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SWALLOWING THE FOREST FIRE

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Srila Sukadeva Goswami

WHAT IS A FOREST FIRE?

His Divine Grace

A.C.Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

WHAT IS THE DEFINITION OF THE LIVING ENTITY'S MATERIAL EXISTENCE?

Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura

WHO CAN HELP A CONDITIONED LIVING ENTITY?

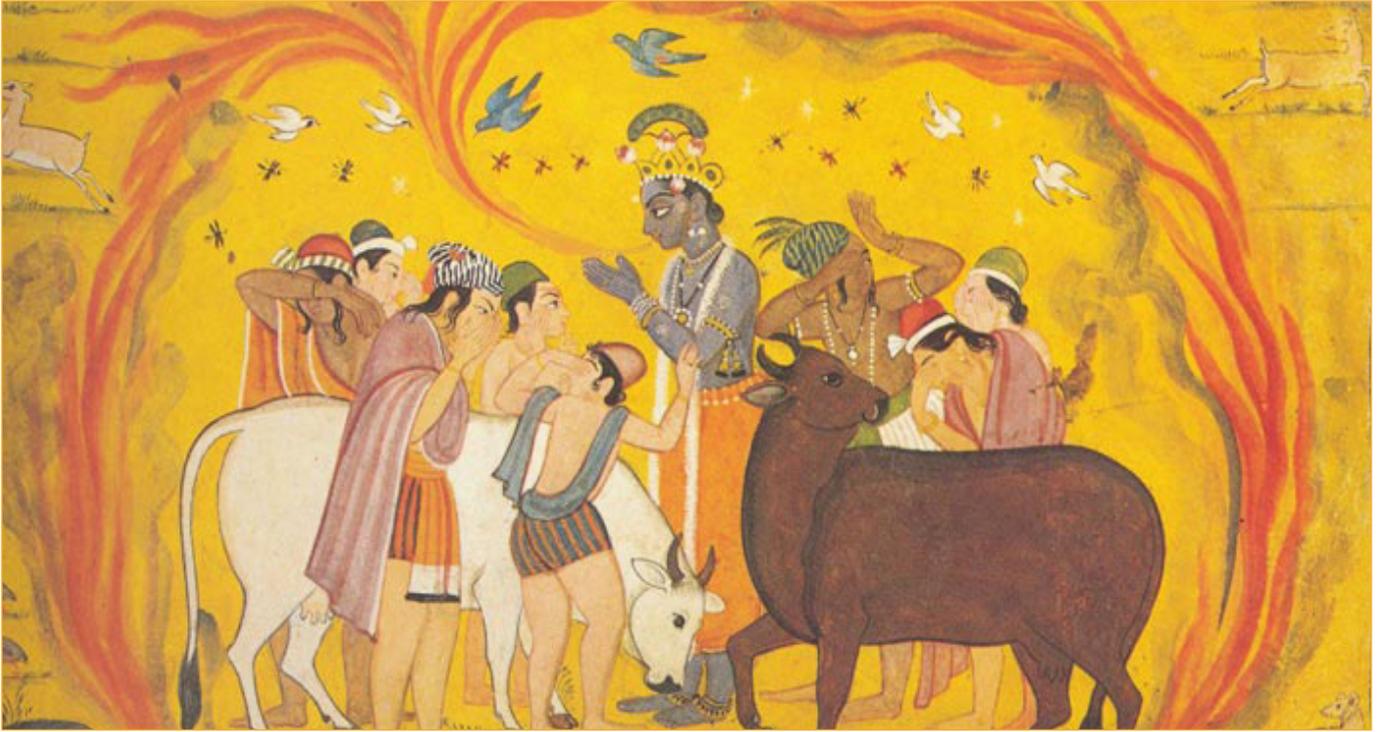
Srila Narottama Das Thakura

CAN SANNYASA HELP A PERSON BECOME LIBERATED FROM MATERIAL EXISTENCE?

Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakura

MATERIAL EXISTENCE AND THE RIVER VAITARANI

Srila Sanatana Goswami



SWALLOWING THE FOREST FIRE

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Sukadeva Goswami said: While the cowherd boys were completely absorbed in playing, their cows wandered far away. The cows hungered for more grass, and with no one to watch them, they wandered unchecked in the expansive forest. Passing from one part of the great forest to another, the goats, cows and buffalo eventually went into an area filled with sharp canes which prohibited them from easily returning. When the heat of a nearby forest fire made them thirsty and distressed, and they bellowed in anxiety. Hearing those cries and not seeing the cows before them, Krishna, Rama and Their cowherd friends immediately felt repentant for having neglected them. The boys searched all around, but could not find where they had gone. Then the boys began tracing the cows' path by noting their hoof prints and the blades of grass the cows had dislodged and broken with their hooves and teeth. All the cowherd boys were in great anxiety because they had lost their source of livelihood.

Coming to the Munja forest the cowherd boys finally found their entrusted cows,

who had lost their way and were mooing piteously. Then the boys, thirsty and tired, shepherded the cows onto a path to safety. The Supreme Personality of Godhead Lord Krishna called out to the animals in a voice that resounded like a rumbling cloud. Hearing their names, the cows were overjoyed and lowed lovingly in reply.

Suddenly the now enlarged forest fire appeared all around them. It threatened to annihilate all the animals of the forest. Like a chariot driver, the wind swept the fire onward, and terrible sparks shot in all directions. Indeed, the great fire extended its tongues of flame toward all moving and non-moving creatures. As the cows and cowherd boys stared at the forest fire threatening them on all sides, they became very fearful. The boys then approached Krishna and Balarama for shelter, just as those who are disturbed by fear of death approach the Supreme Personality of Godhead. The boys addressed Them as follows. O Krishna! Krishna! Most powerful one. O Rama, whose prowess never fails. Please save Your devotees, who are about to be burned by this forest fire and have come to take shelter of You. Krishna! Certainly Your friends shouldn't



be destroyed. O knower of the nature of all things, we have accepted You as our Lord, and we are souls surrendered unto You. Please help us now.

Sukadeva Gosvami said: Hearing these pitiful words from His friends, the Supreme Lord Krishna told them, “Just close your eyes and do not be afraid.” The boys responded affirmatively, and immediately closed their eyes. Then the Supreme Lord, the master of all mystic power, opened His mouth and inhaled the terrible fire, saving His friends from danger. When the cowherd boys opened their eyes they were amazed to find that not only had they and the cows had been saved from the terrible fire but that they had also all been brought back to the Bhandira tree. Although the cowherd boys saw that they had been saved from the forest fire by the Lord’s mystic power, which is manifested by His internal potency, they had no inkling of His divinity. Rather they began to think that Krishna must be favoured by some demigod and they felt proud to have such a wonderful friend.

By now it was now late in the afternoon, and Lord Krishna, accompanied by Balarama, turned the cows toward home. Playing His flute in a special way, Krishna

returned to the cowherd village in the company of His cowherd friends, who chanted His glories. The young gopis who were obliged to remain in the village during the daytime, took great pleasure in seeing Rama and Govinda come home, since for them even a moment without Krishna’s association seemed like a hundred millenia.

— *Srimad Bhagavatam » Canto 10: Summary of Chapter: 19 » Swallowing the Forest Fire.*

WHAT IS A FOREST FIRE?

His Divine Grace

A.C.Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

Constant transmigration of the soul from one body to another is the cause of suffering in material existence. This conditional life in material existence is called *samsāra*, the cycle of birth and death. One may perform good work and take birth in a very comfortable material condition, but the process under which birth and death take place is always like a terrible fire. Sri Vishvanatha Chakravarti Thakura, in his prayer to the spiritual master, has described this. *Samsāra*, or the repetition of birth and death, is compared to a forest fire. A forest fire takes place automatically - without anyone's endeavour - by the friction of dry wood. It cannot be extinguished



by the endeavours of men. The raging forest fire can be extinguished only when there is a heavy downpour of water from a cloud. The cloud is compared to the mercy stored in the heart of the spiritual master. By the grace of the spiritual master the cloud of the mercy of the Personality of Godhead is brought in. Then, when the rains of Krishna consciousness fall, the fire of material existence can be extinguished. This is also explained here. In order to find freedom from the stereotyped conditional life of material existence, one has to take shelter of the lotus feet of the Lord. That shelter is achieved not in the proud manner in which the impersonalists indulge, but in humble devotional service — chanting and hearing of the transcendental activities of the Lord. Only then can one be free from the actions and reactions of material existence. It is recommended here that one should give up the conditioned life of this material world and the association of so-called civilized human beings who are simply following - in a polished way - the same stereotyped principles of eating, sleeping, defending and mating. Chanting and hearing of the glories of the Lord is described here as *tvad-guṇa-vāda-sīdhu*. Only by drinking the nectar of chanting and hearing the pastimes

Bhāgavata Mahāvidyālaya

of the Lord can one forget the intoxication of material existence.

— *Srimad Bhagavatam* » Canto 3: *The Status Quo* » Chapter 12: *Creation of the Kumāras and Others* » Verses: 18, Purport.

WHAT IS THE DEFINITION OF THE LIVING ENTITY'S MATERIAL EXISTENCE?

Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura

Disregarding his true self, the living entity has connected himself with a new body composed of the subtle elements of mind, intelligence, and false ego. Subsequently his gross body comes into existence. Considering these psychological and physical phenomena as real, the embodied soul mistaken thinks these items are his assets. Then becoming proud of his gross body made of five material elements, he misidentifies himself and thinks “I am such and such Bhattacharya” and “I am such and such Saheb.” Sometimes he dies, sometimes he takes birth, sometimes he is puffed up with happiness, and sometimes he is overwhelmed with distress. How astounding these changes are! How wonderful the tricks of maya!

Sometimes accepting a male body, the living entity marries a female, and sometimes

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accepting a female body, he marries a male and thus establishes this family life. In this material existence, he serves his respectable elders, maintains his dependents, fears the king, and hates his enemies. Becoming a chaste woman, he feels shy and is afraid of people's criticism. In this way, entangled in temporary relationships in this enchanting material existence, the living entity has fallen far away from his original constitutional position. The condition of the living entity situated in material existence is terribly piteous! Considering the various rules and regulations of material existence as paramount, he has totally forgotten Krishna, his eternal master.

— *Sajjana-toṣaṇī* 8/9. » *Bhaktivinoda Vānī Vaibhāva* »
Published by Īśvara dāsa.

WHO CAN HELP A CONDITIONED LIVING ENTITY?

Srila Narottama Das Thakura

*cakṣu-dāna dila yei, janme janme prabhu sei
divya-jñāna hr̥de prakāśita
prema-bhakti jāhā haite, avidyā vināśa jāte
vede gāya yāhāra carita*

“Sri Krishna is my Lord and I am His eternal servant.” Though this is their constitutional position, the living entities have forgotten it from time immemorial. Taking advantage of this, the external energy of the Supreme Lord, maya, has entangled the living entities in unlimited material miseries and caused them to accept the unconscious material body, as their self. The spiritual master alone is able to deliver such living entities from the miseries of material existence and establish them in their constitutional position. The phrase *cakṣu dāna dilā yei* indicates that the spiritual master opens our darkened eyes which were covered with darkness and bestows divine vision by which we can cross the ocean of material existence. Thus we become qualified to behold the higher spiritual reality.

The words *divya-jñāna* refer to the knowledge through which one can learn how to worship Krishna. It is understood that such knowledge can be revealed in one's heart only by the mercy of *śrī guru*. The word *divya-jñāna* also means transcendental knowledge in the form of initiation into the teachings of Sri Krishna. It is stated in *Hari Bhakti Vilāsa*;

*divya jñānam yato dadyāt
kuryāt pāpasya samkṣyam*



*tasmād dikṣeti sā proktā
deśike tattva kovidaiḥ*

When one is initiated into the knowledge of Krishna and his relationship with Krishna is revived, it is to be understood that he is educated in transcendental knowledge. The words *janme janme prabhu* indicate that after removing the coverings of ignorance upon the living entities born in this material world, the spiritual master engages them in the eternal loving service of Sri Govinda, the transcendental cowherd boy of Brajamandala, which is beyond the realm of Maya. Therefore, whether one is in the practicing stage or one is in the perfected stage, the spiritual master is always one's worshipable lord.

The words *vede gāya* indicate that not only Narottama dasa Thakura glorifies the spiritual master, but the Vedas and the supplementary Vedic scriptures also glorify the spiritual master. As stated by Lord Krishna to Uddhava in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (11.17.24), *ācārya mām vijānīyāt*, "One should consider the spiritual master as non-different from Me." Also it is stated in the Vedas: *ācāryavan puruṣo vedah;* one who associates with the *ācārya* can become familiar with all the Vedic knowledge.

— Adapted and Published by Īśvara dāsa • Translation by Bhumiṇpati dāsa.

CAN SANNYASA HELP A PERSON BECOME LIBERATED FROM MATERIAL EXISTENCE?

Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakura

Dressing like a *sannyāsī* and becoming a real *sannyāsī* are not the same. We have to renounce material enjoyment and the desire for liberation. One who has made Krishna's devotional service the essence of life by renouncing the desire for religiosity, economic development, sense gratification, and liberation is the real *sannyāsī*.

To become a real *sannyāsī* means to follow in the footsteps of the spiritual authorities (*mahājanas*) and to become attached to the transcendental Lord. Without this, dressing like a *sannyāsī* is nothing but imitation or pretense. Sri Mahaprabhu states: *parātma-niṣṭhā-mātraveṣa-dhāraṇa, mukunda-sevāya haya saṁsāra-tāraṇa*: "The real purpose of accepting *sannyāsa* is to dedicate oneself to the service of Mukunda. By serving Mukunda, one can actually be liberated from the bondage of material existence."

— Caitanya-caritāmṛta Madhya Lila, 3.8

If after accepting *sannyāsa* one lovingly serves Krishna with body, mind, speech, wealth, knowledge, intelligence, and his possessions, he can both become liberated from material existence and become a devotee of Sri Krishna. It is impossible to attain any benefit without rendering service to the Supreme Lord. Whether



one lives at home or in the monastery, he must engage in the Lord's service as his life and soul. Then only can he please the Lord. A person must give up miserliness and the propensity to cheat. If he can make the Lord's service the goal of his life, anyone can attain the Lord's mercy in this very lifetime.

—*AmṛtaVāṇī* » *Nectar of Instructions for Immortality*
Translation by Bhumipati dāsa.

MATERIAL EXISTENCE AND THE RIVER VAITARANI

Srila Sanatana Goswami

*evam sva-karma-patitaṁ bhava-vaitaraṇyām
anyonya-janma-maraṇāśana-bhīta-bhītam
paśyañ janamaṁsva-para-vigraha-vaira-maitraṁ
hanteti pāra-cara pīpṛhi mūḍham adya*

“My dear Lord, You are always transcendently situated on the other side of the river of death. However, because of the reactions to our activities, we are suffering on this side.

Indeed, we have fallen into this river and are repeatedly experiencing the pains of birth and death and eating horrible things. Now kindly glance toward us—not only upon me but also upon all others who are suffering—and by Your causeless mercy and compassion, deliver and

maintain us.”

— *Bhāg* 7.9.41

Material existence is like the river Vaitarani, the gateway to the court of Death. In general, material life on earth is full of suffering, no less than life in the subterranean realms of hell. Therefore, although immune to these dangers, for our benefit Prahlada speaks as if he fears the troubles expected in various births and deaths. Prahlada presents himself as befooled like most people in this world, who deal with one another either as enemies or as friends and who are thereby bewildered in all circumstances.

Prahlada addresses Lord Narsimha as *pāra-cara*, He who is situated on the other side of the Vaitarani River, or in other words, in the eternally free realm of Vaikuntha. Expressing his own pain at seeing the suffering of other souls in the material world, Prahlada requests the Lord to please carry them across the Vaitarani to safety. He then further prays:

*ko nv atra te 'khila-guro bhagavan prayāsa
uttāraṇe 'sya bhava-sambhava-lopa-hetoḥ
mūḍheṣu vai mahad-anugraha āṛta-bandho
kiṁ tena te priya-janān amusevatāṁ naḥ*

“O my Lord, O Supreme Personality of Godhead,



original spiritual master of the entire world, what is the difficulty for You, who manage the affairs of the universe, in delivering the fallen souls engaged in Your devotional service? You are the friend of all suffering humanity, and for great personalities it is necessary to show mercy to the

fallen and foolish. Therefore I think that You will surely show Your causeless mercy to persons like us, who engage in Your service.” (*Bhāg* 7.9.42)

Here Prahlada addresses Lord Narsimha as the spiritual master of all souls, implying that it is quite fitting for Him to show mercy to everyone without exception. For the Lord to deliver every soul in existence should not be a great endeavour, because He creates, maintains, and destroys universes as a mere sport. And it should be even less difficult for the Lord to deliver His own devotees and their servants, like Prahlada, who considers himself a fallen demon whose only saving grace is being Narada Muni’s faithful disciple.

—*Śrī Bṛhad Bhāgavatāmṛta* of Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī, Volume One. Translated by Gopīparāṇadhana Dāsa.

!! Sri Sri Nitai Gaurchandra Jayati !!

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A.C. BhaktiVedanta Swami Prabhupāda

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His Divine Grace A.C. BhaktiVedanta Swami Prabhupada

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