, then, I shall accept your words. If not, I will know your words to be as good as the croaking of a frog.”

Hearing such a strong response from his son, Śivānanda was even more enraged and said, “You fools! Black sheep of the family! You are considering my words to be the croaking of a frog, are you? You have become so proud. You do not even have the intelligence to talk to your father properly. *Vaiṣṇavas* used to teach one to be as humble as the grass, but your *gurus* seem to have taught you to be arrogant and rebel against your father.”

Śivānanda became impatient with anger and immediately sent for some of the greatest elderly scholars. When the great scholars arrived, they started a scriptural debate with Harirāma. Although Harirāma was young, when he began refuting all the ungodly doctrines of the scholars, he appeared as if like a roaring lion. Very systematically, he established the glories of pure devotion. Quoting references from many *śrutis*, *smritis*, and *purāṇas*, he proved that

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<sup>48</sup> Another name for goddess *Durgā*.

*Vaiṣṇavism* is superior to *Brāhmaṇism* in all respects and that *Brāhmaṇism* is best executed by being a servant of a *Vaiṣṇava*; or else, a *brāhmaṇa* is 'fallen'. Using rationale and evidence drawn from many scriptural injunctions, Harirāma demonstrated that the *Vaiṣṇavas*' worship of the Supreme is beyond the primary modes of material nature and that it is causeless. The worship of goddess *Durgā*—who is the treasurer of the universe—hinges on fulfillment of material desires. This kind of worship is mixed with the three modes of material nature, namely, goodness, passion and ignorance. All actions and endeavors of the devotees of the Lord are directed toward pleasing the senses of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Śrī Kṛṣṇa. They are, therefore, devoid of enviousness. The *Vaiṣṇavas* do not seek religion, wealth, material gain, or liberation. It is evident from the *sarva-dharmān parityāja* verse of Bhagavad Gita (18.66) that Śrī Kṛṣṇa protects one who has taken His shelter from all kinds of sinful activities. The *Vaiṣṇavas* who have taken shelter of Śrī Kṛṣṇa are saved from all kinds of sinful activities and five kinds of debts toward the *devās*, *ṛṣis*, ghosts, man, and the forefathers. They do not have to involve themselves in sinful activities, like killing of animals, as done by the worshipers of other demigods.

The scholars were astonished to hear Harirāma's profound religious conclusions, which were all irrefutable. They started speaking amongst themselves, "He appears to be just a little boy. But how did this son of Śivānanda acquire such knowledge at such a tender age? These two sons of Śivānanda must have received boons from goddess *Sarasvatī*. It is due to the power of Narottama Ṭhākura and Rāmacandra Kavirāja that such great erudition has awakened in such young boys. It seems impossible to find a scholar who can defeat them."

Śivānanda had hoped to defeat his sons with the help of the scholars. On the contrary, the scholars were defeated by his son. Stunned and unable to argue further, the scholars very humbly left Śivānanda's home. The result of the debate infuriated Śivānanda even more, as if oblation of clarified butter was poured into a fire. He took up a vow that he would shatter the pride of his two arrogant sons by arranging for a scholar who is undefeatable and whose is renowned within all the quarters of the world. Śivānanda sent for a great scholar named Murāri, who had defeated all scholars in India to date.

Paṇḍita Murāri traveled from Mithilā<sup>49</sup> to Śivānanda's village with a group of his own disciples. Murāri was a very arrogant personality. He thought so highly of his own erudition that he considered everybody else to be no better than grass compared to it. When thus invited to debate with Harirāma and RāmaKṛṣṇa—who he had heard had great erudition and very robust spiritual conclusions—he still thought, "What would be the wonder in defeating Śivānanda's two young sons who are inferior even to grass? It is indeed very embarrassing for me to be arguing with these children. If their *guru* or another superior representative from their sect is available, then, it might be fitting for me to debate. Else, I shall not fire a cannon to kill a mosquito." Therefore, it was decided that the elderly Balarāma Kavirāja would debate with Murāri. When the debate took place, Kavirāja very cleverly used the very logic proposed by

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<sup>49</sup> A subdivision of Bihar province in India.

Murāri to turn it around and defeat him without much effort at all. Everybody was astonished at Murāri's shock defeat. Despite Murāri's arrogant nature, one of his virtues was that he never resorted to hypocrisy or unjust orthodox acts to establish his defeat as victory. When he was defeated, the scholar said, "I do not have the ability to describe the glories of *Vaiṣṇavism*. There is nothing better than *Vaiṣṇavism*." Then, he distributed all his belongings to others. Since the defeat meant that his highly regarded position as an undefeatable erudite scholar no longer stood, he decided to become a mendicant. He gave up the pride he had of his erudition, considering it to be useless. Since he did not accept *Vaiṣṇavism* and took shelter of monastic path with a remorseful heart, he set an example by taking up a 'third' way which became renowned as the *Murarestritīyah pantha* or the 'third measure of Murāri'. Therefore, he remained neither a world-renowned undefeatable scholar, nor did he become a pure *Vaiṣṇava*; rather, he adopted a third way. Śivānanda Bhaṭṭācārya, on the other hand, almost died of shame and sorrow. The goddess *Durgā* punished him appropriately for being envious of *Vaiṣṇavas*.

Om Viṣṇupāda Śrī Śrīmad Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Gosvāmī Prabhupāda used to quote this anecdote regularly to underscore the importance of taking shelter of the lotus feet of a pure *Vaiṣṇava* and bonafide spiritual master as soon as one sees them. The kind of religion followed by the common mass—who are afflicted by religious gain, wealth, fulfillment of material desires, or attaining liberation—are all born of lust and are products of the material modes. However, the dire need of every living entity is a conscious evolution that develops to the stage of love of God. That religion of love is universal, everlasting and beyond any national borders. In order to be initiated in that religion of love, one has to immediately abandon the shelter of all other religions—which are motivated by different desires—and take shelter of a bonafide spiritual master who is well versed in the science of God realization. One should not consider any humanly, societal, or customary beliefs to be a barrier in the path of pure devotion. If parents or so-called materialistic spiritual masters create hindrance in the path of devotional service to the Lord or express enviousness toward a *Vaiṣṇava* and *guru*, then, one should try to approach them humbly by submitting clear and rational explanations. However, if they persistently continue on the path of enviousness, then their association should be considered as evil and should be abandoned immediately. One must then approach the master of all masters, the ever worshipable of all who are worshipped, to render unalloyed service to the Supreme Lord and His devotees. In this regard, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu advised,

*sakala janame pitā, mātā sabhe pāya  
kṛṣṇa-guru nāhi mile bujhiha hiyāya*

*“In every life one gets a father and mother. Rarely, however, does one obtain guru and Kṛṣṇa.”*

—Śrī Caitanyamangala Madhya Khanda 11.204

*gurur na sa syāt sva-jano na sa syāt  
pitā na sa syāj janani na sā syāt  
daivaṁ na tat syān na patīś ca sa syān*

*na mocayed yaḥ samupeta-mṛtyum*

*“One who cannot deliver his dependents from the path of repeated birth and death should never become a spiritual master, a relative, a father, a husband, a mother or a worshipable demigod.”*

—Śrīmad Bhagavatam 5.5.18

## 34. The pride demon and the Goddess of humility

After Ṭhākura Narottama gave initiation to ŚrīHariRāma and ŚrīRāmaKṛṣṇa—the two sons of Śivānanda Bhaṭṭācārjee—many *brāhmaṇas*, such as, Gangānārāyaṇa Cakravartī, Śrī Jagannātha Ācārya, and others took shelter of the lotus feet of Ṭhākura *mahāśaya*.

During that period, there was a formidable king named Narasimha in the province of Bengal. In his royal assembly, there were many learned *brāhmaṇas*, who were irked by the throngs of people taking shelter of Ṭhākura Narottama. These *brāhmaṇas* approached King Narasimha and appealed thus: “Narottama Dāsa, the son of Kṛṣṇānanda Datta, has ruined the lives of many people by encouraging them to accept the path of Vaiṣṇavism. We do not know what kind of magic he is capable of, but throngs of respectable *brāhmaṇas* have become his disciple. He is acclaimed as a scholar in scripture, but we suspect that this undue praise is bestowed upon him by fools not well-versed in scripture. In the presence of learned *brāhmaṇas* like ourselves, he will not be able to utter even a single word! Mahārāja, please arrange to take our assembly of *brāhmaṇas* to confront him without delay. You will see for yourself the pitiable condition that he will be in, out of fear, in our presence! We are confident that he will immediately flee from the scene, along with the imaginative deceit he has been spreading in the name of religion. Since you will have uprooted fraudulent religious practices, your fame will spread in all countries, and because of you, the the dignity of *brāhmaṇas* will be re-established. A king’s duty is to sanction punishment. If you do not intervene against torture and disregard for the *brāhmaṇas*, then, this *brāhmaṇa* cast will be vanquished in the very near future.”

Being thus provoked by the words of the *brāhmaṇas* and scholars of his royal assembly, King Narasimha went on an expedition to defeat Ṭhākura Narottama. The professed scholars took bags of books with them, beaming with pride and making exhilarated gestures amongst themselves, certain that they would defame and oust Ṭhākura Narottama. King Narasimha took leadership of the expedition himself. He brought along with him the famed scholar of the country, RūpaNārāyaṇa, who had conquered renowned scholars in all directions. Along the way, King Narasimha’s army and purported scholars, camped in a village called Kumarpur near Kheturī.

The news of the King's approaching mission reached the ears of Ṭhākura *mahāśaya* through the grapevine. In seclusion, Ṭhākura *mahāśaya* consulted with Rāmacandra *kavirāja*, who he considered non-different than himself. He said, "I will have to argue with the professors. I think it will cause disruption in devotional service since they will not be ready to accept the principles of any bona fide scripture. They will unfortunately retain their strong egotism." Śrī Rāmacandra *kavirāja* said, "You carry on with your devotional service without any worry. You will see very easily that the pride of these pompous persons will be smashed and eventually, they will surrender unto your lotus feet."

Then, Śrī Rāmacandra *kavirāja mahāśaya* secretly hatched a plan with Gangānārāyaṇa Cakravartī. Both of them immediately set out for Kumarpur village. On the way Rāmacandra *kavirāja* disguised himself as a betel-selling fruit vendor and Gangānārāyaṇa Cakravartī took the garb of an earthen pot and pitcher-selling potter. Each of them perched baskets of betelnuts, and earthen pots and pitchers on their heads. Then, they entered the Kumarpur village and set up stalls in the local market. One of the students of a professor who had come with King Narasimha's party came to Rāmacandra *kavirāja's* stall to buy betel for his master. Thinking that the fruit seller—who was in fact Śrī Rāmacandra *kavirāja* in disguise—was an ordinary betel seller, the student asked for the price of the betel in rural Bengali language. When the betel seller answered him in perfectly pure and accurate Sanskrit language, the student was taken aback. Nonetheless, with much pride, the student also started conversing in Sanskrit with the disguised betel seller. However, within a few exchanges in Sanskrit, the student was utterly defeated. The color in the student's face suddenly changed, as if smeared with lime ink. The disguised betel seller said to the student, "You are a fool! How much do you even know? Is this all your teacher has taught you? Bring your teacher here! You will see how much wisdom he has!"

The student—simultaneously shocked, angered, and ashamed—immediately went to his teacher and exclaimed, "Alas! Alas! Today, I had to accept defeat from an insignificant betel seller! How can I show my face to anybody? It seems that in the village where Narottama Dāsa resides, even the street betel sellers and earthen pot vendors are scholars who can defeat scholars in all directions! How can we then measure the limit of Narottama's scholarship? You should only enter into argument with Narottama of Kheturī, if you can first defeat that fruit vendor! Otherwise, you should pack and leave for your home right from this village!"

The teacher of the student became agitated with anger when he heard such words. He retorted heatedly, "Who is this fruit seller? Let me see where this betel seller is! I will teach him a good lesson!" The student led his teacher back to the betel seller. As soon as the teacher saw the betel vendor, he instigated an argument in Sanskrit and the discussion gradually veered into scriptural subject matters. Hearing of the ongoing discussion, other professors in the King's procession also went there. Even King Narasimha went to the scene of the discussion along with the famed scholar RūpaNārāyaṇa. A huge crowd gathered in the marketplace around the betel seller and the teacher, who were engaged in an intense discussion on scriptural matters.

The betel seller maintained a gentle demeanor and cited appropriate scriptural references as he refuted—point-by-point—the opinions of the royal scholar, who was now joined by others in his party. The royal professors were thoroughly defeated and were publicly ashamed. Feeling humiliated and infuriated, every limb of their bodies were beginning to shake. King Narasimha eventually had to appease his royal scholars and took them back to the camp. However, conversations about the day’s incident rippled through the King’s camp and throughout the village. Everyone agreed, “The royal scholars came roaring like lion in the beginning. After being wholly defeated in scriptural argument, however, they returned like dogs curling their tails. They are fools! How would they know the glories of Ṭhākura *mahāśaya*? Pārvatīdevī herself has ordered the *brāhmaṇas* to become disciples of Ṭhākura *mahāśaya*. If one commits offense against His feet, he is not spared.”

King Narasimha was informed about the general pulse of such public opinion and conversations. He then called for RūpaNārāyaṇa to consult with him in private. “Please help me decide what the way out is for us now! Our scholars were proud and certain that they will prove Narrottoma to be a laughable fool in front of everyone. However, they are the ones that are now defeated by illiterate village fruit sellers and potters of the village of Ṭhākura *mahāśaya*. Due to the recent incident, not only are my royal scholars defeated, but I am myself now on the chopping block!”

Scholar RūpaNārāyaṇa then said to the King, “In truth, there is no religion above Vaiṣṇavism. There is no offence greater than criticism of *Vaiṣṇavas*. In order to atone for the offence we have committed, there is no other way but to go to the village of Kheturī and beg for forgiveness and seek the shelter of lotus feet of Ṭhākura *mahāśaya*. For our eternal good, we should go to Kheturī at the earliest possible hour tomorrow, along with our entire party.”

As the King’s party was informed of the plan for the next morning, the royal scholars were the most anxious than all others. Neither could they bring themselves to face the king, nor could they go back to their own country! They were waiting for the next day as if moribund. King Narasimha also tossed and turned in his bed that night. He was so desperate to get the mercy of Śrīla Ṭhākura *mahāśaya* that he began to think over and over again, “How will Ṭhākura *mahāśaya* be able to forgive a villainous offender like me?”

Meanwhile Śrī Rāmacandra *kavirāja* and Gangānārāyaṇa Cakravartī distributed their betel and earthen pots and pitchers to the poor in the village and happily returned to Ṭhākura *mahāśaya* in the village of Kheturī. There, they narrated everything that had transpired.

Meanwhile in the royal camp, one of the *brāhmaṇas*—who was the proudest of them all—had a vision in his dream that night. He saw Bhagavatī devī, with sword in hand, charging at him angrily and saying, “Oh evil minded one! Your study and teaching are both useless. You have criticized a *Vaiṣṇava*. Only if I can cut your head to pieces will the sorrow in my mind be vanquished. Oh wicked demon! Except for this method, by what other means can I teach you? If you want to be protected, then, go and beg forgiveness from Ṭhākura *mahāśaya* and take shelter of His lotus feet.” As soon as his sleep was broken, the *brāhmaṇa* began to tremble in

fear. He woke up his companions and in between sobs, began narrating the vision he had just had. As soon as dawn broke, the *brāhmaṇa* went to the king and narrated his vision. The king told everybody to take their baths and get ready.

Without riding on any chariot, King Narasimha—in modest attire and a very humble mood—appeared at the courtyard of Śrī Gaurāṅgadeva of Ṭhākura *mahāśaya* of Kheturī, along with his party of the royal *brāhmaṇas*. As soon as the King reached Ṭhākura Narottama's courtyard, he fell on the floor, just like a rod, to pay his obeisance. At that time, Śrīla Narottama was engaged in devotional service in his private quarters. Rāmacandra *kavirāja* and other devotees offered a suitable seat for the king with proper respect. Then, the King and the scholar, RūpaNārāyaṇa, were taken to see Ṭhākura *mahāśaya* and were introduced to him. Both the King and the scholar presented themselves as entirely materialistic and grave offenders. Speaking regretfully of the offence that they had just committed against the lotus feet of Ṭhākura *mahāśaya* again and again, they begged for forgiveness. Then, they prayed for mantra initiation. They then summoned the proudest *brāhmaṇa* who had had the vision in his sleep the night before and presented him to Ṭhākura *mahāśaya*. They described his dream and told Ṭhākura Narottama about the order from Bhagavatī devī, earnestly and repeatedly asking to forgive him.

Śrīla Ṭhākura *mahāśaya*, who does not see any fault in others, embraced the *brāhmaṇa* out of mercy. Then *brāhmaṇa* paid obeisance by falling like a rod in front of Ṭhākura Narottama and smeared himself with the dust of the lotus feet of Śrīla Ṭhākura *mahāśaya*. In that courtyard of Śrī Gaurāṅgadeva, a *maha-saṅkīrtan* and feast was arranged. Śrī Santosh Roy (brother, disciple, and a son of the father of Ṭhākura *mahāśaya* from his previous *āśraṁ*) arranged for the proper reception of King Narasimha and his party. Everybody sat in a line and took *prasādam*. The next day, Ṭhākura *mahāśaya* gave *mantra* initiation and offered them to the lotus feet of Śrī Gaurāṅga. Everyone heard a Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam class from the lotus mouth of Gangānārāyaṇa Cakravartī and heard devotional songs from Govinda *kavirāja*. After a few days with the devotees, King Narasimha and scholar RūpaNārāyaṇa returned to their respective homes. Soon after, Śrīla Ṭhākura *mahāśaya* gave *mantra* initiation to the queen of King Narasimha, Śrī Rupamālā devī, who used to chant one hundred thousand Holy Names every day in a regulated way. In this way, by the mercy of Śrīla Ṭhākura *mahāśaya*, everybody became a *Vaiṣṇava*.