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Srila Shukadeva Gosvami

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Shukadeva Gosvami said: Then, on the new-moon day, O King, a fierce and frightening wind arose, scattering dust all about and spreading the smell of pus everywhere. Next, onto the sacrificial arena came a down-pour of abominable things sent by Balvala, after which the demon himself appeared, trident in hand. The immense demon resembled a mass of black carbon. His topknot and beard were like molten copper, and his face had horrible fangs and furrowed eyebrows. Upon seeing him, Lord Balarama thought of His club, which tears to pieces His enemies' armies, and His plow weapon, which punishes the demons. Thus summoned, His two weapons appeared before Him at once.

With the tip of His plow Lord Balarama caught hold of the demon Balvala as he flew through the sky, and with His club the Lord angrily struck that harasser of brahmanas on the head. Balvala cried out in agony and fell to the ground, his forehead cracked open and gushing blood. He resembled a red mountain struck by a lightning bolt. The exalted sages honored Lord Rama with sincere prayers and awarded Him infallible blessings. Then they performed His ritual bath, just as the demigods had formally bathed Indra when he killed Vritra. They gave Lord Balarama a Vaijayanti garland of unfading lotuses in which resided the goddess of fortune, and they also gave Him a set of divine garments and jewelry.

Then, given leave by the sages, the Lord went with a contingent of brahmanas to the Kaushiki River, where He bathed. From there He went to the lake from which flows the river Sharayu. The Lord followed the course of the Sharayu until He came to Prayaga, where He bathed and then performed rituals to propitiate the demigods and other living beings. Next He went to the *āśrama* of Pulaha Ṛṣi. Lord Balarama bathed in the Gomati, Gandaki and Vipasha rivers, and also immersed Himself in the Shona. He went to Gaya, where He worshiped His forefathers, and to the mouth of the Ganges, where He performed purifying ablutions. At Mount Mahendra He saw Lord Parashurama and offered Him prayers, and then He bathed in the seven branches of the Godavari River, and also

in the rivers Vena, Pampa and Bhimarathi. Then Lord Balarama met Lord Skanda and visited Sri-shaila, the abode of Lord Girisha. In the southern provinces known as Dravida-deshā the Supreme Lord saw the sacred Venkata Hill, as well as the cities of Kamakoshni and Kanchi, the exalted Kaveri River and the most holy Sriranga, where Lord Krishna has manifested Himself. From there He went to Rishabha Mountain, where Lord Krishna also lives, and to the southern Mathura. Then He came to Setubandha, where the most grievous sins are destroyed.

There at Setubandha [Rameshvaram] Lord Halayudha gave brahmanas ten thousand cows in charity. He then visited the Krtamala and Tamraparni rivers and the great Malaya Mountains. In the Malaya range Lord Balarama found Agastya Ṛṣi sitting in meditation. After bowing down to the sage, the Lord offered him prayers and then received blessings from him. Taking leave from Agastya, He proceeded to the shore of the southern ocean, where He saw Goddess Durgain her form of Kanyakumari. Next He went to Phalgunatirtha and bathed in the sacred Panchapsara Lake, where Lord Vishnu had directly manifested Himself. At this place He gave away another ten thousand cows.

The Supreme Lord then traveled through the kingdoms of Kerala and Trigarta, visiting Lord Shiva's sacred city of Gokarna, where Lord Dhurjati [Shiva] directly manifests himself. After also visiting Goddess Parvati, who dwells on an island, Lord Balarama went to the holy district of Shurparaka and bathed in the Tapi, Payoshni and Nirvindhya rivers. He next entered the Dandaka forest and went to the river Reva, along which the city of Mahishmati is found. Then He bathed at Manu-tirtha and finally returned to Prabhasa. The Lord heard from some brahmanas how all the kings involved in the battle between the Kurus and Pandavas had been killed. From this He concluded that the earth was now relieved of her burden. Wanting to stop the club fight then raging between Bhima and Duryodhana on the battlefield, Lord Balarama went to Kurukshetra.

When Yudhishtira, Lord Krishna, Arjuna and the twin brothers Nakula and Sahadeva saw Lord Balarama, they offered Him respectful obeisances but said nothing, thinking "What has He come

here to tell us?" Lord Balarama found Duryodhana and Bhima with clubs in their hands, each furiously striving for victory over the other as they circled about skillfully. The Lord addressed them as follows.

[Lord Balarama said:] King Duryodhana! And Bhima! Listen! You two warriors are equal in fighting prowess. I know that one of you has greater physical power, while the other is better trained in technique. Since you are so evenly matched in fighting prowess, I do not see how either of you can win or lose this duel. Therefore, please stop this useless battle.

Shukadeva Gosvami continued: They did not accept Lord Balarama's request, O King, although it was logical, for their mutual enmity was irrevocable. Each of them constantly remembered the insults and injuries he had suffered from the other. Concluding that the battle was the arrangement of fate, Lord Balarama went back to Dvaraka. There He was greeted by Ugrasena and His other relatives, who were all delighted to see Him. Later Lord Balarama returned to Naimisharanya, where the sages joyfully engaged Him, the embodiment of all sacrifice, in performing various kinds of Vedic sacrifice. Lord Balarama was now retired from warfare. The all-powerful Lord Balarama bestowed upon the sages pure spiritual knowledge, by which they could see the whole universe within Him and also see Him pervading everything.

After executing with His wife the *avabhr̥tha* ablutions, the beautifully dressed and ornamented Lord Balarama, encircled by His immediate family and other relatives and friends, looked as splendid as the moon surrounded by its effulgent rays. Countless other such pastimes were performed by mighty Balarama, the unlimited and immeasurable Supreme Lord, whose mystic *Yoga-māyā* power makes Him appear to be a human being. All the activities of the unlimited Lord Balarama are amazing. Anyone who regularly remembers them at dawn and dusk will become very dear to the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Sri Vishnu.

—*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (Bhāgavata Purāṇa) » Canto 10: The Summum Bonum*
 » Chapter 79 » Verses 1-34 » Translation By the Disciples of His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Svami Prabhupada

WHEN BALARAMA WENT TO NAIMISHARANYA
Disciples of His Divine Grace
 A. C. Bhaktivedanta Svami Prabhupada

[When Lord Balarama] went to the holy place of pilgrimage at Naimisharanya,... the sages, saintly persons and brahmanas all stood up to receive Him. They understood that Lord Balarama, although a *kṣatriya*, was now retired from the fighting business. The brahmanas and the sages, who were always for peace and tranquillity, were very pleased at this. All of them embraced Balarama with great affection and induced Him to perform various kinds of sacrifices in that sacred spot of Naimisharanya. Actually Lord Balarama had no business performing the sacrifices recommended for ordinary human beings; He is the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and therefore He Himself is the enjoyer of all such sacrifices. As such, His exemplary action in performing sacrifices was only to give a lesson to the common man, to show how one should abide by the injunctions of the Vedas."

—*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (Bhāgavata Purāṇa) » Canto 10: The Summum Bonum*
 » Chapter 79 » Verses 30 » Purport By the Disciples of His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Svami Prabhupada

LORD BALARAMA AND ROMAHARSHANA
His Divine Grace
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Naimisharanya is still existing in India, and in ancient times it was especially used for the meetings of great sages and saintly persons with the aim of understanding spiritual life and self-realization. When Lord Balarama visited that place there was a great sacrifice being performed by a great assembly of transcendentalists. Such meetings were planned to last thousands of years. When Lord Balarama arrived, all the participants in the meeting—great sages, ascetics, brahmanas and learned scholars—immediately arose from their seats and welcomed Him with great honor and respect. Some offered Him respects by standing up and then paying obeisances, and those who were elderly great sages and brahmanas offered Him blessings after standing up. After this formality, Lord Balarama was offered a suitable seat, and everyone present worshiped Him. Everyone in the assembly stood up in the presence of Balarama because they knew



Him to be the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Education or learning means to understand the Supreme Personality of Godhead; therefore, although Lord Balarama appeared on the earth as a *kṣatriya*, all the brahmanas and sages stood up because they knew who Lord Balarama was. Unfortunately, after being worshiped and seated in His place, Lord Balarama saw Romaharshana, the disciple of Vyasadeva (the literary incarnation of Godhead), still sitting on the *vyāsāsana*. He had neither gotten up from his seat nor offered Him respects. Because he was seated on the *vyāsāsana*, he foolishly thought himself greater than the Lord; therefore he did not get down from his seat or bow down before the Lord.

Lord Balarama then considered the history of Romaharshana: he was born in a *sūta* family, or a mixed family, born of a *brāhmaṇa* woman and a *kṣatriya* man. Therefore although Romaharshana considered Balarama a *kṣatriya*, he should not have remained sitting on a higher seat; according to his position by birth he should not even have accepted the higher sitting position, because many learned brahmanas and sages were present. Lord Balarama also observed that Romaharshana not only refused to come down from his exalted seat but did not even stand up and offer his respects when Balaramaji entered the assembly. Lord Balarama did not like the audacity of Roma-

harshana and, becoming very angry at him, declared from His seat, “This man, Romaharshana, is so impudent that he has accepted a higher seat than that of all the respectable brahmanas present here, although he was born in a degraded *pratiloma* family.”

When a person is seated on the *vyāsāsana*, he does not generally have to stand to receive a particular person entering the assembly, but in this case the situation was different because Lord Baladeva is not an ordinary human being. Therefore, although Romaharshana Suta was voted to the *vyāsāsana* by all the brahmanas, he should have followed the behavior of other learned sages and brahmanas present and should have known that Lord Balarama is the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Respects are always due Him, even though such respects can be avoided in the case of an ordinary man. The appearance of Krishna and Balarama is especially meant for reestablishment of the religious principles. As stated in the *Bhagavad-gītā*, the highest religious principle is to surrender to the Supreme Personality of Godhead. *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* also confirms that the topmost perfection of religion is to be engaged in the devotional service of the Lord.

When Lord Balarama saw that Romaharshana Suta did not understand the highest principle of religion in spite of his having studied all the Vedas, He certainly could not support his position. Romaharshana Suta had been given the chance to become a perfect *brāhmaṇa*, but because of his ill behavior in his relationship with the Supreme Personality of Godhead, his low birth was immediately remembered. Romaharshana Suta had been given the position of a *brāhmaṇa*, but he had not been born in the family of a *brāhmaṇa*; he had been born in a *pratiloma* family. According to the Vedic concept, there are two kinds of mixed family heritage, called *anuloma* and *pratiloma*. When a male is united with a female of a lower caste, the offspring is called *anuloma*; but when a male unites with a woman of a higher caste, the offspring is called *pratiloma*. Romaharshana Suta belonged to a *pratiloma* family because his father was a *kṣatriya* and his mother a *brāhmaṇa*. Because Romaharshana’s transcendental realization was not perfect, Lord Balarama remembered his *pratiloma* heritage. The idea is that any man may

be given the chance to become a *brāhmaṇa*, but if he improperly uses the position of a *brāhmaṇa* without actual realization, then his elevation to the brahminical position is not valid.

After seeing the deficiency of realization in Romaharshana Suta, Lord Balarama decided to chastise him for being puffed up. Lord Balarama therefore said, “This man is liable to be awarded the death punishment because although he has the good qualification of being a disciple of Lord Vyasadeva, and although he has studied all the Vedic literature from this exalted personality, he was not submissive in the presence of the Supreme Personality of Godhead.” As stated in the *Bhagavad-gītā*, a person who is actually a *brāhmaṇa* and is very learned must automatically become very gentle also. But although Romaharshana Suta was very learned and had been given the chance to become a *brāhmaṇa*, he had not become gentle. From this we can understand that one who is puffed up by material acquisitions cannot acquire the gentle behavior befitting a *brāhmaṇa*. The learning of such a person is as good as a valuable jewel decorating the hood of a serpent. Despite the valuable jewel on the hood, a serpent is still a serpent and is as fearful as an ordinary serpent. If a person does not become meek and humble, all his studies of the Vedas and Puranas and his vast knowledge of the shastras are simply outward dress, like the costume of a theatrical artist dancing on the stage.

Lord Balarama considered, “I have appeared in order to chastise false persons who are internally impure but externally pose themselves as very learned and religious. My killing of such persons is proper, to check them from further sinful activity.” Lord Balarama had avoided taking part in the Battle of Kurukshetra, and yet because of His position as an incarnation, the reestablishment of religious principles was His prime duty. Considering these points, He killed Romaharshana Suta simply by striking him with a *kuśa* straw, which was nothing but a blade of grass. If someone questions how Lord Balarama could kill Romaharshana Suta simply by striking him with a blade of *kuśa* grass, the answer is given in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* by the use of the word *prabhu* (“master”). The Lord’s position is always transcendental, and because He is omnipotent He can act as He likes, without being obliged to follow the material laws and principles. Thus it

was possible for Him to kill Romaharshana Suta simply by striking him with a blade of *kuśa* grass.

At the death of Romaharshana Suta, everyone present became much aggrieved and cried out, “Alas! Alas!” Although all the brahmanas and sages present knew Lord Balarama to be the Supreme Personality of Godhead, they did not hesitate to protest the Lord’s action. They humbly submitted, “Our dear Lord, we think that Your action is not in line with the religious principles. Dear Lord Yadunandana, we may inform You that we brahmanas posted Romaharshana Suta on that exalted position for the duration of this great sacrifice. He was seated on the *vyāsāsana* by our election, and when one is seated on the *vyāsāsana*, it is improper for him to stand up to receive a person. Moreover, we awarded Romaharshana Suta an undisturbed duration of life.

Under the circumstances, since Your Lordship has killed him without knowing all these facts, we think that Your action is equal to killing a *brāhmaṇa*. Dear Lord, deliverer of all fallen souls, we know for certain that You are the knower of all Vedic principles. You are the master of all mystic powers; therefore the Vedic injunctions cannot ordinarily be applied to You. But we respectfully advise You to show Your causeless mercy upon others by kindly atoning for this killing of Romaharshana Suta. We do not, however, suggest what kind of act You should perform to atone for killing him; we simply suggest that You adopt some method of atonement so that others may follow Your action. What is done by a great personality is followed by the ordinary man.”

!! Sri Sri Nitai Gaurchandra Jayati !!

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Quotations from the books, letters, and lectures of
His Divine Grace

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The Lord replied, “Yes, I must atone for this action, which may have been proper for Me but is improper for others; therefore, I think it is My duty to execute a suitable act of atonement enjoined in the authorized scriptures. Simultaneously I can also give this Romaharshana Suta life again, with a span of long duration, sufficient strength and full power of the senses. Not only this, but if you desire I shall be glad to award him anything else you may ask. I shall be very glad to grant all these boons to fulfill your desires.” This statement by Lord Balarama definitely confirms that the Supreme Personality of Godhead is free to act in any way. Although His killing of Romaharshana Suta may be considered improper, He could immediately counteract it with greater profit to all. Therefore, one should not imitate the actions of the Supreme Personality of Godhead; one should simply follow the instructions of the Lord.

All the great, learned sages present realized that although they considered the action of Lord Balarama improper, the Lord was immediately able to compensate with greater profits. Not wanting to detract from the mission of the Lord in killing Romaharshana Suta, all of them prayed, “Our dear Lord, the uncommon use of Your *kuśa* weapon to kill Romaharshana Suta may remain as it is; because You desired to kill him, he should not be brought to life again. At the same time, Your Lordship may remember that we sages and brahmanas voluntarily gave him long life; therefore, such a benediction should not be nullified.” Thus the request of all the learned brahmanas in the assembly was ambiguous because they wanted to keep intact their benediction that Romaharshana Suta would continue to live until the end of the great sacrifice, but at the same time they did not want to nullify Balarama’s killing him.

The Supreme Personality of Godhead therefore solved the problem in a manner befitting His exalted position. He said, “Because the son is produced from the body of the father, the Vedas enjoin that the son is the father’s representative. Therefore I say that Ugrashrava Suta, the son of Romaharshana Suta, should henceforth take his father’s position and continue the discourses on the Puranas, and because you wanted Romaharshana to have

a long duration of life, this benediction will be transferred to his son. The son, Ugrashrava, will therefore have all the facilities you offered—a long duration of life in a good and healthy body, with no disturbances and full strength of all the senses.” Lord Balarama then implored all the sages and brahmanas that aside from the benediction offered to the son of Romaharshana, they should ask from Him any other benediction, and He would be prepared to fulfill it immediately. The Lord thus placed Himself in the position of an ordinary *kṣatriya* and informed the sages that He did not know in what way He could atone for His killing of Romaharshana, but whatever they would suggest He would be glad to accept. The brahmanas could understand the purpose of the Lord, and thus they suggested that He atone in a manner beneficial to them. They said, “Our dear Lord, there is a very powerful demon of the name Balvala. He is the son of Ilvala, and he visits this sacred place of sacrifice every fortnight on the full moon and moonless days and creates a great disturbance to the discharge of our duties in the sacrifice. O descendant of the Dasharha family, we all request You to kill this demon. We think that if You kindly kill him, that will be Your atonement on our behalf. The demon occasionally comes here and profusely throws upon us contaminated, impure things like pus, blood, stool, urine and wine; he pollutes this sacred place by showering such filth upon us. After killing Balvala, You may continue touring all the sacred places of pilgrimage for twelve months, and in that way You will be completely freed from all contamination. That is our prescription.”

—Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (Bhāgavata Purāṇa) » Krishna Book By His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Svami Prabhupada

TRAVELING ON PILGRIMAGE NOT NECESSARY

Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura

(1)

*mana, tumi tirthe sada rata
ayodhya, mathura, maya, kasi, kanci, abantiya,
dvarabati, ar ache jata*

My dear mind, you are always attached to all the different places of pilgrimage such as Ayodhya, Mathura, Maya, Kasi (Varanasi), Kancipura, Avantiya, Dvaravati, and so on.

(2)

*tumi caho bhramibare, e sakala bare bare,
mukti-labha koribara tare
se sakala taba bhrama, nirarthaka parisrama,
citta sthira tirtha nahi kore*

You want to travel to all these holy places of pilgrimage again and again for the sake of obtaining liberation. But it is clear that your heart is not becoming resolutely fixed up by going to all these places; therefore all of your wanderings are simply useless labor.

(3)

*tirtha-phal sadhu-sanga, sadhu-sange antaranga,
sri-krsna-bhajana manohar
jatha sadhu, tatha tirtha, sthira kori' nija citta,
sadhu-sanga koro nirantar*

The real benefit of any place of pilgrimage is the company of the pure-hearted devotees of the Lord living there. Establishing intimate and friendly relations with such great souls, let your mind be captivated by performing the charming worship of Lord Krsna in their association. Actually any place in the entire world becomes a worshipable place of pilgrimage if the Lord's devotees are living there. Thus you should immediately seek out such a place, wherever you happen to be, and you should become fixed up in Krsna consciousness by constantly remaining in the company of such devotees.

(4)

*je tirtha vaisnava nai, se tirtha nahi jai,
ki labha hantiya dura-desa
jathay vaisnava-gana, sei stana brndabana,
sei sthane ananda asesa*

Personally, I never bother to visit any so-called place of pilgrimage which is devoid of the presence of unalloyed devotees, for what other worthwhile benefit could possibly be gained by taking the trouble of walking to such faraway places? Only that place which is graced by the presence of the devotees is actually Vrndavana, and only there can you come into contact with unlimited spiritual pleasure.

(5)

*krsna-bhakti jei sthane, mukti dasi seikhane,
salila tathay mandakini
giri tatha govardhana, bhumi tatha brndabana,
abirbhuta apani hladini*

Liberation personified is herself the humble maidservant of that place which is surcharged with devotion to Krsna. All the water at that place is the celestial Ganges, every hill there is Govardhana, and the very earth is indeed Vrndavana. Only such a place can manifest the eternal spiritual joy which is revealed by the Lord's pleasure-potency.

(6)

*binoda kohiche bhai, bhramiya ki phal pai,
vaisnava-sebana mor brata*

I ask you now, dear brother, what benefit would I get by circumambulating all the holy places of pilgrimage? Personally, my vow is to serve the Vaisnavas with firm resolution and untiring endeavor.

—Vaiṣṇava-siddhānta-mala (A Garland of Vaiṣṇava Truths) by Śrīla Thakura Bhaktivinoda printed in 1892 and distributed as a preaching pamphlet for spreading the Nama Hata Program (the Marketplace of the Holy Name) » Kalyana Kaplataru of Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Thakura » Translation by Dasaratha-suta dasa

