

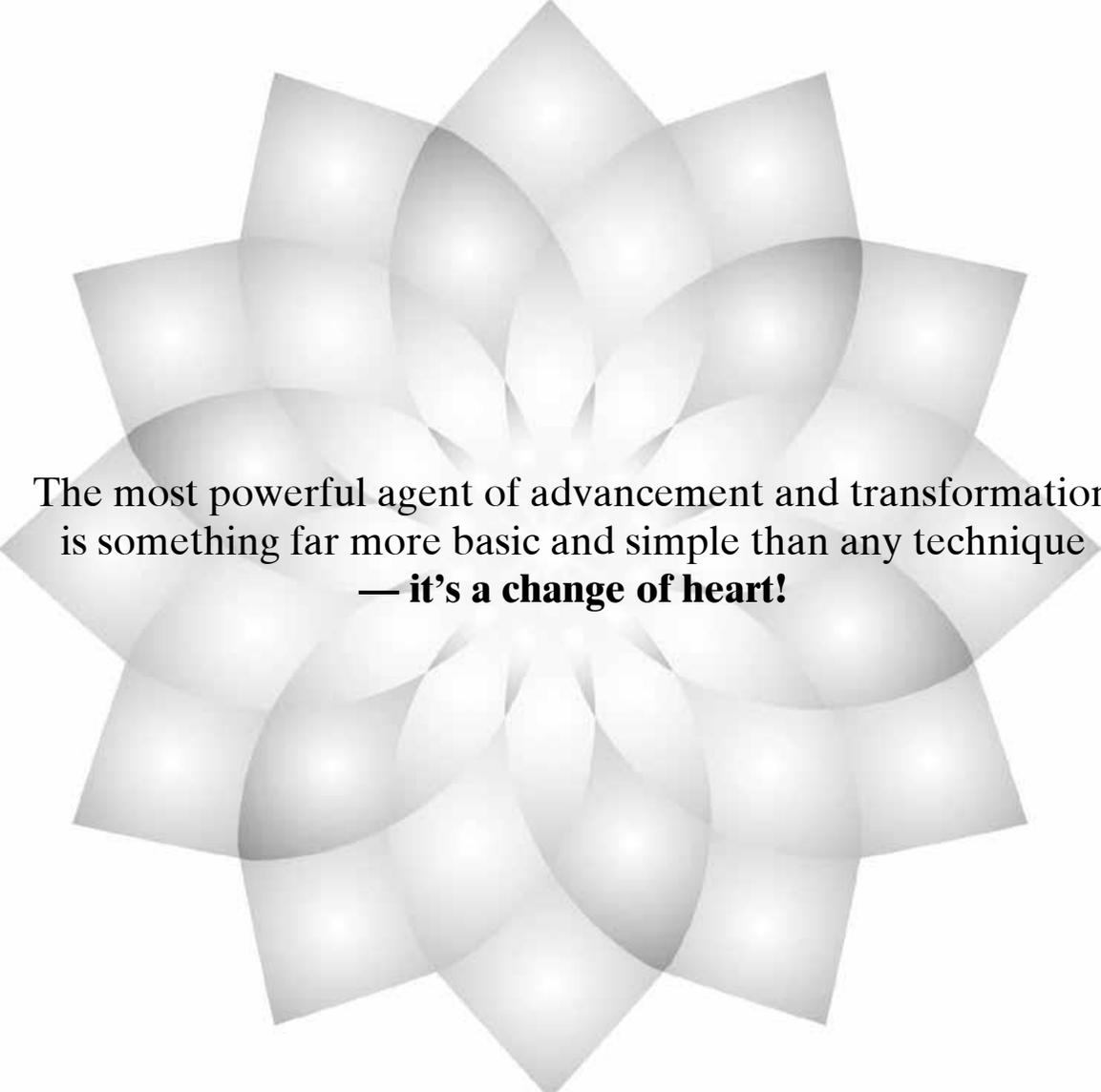


Living a Life Beyond Illusion

— Presented by Śrīmatī Dāsī and team
ISKCON, Śrī Vṛndāvana Dhāma

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The most powerful agent of advancement and transformation
is something far more basic and simple than any technique
— **it's a change of heart!**

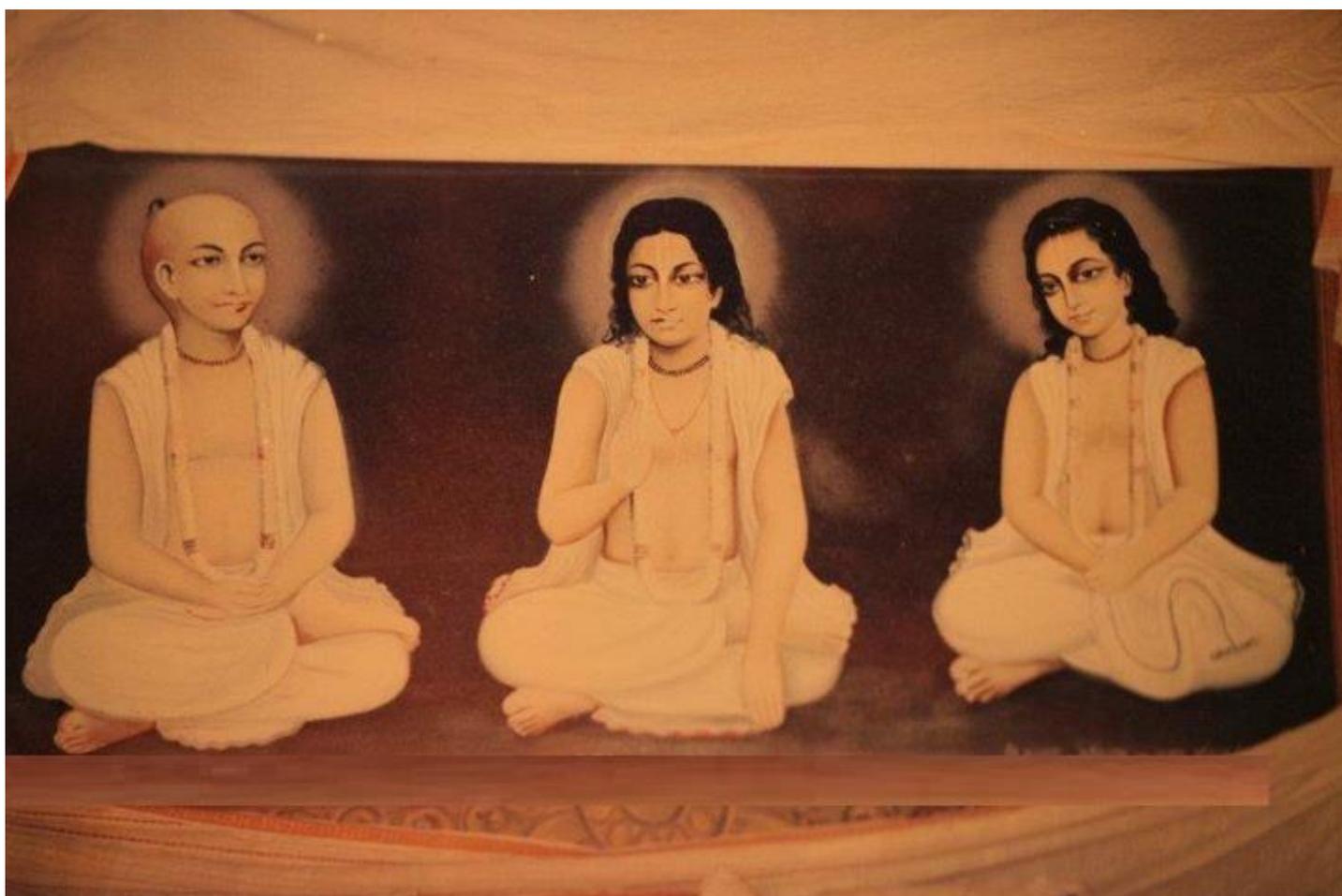
Let's Live a Life Beyond Illusion!

Nightmare or sweet dreams — we continue to live the illusion. So many wake-up calls, but still we stubbornly hold on to a world of **I, me** and **mine**. Dressed in the garb of a devotee, and so attentive to the external detail of the rituals and rites, we seem to have lost contact with the heart of the matter — spontaneous, selfless, loving service for Kṛṣṇa! Do we have it? Do we really want it?! Do we **really want** to love Kṛṣṇa and accept Him as our eternal master, controller and enjoyer?

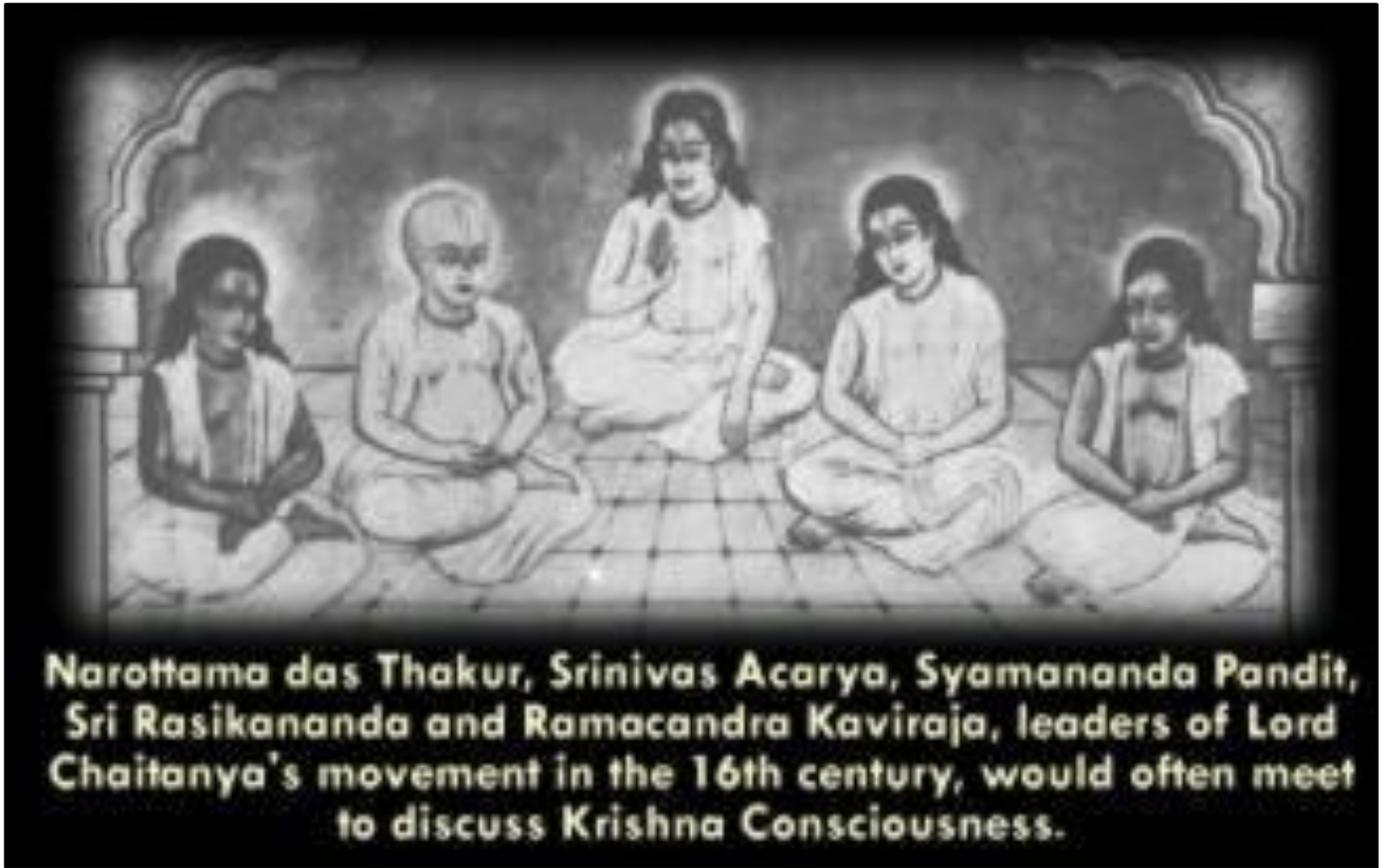
What does it mean to live a life beyond illusion? Can we do it now? In this degraded Age? The lives of three of the most powerful preachers of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism in this Age say we can. Let's take a glimpse of their lives — a peek into living a life beyond illusion — and begin our own journey into this sacred world aboard the safest, swiftest and sanest carrier of all time — The chanting of

*Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare
Hare Rāma Hare Rāma Rāma Rāma Hare Hare*

The Famous Trio — Inspirational Insights



Three of the greatest preachers in the recent history of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism were Śyāmānanda Paṇḍita, Narottama Dāsa Thākura and Śrīnivāsa Ācārya — All three of them were exceptionally qualified students of the revered and illustrious Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī and all three of them lived a Reality far beyond illusion



Śyāmānanda Paṇḍita

Śyāmānanda Paṇḍita was initiated as Dukhī Kṛṣṇadāsa by his Gurudeva, Hṛdaya-caitanya Gosāñi, a renowned devotee of Śrī Śrī Gaura-Nitāi. After some time, Hṛdaya-caitanya Gosāñi asked Dukhī Kṛṣṇadāsa to go to Vṛndāvana and study Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism under the shelter and expert tutelage of Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī. And this instruction proved to be of monumental significance, as the following pastime makes very, very clear.

Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī used to send reports to Kṛṣṇadāsa's Gurudeva at Kālnā about his well-being and progress in study. Hṛdaya-caitanya Gosāñi would write back asking Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī to reveal the confidential secrets of devotional service to his disciple. As Dukhī Kṛṣṇadāsa's guru, Hṛdaya-caitanya Gosāñi advised Kṛṣṇadāsa to accept Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī as an extension of himself.

By the mercy of Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī, Kṛṣṇadāsa worshiped Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa according to the process of *rāgānuga-bhajana*. Day by day he became increasingly absorbed in

devotional service. Thinking only of the pastimes of the Lord, he repeatedly fell into trances of spontaneous devotion. He was consistently preoccupied with meditating upon the Lord's activities in the spiritual realm. Externally, he carefully performed his *sādhana* (daily services), which included sweeping the area of *Kalpa-kuñja kuṭira* and fetching a pot of water for Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī. Internally he served the Divine Couple under the guidance of Śrī Rūpa- mañjarī.

Inside the *Kalpa-kuñja kuṭira* in Vṛndāvana Śrī-Śrī Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa eternally perform Their *rasa-līlā* dance. Those who are spiritually unqualified are not able to perceive this reality, even if they happen to be present at the exact location of the divine performance. However, accomplished devotees, such as Dukhī Kṛṣṇadāsa, can see the Divine Reality in all of its glory.

One day, as Rādhā, Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs* were enjoying this *rasa-līlā*, They were overcome with an especially intense ecstasy. The rhythms of the music and dance mixed with the enthusiasm of the moment, creating indescribably exuberant emotions. This compelled everyone to participate with an even greater enthusiasm, dancing more dynamically with each moment. As the *gopīs* moved their bodies to the beat of Kṛṣṇa's heart, encircling Him and Śrī Rādhā, they played various musical instruments in a spirited fashion. While doing this, the *gopīs* moved in and out of the circle of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa's vigorous dance. Soon their energetic dancing increased in intensity and Rādhikā lost Her *nūpura* (ankle bells).



No one noticed the missing ankle bells. In fact, Rādhikā had deliberately lost them just to offer special mercy to Kṛṣṇadāsa who arrived the next morning to perform his usual

sweeping service and found the golden ornaments beneath a tree. Kṛṣṇadāsa was enthralled by the beauty of the ankle bells. He could understand that they were from another dimension — from Rādhikā’s world. The whole *kuñja* was glowing from the light that emanated from those ankle bells, and so Kṛṣṇadāsa touched them to his head out of respect. At that moment, his body exhibited all varieties of ecstatic symptoms, such as horripilation and profuse sweating. He began to cry and experienced an overflowing happiness. Deluged with divine love, he clasped the treasured ankle bells to his heart and fainted.

After considerable time, Dukhī Kṛṣṇadāsa came to his senses and began calling the names of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Like the love-mad *gopīs*, he ran here and there, filled with distress, looking for Their Lordships. In desperation, he frantically called out again and again: ***Where is Rādhā? Where is Kṛṣṇa? Please—I must find Them!*** Eventually, he calmed himself, tied the ankle bells around his neck, and continued cleaning the *kuñja*. Fearful that someone might steal them from him, he eventually buried them in a secret place.

Meanwhile, after entering Her room, Rādhā noticed Her ankle bells were missing. Thinking (knowing!) that She may have dropped them in the *kuñja*, She ordered Lalitā, Her dear friend, to go there and search for them. Disguising herself as an elderly woman, Lalitā Sundarī hurried to the *kuñja* in compliance with Rādhikā’s request. When she arrived, she immediately saw Kṛṣṇadāsa and asked his name. ***I am Dukhī Kṛṣṇadāsa***, he said.

Have you seen my daughter-in-law’s ankle bells? she asked. ***She is careless and sometimes when I send Her to the Yamunā to fetch water for me, She loses things. I cannot trust Her. Please tell me, did you find the ankle bells? I can give you a reward if you return them to me.***

Tell me frankly, Dukhī Kṛṣṇadāsa replied with great suspicion, ***where do you live and what is your name?***

I am Rādhā-dāsī, Lalitā replied, concealing her true identity. ***I belong to a Kanoj brāhmaṇa family of Vraja.***

Hearing this, Kṛṣṇadāsa confessed, ***Yes, I did find the ankle bells. But they cannot be yours. They belong to Śrī Rādhā. I know this because the moment I touched them I felt as if I was falling into the deep ocean of kṛṣṇa-prema. My heart swelled with unfaltering devotion, and I fell unconscious. No ordinary ankle bells could induce such feelings.***

Listen to me, Kṛṣṇadāsa continued, ***I will give them to you if they are truly yours. But first you must prove it. We will go to your village and show the ankle bells to your neighbors. If they identify them as belonging to you, then I will happily relinquish them without any further questions.***

When Lalitā heard this proposal, she became nervous and revealed the actual situation: ***You are right***, she admitted, ***I was trying to deceive you. The ankle bells indeed belong to Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī. She is pleased with you, as am I. Ask for any boon, and it is***

yours. Then I will return the ankle bells to Rādhikā, who will be grateful that you have recovered them.

Kṛṣṇadāsa did not want anything for himself. *O Thakurani*, he said, *I must know your real identity. Only after you reveal your true self to me will I ask for a boon.*

Taking Kṛṣṇadāsa to a secluded place, Lalitā Sundarī revealed her true identity by telling him her name and her service to Rādhikā. She did not, however, remove her disguise as an elderly lady. Instead she cautioned him, *Listen Dukhī Kṛṣṇadāsa, you are anxious to see my real spiritual form, but such a revelation would be too much for you to bear.*

He countered her: *By your grace, anything is possible. If you give me the ability to bear it, then I will be able.*

Submitting to his intense desire, Lalitā was ready to abandon her disguise, but she told him to first close his eyes. After several moments, she allowed him to look upon her spiritual form. Gazing at the incomparable beauty of Lalitā Sundarī, he fell unconscious and began to foam at the mouth. As he came to his senses, she soothed him with kind words as he bowed to her feet with tears of love. She put one foot on his head and he relished the dust that fell from her toes. Fully under the control of the spiritual energy, Kṛṣṇadāsa was unable to speak. He could only weep.

At this point, Lalitā again offered to grant him any boon he desired. *What else can I ask for?* Kṛṣṇadāsa queried. *My only desire is to serve Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa under your guidance.*

Lalitā smiled, knowing well the single-minded determination of young Kṛṣṇadāsa. *You shall certainly attain the association of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa*, she said, *but you cannot serve Them in this body. You must prepare yourself mentally (manasa-sevā) as a confidante of Śrī Rādhā. Then, when you are perfected, you can come to the kuñja with Rūpa Mañjarī and personally witness the rasa-līlā of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. At that time you shall discover everyone's real identity. This is self-realization. For now, continue serving Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī in this body and continue doing your service for the Divine Couple's kuñja. You will attain your perfected body (siddha-deha) in due course.* With this advice, she gave him a sacred *mantra* which she herself chants to enable constant vision of Rādhikā's form.

Kṛṣṇadāsa then took her to an area in the *kuñja* where he had buried the ankle bells. The iron spade with which he had buried them turned bright gold, as he used it to unearth the ankle bells once again. After digging them up with the spade, he put them to his head. Then he prostrated himself before Lalitā's magnificent form and relinquished the ankle bells by gently placing them in her hand. Upon giving the precious ankle bells to Lalitā, he was surprised to see that she first touched them to *his* head after moving them around in a mystical fashion. She said: *Let the touch of Rādhikā's feet be impressed upon your head.* Suddenly, two vertical lines appeared on

his forehead, and from the touch of the tip of one of the anklets, a dot appeared in the middle. ***From this moment Lalitā said, you shall be known as ‘Śyāmānanda,’ for you have brought bliss (ānanda) to Rādhā (Śyāmā) by returning Her ankle bells. Now go back to your kuñja-sevā, but do not tell anyone about this incident. You may disclose these events only to Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī — but do not tell anyone else.*** Overwhelmed with love, Śyāmānanda bowed again, and when he arose, Lalitā had disappeared into the *kuñja*.

He began searching the *kuñja*, ***Where is the beautiful Lalitā, Rādhārāni’s servant? Where has she gone?*** But it was to no avail. Soon he came upon Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī and fell at his feet. When Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī saw the bliss in Śyāmānanda’s eyes and his new molten gold complexion, obtained through his intimate association with the golden-hued Lalitā, he asked the natural questions: ***Where have you been, and why is your skin glowing in such a distinct way?***

Śyāmānanda replied: ***My Lord, I have been to Kanaka-kuñja. While at this place, I received the zenith of Śrī Gurudeva’s mercy. Only by such grace can one experience the transcendental fortune that I have known.*** Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī then saw the beautiful golden spade, wrapped tightly in a cloth beneath Śyāmānanda’s arm. He began to suspect that something extraordinary had indeed taken place.

Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī said: ***And what is this strange tilaka mark on your forehead? You cannot fool me, my dear Kṛṣṇadāsa, I know that you have attained Kṛṣṇa’s special mercy, or, perhaps, even the mercy of Śrī Rādhā. Your body is exhibiting ecstatic symptoms and your eyes are pouring forth tears of love....Please tell me the details of your transcendental experience.***

Since Śrī Lalitā-devī had given him permission, Śyāmānanda proceeded to tell Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī the entire story but asked him not to divulge these secrets to anyone. Śyāmānanda requested that Jīva Gosvāmī simply tell them that by the grace of Gurudeva everything has taken place. Since this was Lalitā’s desire, Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī complied, and the people of Vṛndāvana came to know Kṛṣṇadāsa by his new name “Śyāmānanda” and they called the new *tilaka* “Śyāmānandī,” or “*kṛpā-bindu*.” But only Jīva Gosvāmī and Śyāmānanda knew the secret behind the new name and the new *tilaka*.

Śrīnivāsa Ācārya

Śrīnivāsa Ācārya received dīkṣā from Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī and thorough Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava training and education from Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī. All this equipped him to become an exemplary and very powerful preacher. He was also highly accomplished and realized in his internal life of bhajana as the following pastimes indicate.

Once while in Viṣṇupura in Bengal, Śrīnivāsa Ācārya showed the highest level of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. He fell into trance while absorbed in his spiritual form as Maṇi-mañjarī in the transcendental realm. As he fixed his mind on Rādhārāṇī's water sports in Vṛndāvana, he relished watching Her play about in the Yamunā with Kṛṣṇa and Her intimate *gopī* friends. But in the middle of Her playful dealings, Her nose-ornament (*beśara*) fell into the dark blue waters, and only Śrī Rūpa-mañjarī noticed that it had fallen from Her moon-like face. She glanced knowingly at Guṇa-mañjarī [Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī] who, knowing the mind of Śrī Rūpa, dove into the water to look for the lost nose-ring. However, Guṇa-mañjarī searched the transparent waters in vain because the blessed ornament could not be found. Guṇa-mañjarī had even engaged Maṇi-mañjarī [Śrīnivāsa himself] in the search, but to no avail.

Śrīnivāsa Ācārya's absorption in this pastime continued, day and night, for three days without a break. However, in the external world, his wives were now beside themselves with grief: ***Will Śrīnivāsa ever come out of this deep trance? Is he dead?*** His body had become stiff and his breathing was slight. His wives started to cry loudly. Soon King Vīrhamvīr, a disciple of Śrīnivāsa Ācārya came running, and when he observed Śrīnivāsa's condition, he too was deeply concerned: ***The body requires food. If the Ācārya does not soon return to our plane of existence, he may permanently leave us.*** Nonetheless, the king consoled himself and Śrīnivāsa's wives because when the court physicians examined Śrīnivāsa's body—it was still in a healthy state. But how long can even the healthiest man exist without food?

Then Īśvarī, Śrīnivāsa's first wife, thought of Rāmacandra Kavirāja. If anyone could understand Śrīnivāsa's state and bring him out of it, it was Rāmacandra. She expressed these thoughts to the king, who quickly sent for Śrīnivāsa's most intimate disciple. After some time, Rāmacandra arrived, and seeing the face of his lord and master, he assured everyone by saying, ***Do not fear, Śrīnivāsa Ācārya is in a deep state of samādhi. He will soon return to you.***

Rāmacandra, who was also the embodiment of Maṇi-mañjarī (although he is more commonly known as Karuṇā-mañjarī), sat next to Śrīnivāsa in a meditative trance. In this state, he appeared at the Yamunā where Śrīnivāsa, as Maṇi-mañjarī, was still looking for Rādhārāṇī's nose-ring. Rāmacandra, in his spiritual form as Maṇi-mañjarī's other self, entered the river and helped Śrīnivāsa find the ornament, which was hidden under a lotus leaf. Giving the nose-ring to Maṇi-mañjarī [Śrīnivāsa], Rāmacandra was happy to assist his *guru* in such a confidential way.

Just at this time, Rādhārāṇī finished Her water sports, and She began to dress in Her beautiful dark blue *sārī*. Her intimate *gopī* friends enthusiastically assisted Her, and when there was one last ornament to place on Her person — the nose-ring — Guṇa-mañjarī confidently looked to Maṇi-mañjarī who, in perfect timing, came out from the Yamunā and delivered the desired apparel.

As this finishing touch was placed on Radhika's body, Kṛṣṇa came to accompany Her into the forests of Vṛndāvana. The *gopīs* and *mañjarīs* watched on in disbelief, mesmerized by the unparalleled beauty that emanated from the Divine Couple. The scene engulfed them with intense love, and their bodies showed symptoms of spiritual ecstasy. Just then, Śrīnivāsa Ācārya's trance broke, as did Rāmacandra Kavirāja's. They turned to look at each other — once again in the external world. Laughing like madmen, they embraced each other and both fell to the floor, their eyes flooded with tears of love.

King Vīrhamvīr was never more ecstatic. His master had come back to life! Īśvarī and Gaurāṅga-priya cried tears of joy. All the devotees began to chant, ***Hari! Hari!*** A huge *prasādam* feast was brought in for the two *sādhus* who had just returned from an expedition in consciousness, an esoteric but very real journey to the spiritual world. The feast remnants were given to the inner circle of Viṣṇupura devotees. After honoring *prasādam*, the devotees sat at the feet of Śrīnivāsa and Rāmacandra, who began to discuss the pastimes of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa and it was a blissful discussion which continued throughout the night.



Śrīnivāsa Ācārya developed his internal Reality to such a degree that he began to inadvertently bring tangible paraphernalia from these trances when returning to external consciousness. For example, *Bhakti-ratnakara* relates that once, while absorbed in Mahāprabhu's *līlā*, Śrīnivāsa saw that he was actually worshiping Lord Caitanya Himself, who was seated on a beautifully-jeweled throne. He approached the Lord and reverentially anointed His body with fragrant sandalwood paste. Then he placed a garland of aromatic flowers around the Lord's neck and began to carefully fan Him with a *cāmara* whisk.

As Śrīnivāsa served the Lord in this way, he could not keep his composure and, looking at the Lord's magnificent form, he began to exhibit ecstatic symptoms. This pleased Lord Caitanya, who then took the same garland of flowers that Śrīnivāsa had given Him and placed it around Śrīnivāsa's neck. After the Lord made this loving gesture, Śrīnivāsa's trance broke, but the garland was still adorning his chest and its fragrance was unlike anything he had ever experienced. He quickly took off the garland and hid it in order to conceal this confidential pastime.

Bhakti-ratnākara also describes that once during Śrīnivāsa's intense trance, he saw himself (as Maṇi-mañjarī) at the side of Rādhārāṇī as She and Kṛṣṇa were taking part in the Holī Festival. This is a joyous event wherein Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa playfully throw natural colored dyes at each other. In his trance, Śrīnivāsa saw Rādhā and Her intimate *gopī* friends flinging dyes and squirting all kinds of colored waters at Kṛṣṇa, bombarding Him from all directions; and He in turn threw various kinds of dye at them. As this loving battle reached its highest point, the *gopīs* looked at Śrīnivāsa (Maṇi-mañjarī), gesturing that he should come to their rescue.

Maṇi-mañjarī (Śrīnivāsa) then started to quickly supply Radhika with ample quantities of multi-colored powders. Radhika and the *gopīs* used these against Śrī Kṛṣṇa, but He would not be defeated so easily. He returned their attempts with even greater attacks. The conflict became so furious that the ground began to shake. In the midst of this irrepressible happiness Śrīnivāsa's trance broke, and when he returned to external consciousness, he realized that his body was covered with the multi-colored powders from the spiritual world. Such was the perfection of his internal absorption in Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa-*līlā* — even when not physically in Vraja.

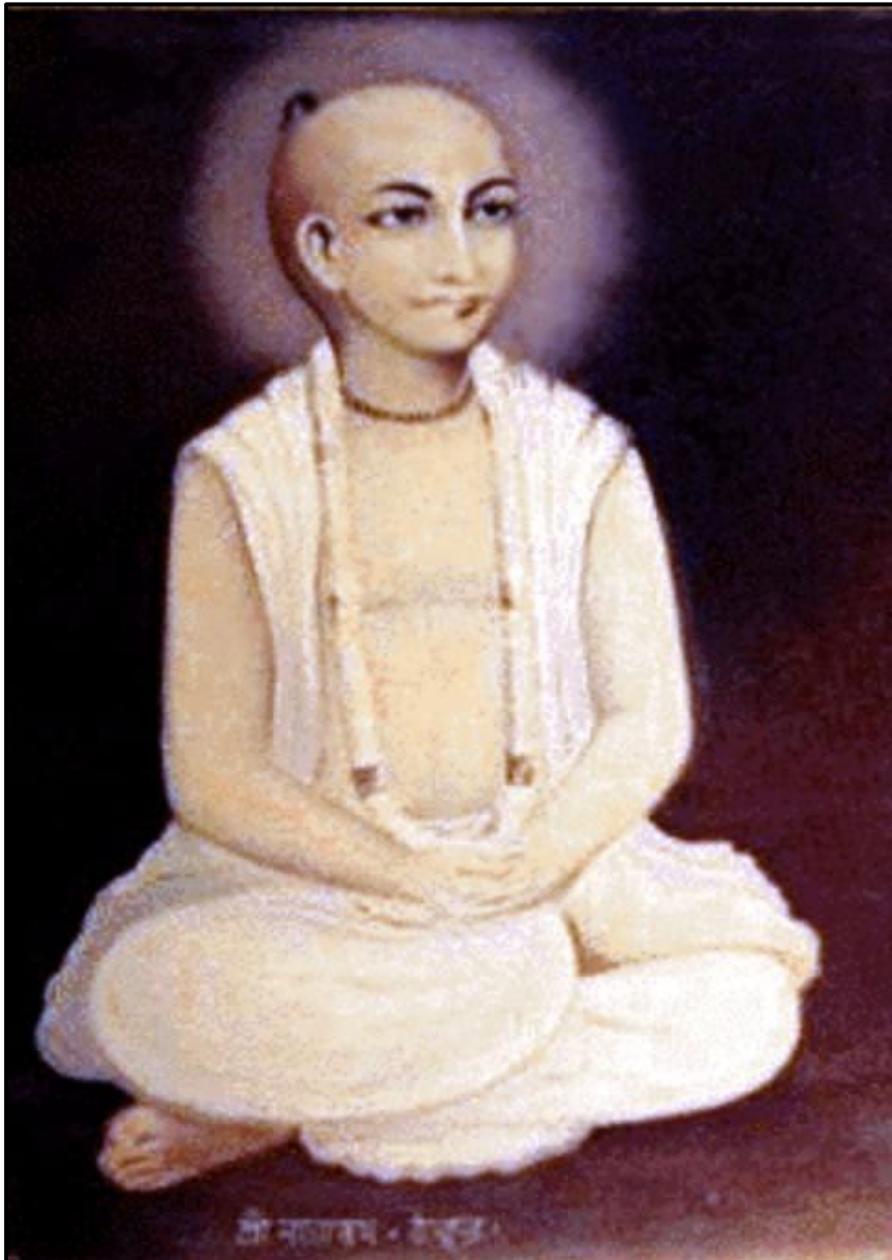
Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura

By the divine intervention of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu — and after much personal anxiety, endeavor and hardship — Narottama was initiated by Śrīla Lokanātha Gosvāmī.

As the days passed into weeks and then months, Narottama grew in spiritual accomplishment, as did his reputation throughout Vṛndāvana. One night, a divine

Vaiṣṇavī appeared to him in a dream and said, *Dedicate yourself to the feet of your guru and do whatever he asks. Your sincerity and austerity have pleased Me, and I will see that you are engaged in a very confidential service. When I meet Kṛṣṇa every afternoon in the kuñja, I see that the sakhīs are serving Him with the utmost care. They make a special milk-based preparation for Him, and Campakalatā is the most efficient gopī in this service. Boiling the milk, you shall work under her direction. Please remember that I become happy if Kṛṣṇa is happy.*

When Narottama awoke, he quickly ran to Lokanātha Gosvāmī's *bhajana-kuṭīra* and conveyed the entire dream. Lokanātha embraced Narottama, confirming that the Vaishnavi was indeed Śrī Rādhikā, Kṛṣṇa's beloved consort. Lokanātha was pleased to hear that Narottama was given a special service—boiling milk—by Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī Herself. Lokanātha understood that this was his disciple's eternal service to Kṛṣṇa, and that Rādhikā was merely reinstating him in that service.



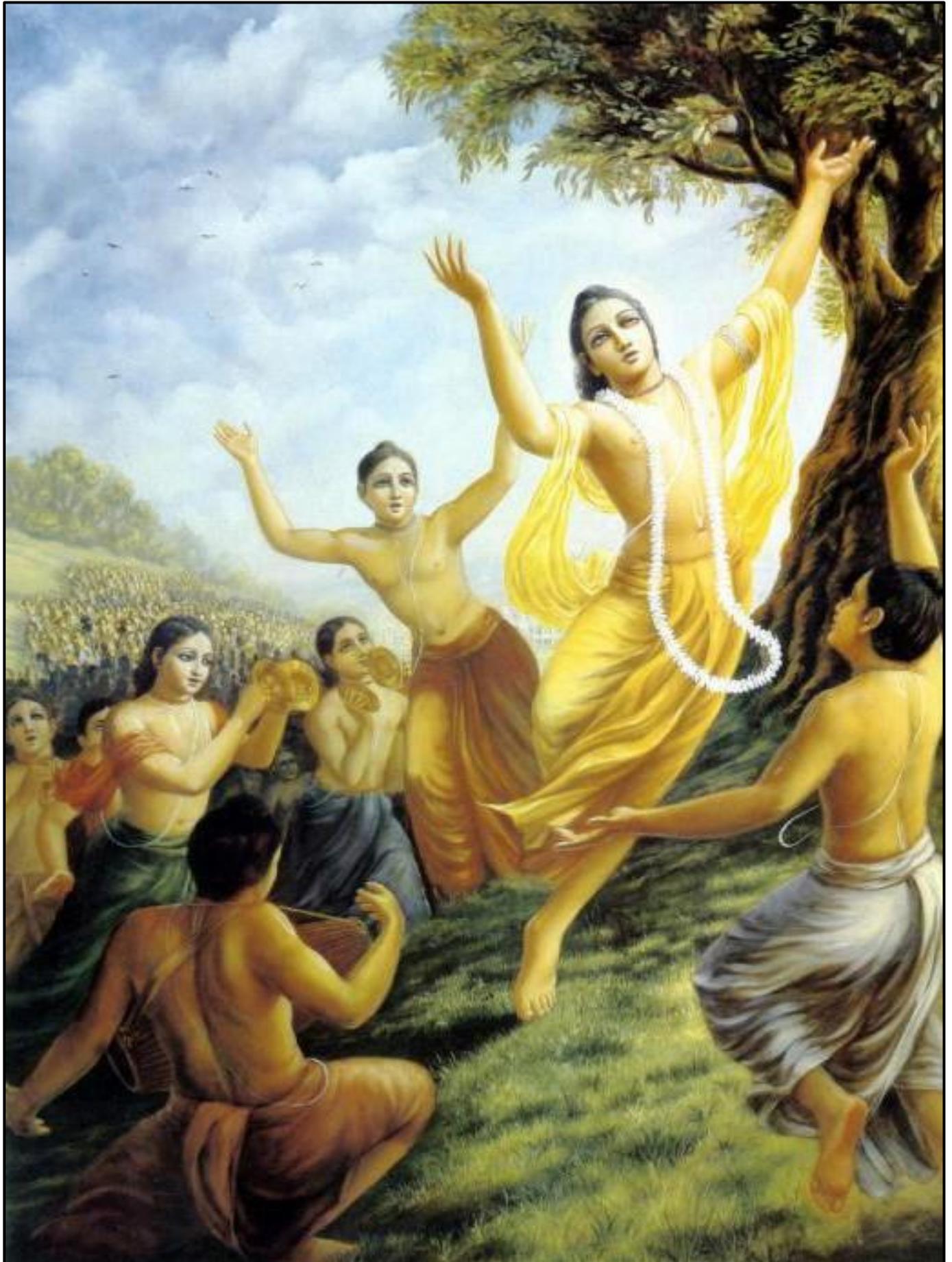
After being given this unique chore by Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī, and having it confirmed by his Gurudeva, Narottama would sometimes go into elaborate and very deep trances, seeing himself boiling milk for Rādhikā and the *gopīs* while in his *mañjarī* form. Often, in this *siddha-deha*, or “perfected form,” he found it useful to use dry wood for the fire, which kept the milk boiling. On some occasions, however, the milk would overflow. Whenever this happened, Narottama would try to stop the overflowing milk with his bare hands. During his intense absorption, he would often neglect the fact that his hands were scorched. But when his reverie subsided, he saw that the scorched hands in his internal service had accompanied him back to the world of three dimensions. Sometimes he tried to cover his marked hands with a piece of cloth, but all of Vṛndāvana knew the transcendent way in which he had received the burns.

He was then asked by his Guru Mahārāja to take shelter of Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī for further instruction and education. And this he happily did.

Complying with the order of Lokanātha Gosvāmī, Narottama submitted himself at the feet of Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī and asked him to accept him as a student. In response, Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī took hold of his hands and immediately requested him to tell the story of how they became so badly burned. Narottama then told his new master the recurring events of his internal service. As Śrīla Jīva listened, he felt great satisfaction and spiritual ecstasy. He confirmed that Narottama was indeed Campaka-mañjarī, and Narottama said, ***Yes, Rādhikā Herself has addressed me in this way.*** Hearing this, with great happiness, Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī embraced Narottama, saying, ***You are the manifestation of Mahāprabhu’s love, and with this love you will flood the entire universe.***

Many Years Later, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu Descends at the First Gaura Pūrṇimā Festival

It is said that Narottama’s *kīrtana*, more than anybody else’s, had reached a perfected state. This is accepted by Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas as an objective fact for a number of reasons, not least of which may be the miraculous occurrence that has been documented by all biographers of the period — Mahāprabhu and all His associates, many of whom had left the mortal world more than fifty years earlier, personally appeared at the Kheturī festival and danced at the height of Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura’s blessed *kīrtana*. Thousands of attending devotees bore witness to this sacred event. The author of *Bhakti-ratnākara* incredulously asks, ***Who can describe the incomparable happiness of the devotees when in the midst of the kīrtana the munificent Śrī Caitanya and His associates descended for the pleasure of His devotees? Like a flash of lightning in the middle of a mass of beautiful clouds, Śrī Caitanya Himself appeared within the multitude of His followers.***



As the devotees chanted and danced more and more, they felt their bodies become soaked with tears as they completely lost themselves in Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura's *kīrtana*. For some time, Śrīnivāsa was able to control himself, but Narottama could not, and his *kīrtana* reached irrepressible heights. Some devotees spoke loud words of appreciation and gratitude in his ear: ***Thank you, my master. Your devotional power has enabled us all to see Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu in His unending spiritual dance with Advaita Ācārya and His other eternal associates.***

Mahāprabhu had told Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura in a dream the prior evening that He would come with His associates and ecstatically dance in his *kīrtana* performance; so Narottama was waiting for this moment and would not abandon it so easily. In fact, the *kīrtana* lasted many hours deep into the night. It seemed endless, and for many it was, for they took the event with them and constantly lived in its memory.



If you are enlivened by what you have read and would like to know more about these amazing Vaiṣṇavas, please take a look at Satyarāja Prabhu's book, "*Vaiṣṇava Saints*". You won't be disappointed.

What's All This Got to Do with Me? — I'm Just a Struggling Neophyte! —

Hmm, you may well be thinking *What's all this got to do with me?! These three Vaiṣṇavas are premī-bhaktas — eternal associates of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. I'm just a struggling neophyte!*

That's a reasonable thought. We certainly can't advance towards *kṛṣṇa-prema* from an artificial or false platform. But is *struggling neophyte* our permanent ID tag? Do we really want to stand still and go nowhere forever? Speaking practically, that's not even an option. Material existence is so designed that we can either advance or degrade — there's no third option, there's no pause or replay button. And the choice is always ours. We individually have to decide

- * Do I want to live the illusion and stagnate in the name of religion?**
- * Or do I want to step beyond the illusion and experience a joyful revolution of heart?**

From Illusion to Reality

— Six Essential Sane and Safe Beginners' Steps —

STEP ONE: Take a Reality Check



- ✿ Take a serious, honest and private look at your present attempts to become a devotee.
- ✿ Don't deny your faults and limitations. Don't try to justify them. Don't beat yourself up and become depressed.
- ✿ Take a calm and objective look at what you see. Note the positive and offer a heartfelt prayer of gratitude. Jot down the challenges and prioritize them according to what you feel you can best tackle now.
- ✿ Place your list at the feet of your Deities with a prayer for guidance and strength.
- ✿ Then take a deep breath and begin your work.....

STEP TWO: Stop Cheating Yourself



- ❁ Acknowledge and accept that you can never be independent or self-sufficient. You are just not made that way!
- ❁ Be confident that there is a loving and kindhearted Supreme Controller and Planmaker who has your best interests at heart.
- ❁ Trust Him. Cooperate with Him. Learn from Him.
- ❁ Don't waste time or energy doubting Him or trying to counteract His plan or timing — you can't change it anyway!
- ❁ **Be happy, optimistic and positive about all of this. You're taking a very big and necessary step to begin your journey into the Reality.....**

STEP THREE: Take REAL Shelter!



- ❁ It's inherent to our nature to take shelter and we all do it. **We feel a need for it.**
- ❁ We take shelter of our loved ones, our work, our money and our possessions. Sometimes we even take shelter of eating and sleeping.
- ❁ The **BAD NEWS** is that all such shelters are not only temporary — they can also keep us here for a very, very long time.
- ❁ Better we take shelter of Kṛṣṇa, and we can do that in limitless ways...
 - Prayer
 - Nāma kīrtana* or *japa*
 - Lovingly serving our Deities.

- Absorbing ourselves in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* or *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta*
- Remembering and sharing Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes The list is blissful and endless!

- ❁ Maybe it’s time to change gears and reassess where we can best seek shelter for permanent sanity, safety and security.
- ❁ Big things begin with a small step in the right direction. And so we would like to share with you a very special prayer to help get you started. It’s the 5th verse of the *Śrī Balabhadra-stotra-kavaca* found in the *Garga-saṁhitā*. Why not give it a try?!

***kāmāt sadā rakṣatu dhenukāriḥ
krodhāt sadā mām dvivida-prahārī
lobhāt sadā rakṣatu balvalārī
mohāt sadā mām kila māgadhārī***



May Lord Balarāma, who is the enemy of Dhenukāśura, always protect me from lust.

May Lord Balarāma, who killed Dvivida, always protect me from anger.

May Lord Balarāma, who is the enemy of Balvala, always protect me from greed.

May Lord Balarāma, who is the enemy of Jarāsandha, always protect me from illusion.

STEP FOUR: Consciously Shape Your Mind — It's Shaping Your Life!

- ☼ We tend to avoid people who talk gibberish and waste our time. Are we so vigilant when dealing with the mind? It not only talks a lot of nonsense but has us mechanically and mindlessly meandering our way through our days — and our life!
- ☼ The mind makes a fabulous servant but a very dangerous master. And we have foolishly given the monster power of attorney! It will be a struggle, but we really need to change that...
- ☼ Best we consciously shape the mind — become aware, alert and dynamically absorbed in our daily dealings — and decisions!
- ☼ And it's good to keep in mind that three of our senses are voracious eaters — our mouth, eyes and ears. What we feed them will determine our health — especially our mental health and our inner core health!



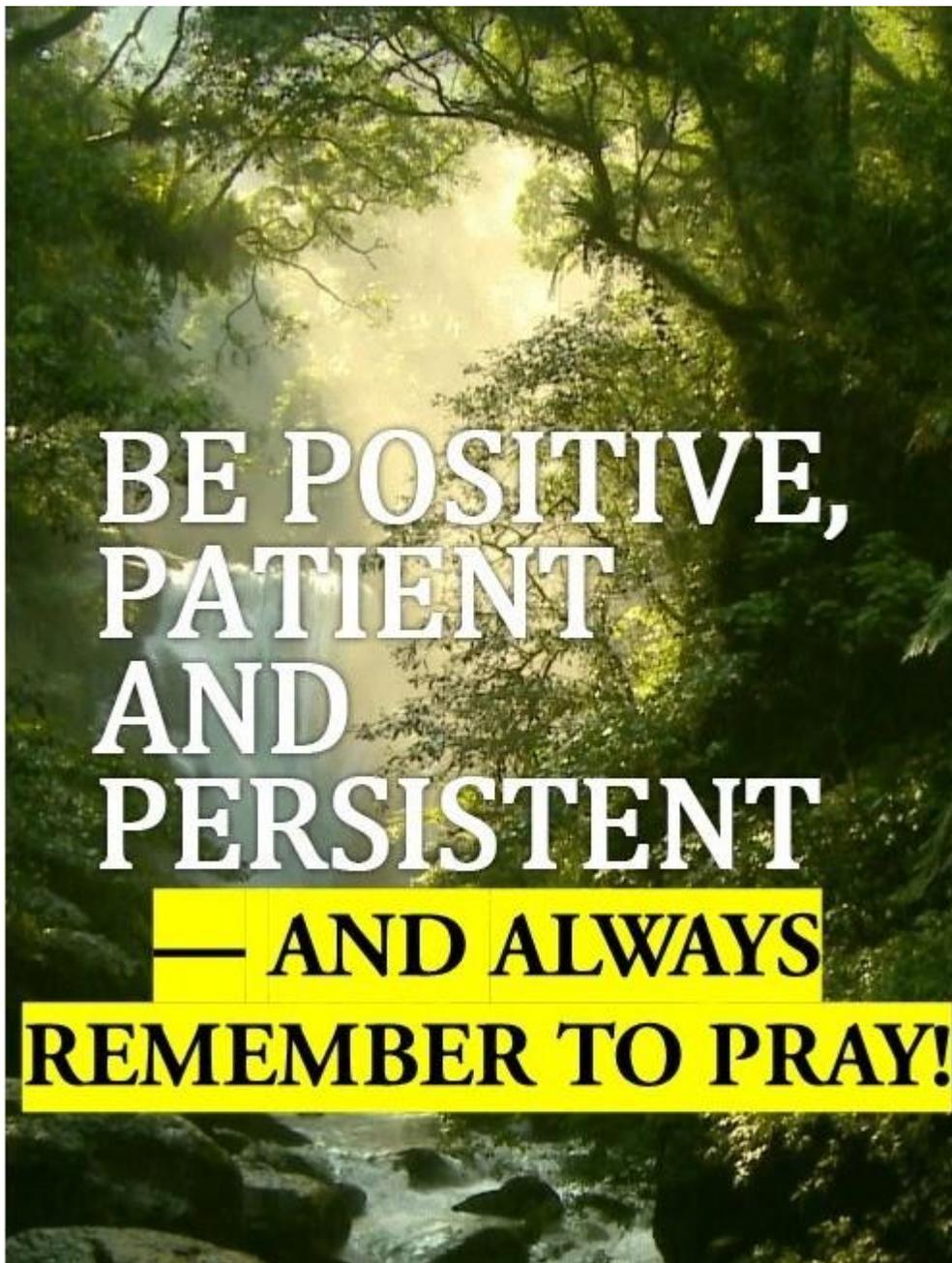
STEP FIVE: Say NO!!! to Verbal Violence!

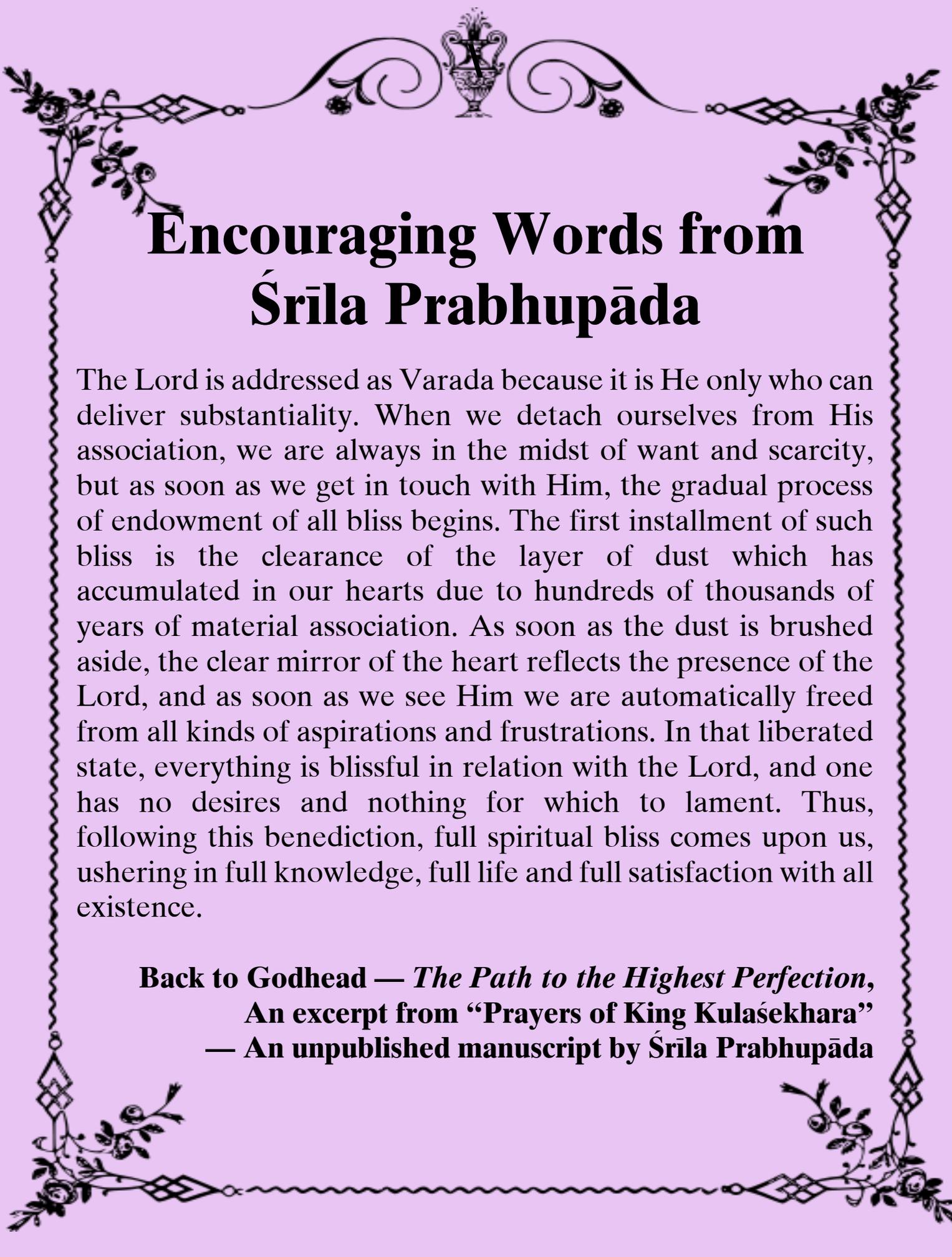


- ❁ There's no need to elaborate on this one. We all know what verbal violence means.
- ❁ We have all experienced it. We all know how painful and soul-destroying it is. But still we do it — or we tolerate it!
- ❁ Best to remember that anger, stressed-filled anxiety and hurt are emotions that inevitably make our mouth work faster than our mind and better judgement. **DISASTER!**
- ❁ **Best to THINK before we speak ...**
 - T — Is it true?**
 - H — Is it helpful?**
 - I — Is it inspiring?**
 - N — Is it necessary?**
 - K — Is it kind and well-intentioned?**
- ❁ **Serious practice and prayer makes perfect!**

STEP SIX: Be Positive, Patient and Persistent!

- ☼ A serious attempt to follow steps 1-5 will be a challenge.
- ☼ Best to be positive, patient and persistent — and daily pray, daily practice.
- ☼ Please give it an honest try.
- ☼ You have nothing valuable to lose — and everything priceless to gain!





Encouraging Words from Śrīla Prabhupāda

The Lord is addressed as Varada because it is He only who can deliver substantiality. When we detach ourselves from His association, we are always in the midst of want and scarcity, but as soon as we get in touch with Him, the gradual process of endowment of all bliss begins. The first installment of such bliss is the clearance of the layer of dust which has accumulated in our hearts due to hundreds of thousands of years of material association. As soon as the dust is brushed aside, the clear mirror of the heart reflects the presence of the Lord, and as soon as we see Him we are automatically freed from all kinds of aspirations and frustrations. In that liberated state, everything is blissful in relation with the Lord, and one has no desires and nothing for which to lament. Thus, following this benediction, full spiritual bliss comes upon us, ushering in full knowledge, full life and full satisfaction with all existence.

**Back to Godhead — *The Path to the Highest Perfection*,
An excerpt from “Prayers of King Kulaśekhara”
— An unpublished manuscript by Śrīla Prabhupāda**