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DARSHAN OF JAGANNATH AT RATHA-YATRA

His Divine Grace

A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

Devotee: Prabhupada, can you explain a little more about *Ratha-yātrā*. Anyone who takes part in *Ratha-yātrā*, are they liberated?

Prabhupada: Certainly.

Devotee: Does that mean they will not take birth again?

Prabhupada: Yes, provided they take it seriously. Otherwise, if they keep their mentality differently, then according to their mind they have to get a body. But just like so many boys, they come here in the beginning out of curiosity, but gradually they get the chance of becoming devotees. Similarly, if they take the chance then they will be liberated. They come out of curiosity, but if they take it seriously, then they will be liberated. Just like the hospital is meant for curing disease. So one should take the treatment. If one simply goes and visits the hospital thinking, "Now I am cured," how will it be done? Suppose if I advertise that, "Anyone who simply

visits this hospital will be cured of disease." If someone thinks, "I have come here and now I am going," then how will they be cured? If one sees Jagannath on the *Ratha-yātrā*, their way for liberation is open, but if they come back again and entangle themselves, then? One goes to the doctor. He gives an injection and the disease is cured. But if he again comes back and does the same thing so that he develops this disease again, then whose fault is it? This is called *hasti-snāna*. The elephant takes bath very nicely but then as soon as it comes on the bank of the river or the lake he takes dust and throws it all over his body again. If we do that, then we shall always remain dirty.

It is a fact that by seeing Jagannath one becomes *mukta*, liberated. But if he again comes to *māyā*, then who can check him? Just like you are all on the path of liberation, but if you again come back to *māyā*, then where is your liberation? If someone comes here and sees that their path for liberation is open, then they should protect themselves. Just a like disease. The fever is subsided, now one should be careful not to relapse the fever. ... Not that, "Now I have seen Jagannath. My liberation is guaranteed. Now I can do anything I want." This mentality will not give you liberation. You have seen Jagannath and your sinful activities are neutralized. Now don't commit them again! Now make progress! Then your liberation is guaranteed. *nāmo balād yasya hi pāpa buddhiḥ* — at every initiation ceremony we teach that even once chanting Hare Krishna is sufficient to make us pure from all sinful activities. But if we commit sin again in the hope that, "Because I am chanting, this will be neutralized",

that is the greatest sin. So on one side you should always chant Hare Krishna mantra so that you may not fall down, and on the other side you should be careful: “Now no illicit sex life, no intoxication, no meat-eating.” In this way, if you carefully make progress, then your liberation is guaranteed. ❧

— From a lecture in Los Angeles. 1 July 1971.

DUTIES AT KURUKSHETRA DURING A SOLAR ECLIPSE

Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur Prabhupada

Let me briefly tell you about the duties of *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas* during a solar eclipse.

It is a custom to take a holy bath at Brahma Sarovara during a solar eclipse. Krishna went there from Dwarka on a chariot with Balaram. On the pretext of taking a holy bath, the *vrajavāsīs* also went there on that occasion. The *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas* who attempt to arrange a meeting of Radha and Govinda should make a special endeavor so as to make the event a grand success.

Following the example of Kurukshetra, Lord Krishna in his second appearance as Sri Gaurasundara revealed the *gopīs'* mood of separation by singing appropriate songs before Lord Jagannath. The arrangement for taking a holy bath, etc., during a solar eclipse is meant for washing off the *karmis'* sinful reactions and to give them the opportunity of chanting the Lord's holy names on that most auspicious occasion.

The *jñānis* try to use this opportunity to strengthen their objective of being merged into the Absolute Truth. But although the *gopīs'* raptness appears similar to that of the *jñānis*, they remain separate despite being apparently merged into Krishna. By understanding this particular pastime, the *jñānis* may give up their theory of oneness with God and their sentimental mood. Thus, all three classes of people should go there for the eclipse. ❧

— From a letter dated 17 October 1928. From *Patrāmṛta, Nectar from Letters*. Translated from Bengali by Bhumiapati Das. Produced and Published by Isvara Das. Touchstone Media. 2012. Page 37.

THE FORMS OF JAGANNATH, BALADEV, SUBHADRA

Srila Thakur Bhaktivinode

What are the characteristics of Sri Jagannath, Sri Baladev, and Sri Subhadra?

Jagannatha, the emblem of God, has no other form than eyes and hands, which show that God sees, knows,

and creates. Balaram is the source of *jīva-śakti*, Subhadra is *māyā-śakti*, and Sudarshan is the energy of will. ❧

— From “The Temple of Jagannātha at Puri”. Excerpts printed in *Śrī Bhaktivinoda Vāñī Vaibhava*. Compiled by and with questions from Sri Sundarananda Vidyavinode. Translated from Bengali by Bhumiapati Das. Produced and published by Isvara Das. Touchstone Media. 2002. Page 128.



LORD JAGANNATH'S RETURN RATHA-YATRA

Part Two: The Gaudiya Understanding

In part one of this presentation, we addressed a question that many devotees have: “How are we to understand the return *Ratha-yātrā* in Jagannath Puri?” Therein we described the common understanding in Odisha, which is that Jagannath has to return to his newly-married wife Lakshmi.

However, considering that *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas* deem the *Ratha-yātrā* to represent the ecstatic emotions of the residents of Vrindavan taking Krishna home from Kurukshetra, there is also a sweet and more internal understanding of the return *Ratha-yātrā*.

We will also address a second important question in this final instalment: “Did Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu take part in the return *Ratha-yātrā*, and if so, how did he participate?”

It might be helpful if we first contemplate something about the profound mood and emotions experienced by the *vrajavāsīs* at Kurukshetra. They were going through a whirlpool of conflicting ecstatic feelings. On one hand there was the sweet bliss of finally meeting with Krishna again after such a long time — a meeting that they had not been sure was ever going to happen. At the same time there was some sulkingness, especially amongst the *vraja-gopīs*: “You left us! You promised you would return but you didn't!”

Although they were experiencing the highest happiness of again meeting with their beloved Krishna, they also couldn't forget the fact that he had left them.



Painting by Yadurani Dasi

Krishna leaving Vrindavan

Other emotions they were poignantly experiencing included the fact that although they were so very, very happy to be reunited with Krishna, they were unhappy with the opulent, regal atmosphere present there at Kurukshetra.

They wanted him to come home to Vrindavan.

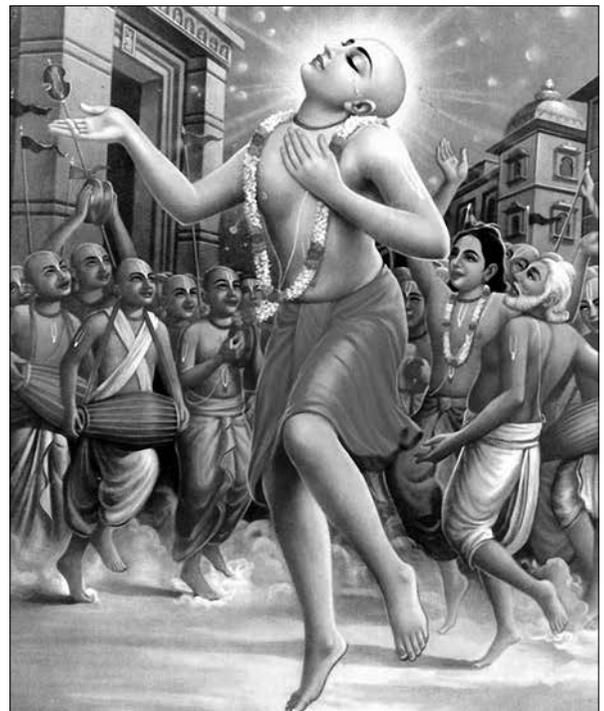
Aside from this, there was yet another conflicting feeling churning the waves of their ocean-like hearts: They were painfully aware that Krishna would soon leave them again to return to Dwarka. And after that departure they didn't know if they would ever see him again.

The atmosphere in Jagannath Puri is a kind of emotional mirror of the mood at Kurukshetra when Krishna met the *vrajavāsīs* there.

These seemingly opposite emotions work together. Thus, Sri Srimad Gour Govinda Maharaja described that the two opposites, union and separation, exist simultaneously in one container — Puri — where the atmosphere is the inconceivable *aiśvarya-mādhurya-yugala-milana*, a simultaneous combination of opulence and sweetness. As the *vrajavāsīs* experienced when they visited Kurukshetra, there are the feelings of union in Puri. Having *darśana* of Jagannath Krishna provided unlimited pleasure for Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. Yet at the same time in

Jagannath Puri, as it was for the *gopīs* in Kurukshetra, there are also the pangs of imminent separation.

So then what about our above question: “Did Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu take part in Lord



Unknown artist

Mahaprabhu dances at Ratha-yātrā

Unknown photographer



Jagannath Mandir in Puri in the 1890s

Jagannath's Bahudha, Return *Ratha-yātrā*, and if so, what was his mood?"

Srila Krishnadas Kaviraj Goswami describes in *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta* (*madhya* 15.16), that during the four month period of *cāturmāsya*, the associates of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu took part in all of the festivals of Lord Jagannath in Puri. When I first came across that statement I remember thinking to myself, "ALL of the festivals? And if so, then what about the return *Ratha-yātrā*?"

Moreover, after contemplating further on the matter, it seemed obvious to me that the devotees of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu never would have

attended the return *Ratha-yātrā* if Mahaprabhu didn't observe it. Kaviraj Goswami says that those devotees were more attached to his association than even having *darśana* of Lord Jagannath. So it seemed to me that Mahaprabhu must have attended the festival.

If so, what was Mahaprabhu's mood at that time? Can we accept that he was helping to take Krishna away from the Vrindavan-like Gundicha temple to return him to the Dwarka-like atmosphere of the Sri Mandir?

With these thoughts in mind, I began further research on the subject. As part of that research, I inquired from many *sādhus* and learned persons in Puri, including the King of Puri and many of the *mahānts*, spiritual leaders, of various groups there.

Basically, the reply I got was, "No. He didn't observe that festival."

Srila Murari Gupta was one of the personal associates of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu in Nabadwip. He wrote, in Sanskrit, one of the first biographies of Lord Chaitanya, entitled, *Śrī Kṛṣṇa-caitanya-caritāmṛtam*. Therein he speaks about Mahaprabhu's attendance at the return *Ratha-yātrā*. He elaborates slightly on it, saying, *gaura-candro ratham anugata* — "Moonlike Gauranga followed *behind* the cart of Lord Jagannath." (4.21.2)

Finally I had an answer that I found satisfying! In the same way that Radharani and the *gopīs* followed behind the chariot of Akrura when he was taking Krishna away from Vrindavan, Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu followed behind the cart of Lord Jagannath in Puri when he was leaving the Vrindavan-like Gundicha Mandir. Neither the *gopīs* nor Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu pulled the Lord's cart to Mathura or to the Puri Sri Mandir. Rather, they were following behind (*anugata*); crying and pleading, "Don't go! Don't go!"

Jagannath Puri Dham has many names. It is called Purushottam Kshetra (the place of the Supreme Person), Sri Kshetra (the place of Lakshmi Devi), Anna Kshetra (the place of *prasādam* rice), and Durlabha Kshetra (a difficult place to enter). Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati also addressed it as Vipralambha Kshetra, the place of separation. Yet another name is Gupta Dham, a hidden, mysterious place. I hope from this humble presentation that the *vaiṣṇavas* may have a deeper understanding of this festival and this very deep, mysterious abode of separation. 🙏

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