

Godhead is light. Nescience is darkness. Where there is Godhead there is no nescience

Rs. 15

BACK TO GODHEAD

The Magazine of the Hare Krishna Movement Dec 2006



The Song Goes Ever On

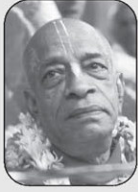
Happy New Year
Pilgrimage to Bangladesh

BTG Index 2006

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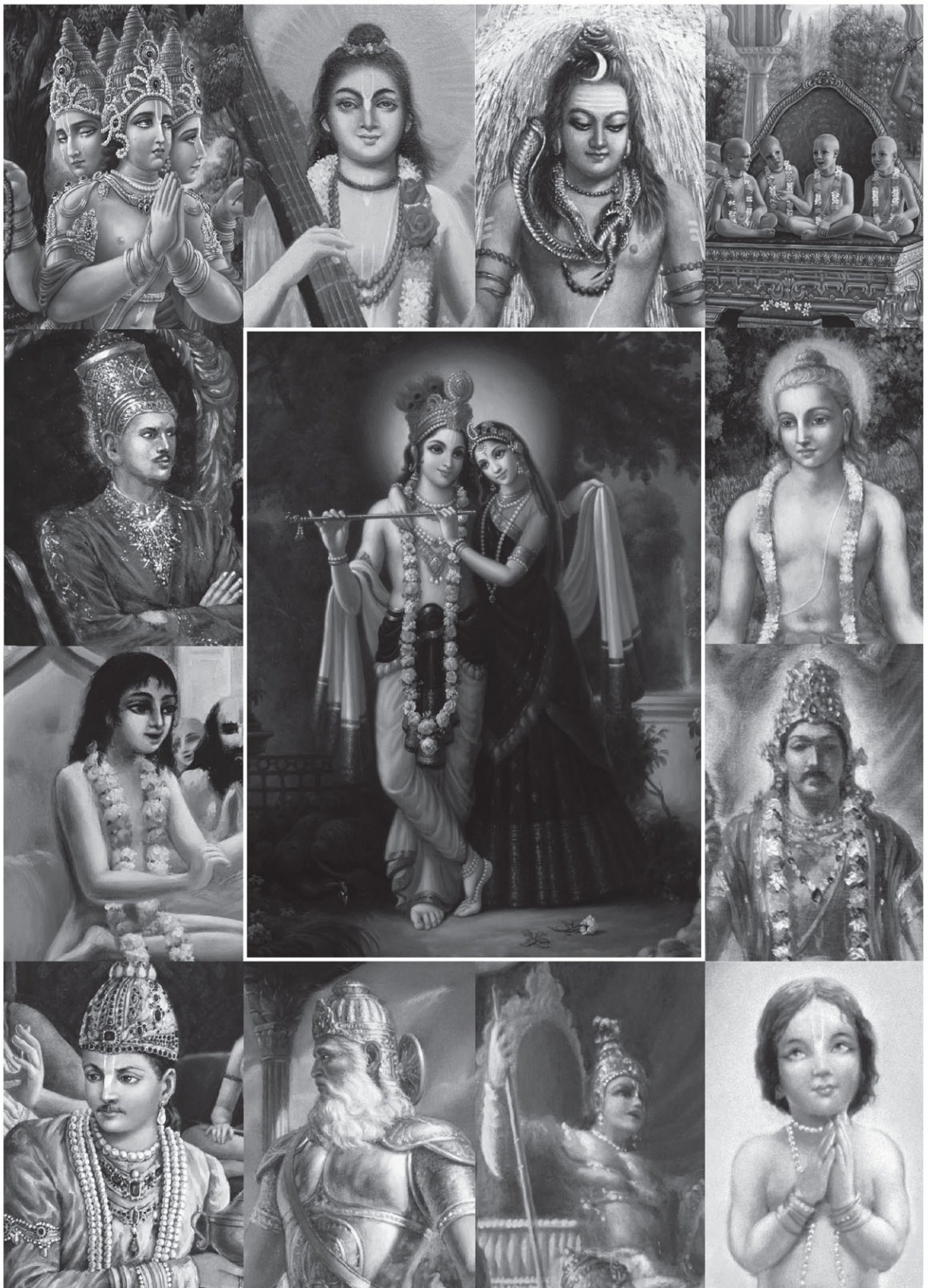
**Special
Issue on
Deity
Worship**

**Jan
2007**



OUR PURPOSES

• To help all people discern reality from illusion, spirit from matter, the eternal from the temporary. • To expose the faults of materialism. • To offer guidance in the Vedic techniques of spiritual life. • To preserve and spread the Vedic culture. • To celebrate the chanting of the holy names of God as taught by Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu • To help every living being remember and serve Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead.



Knowledge about Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa is revealed by the twelve mahājanas.

HOW TO RECEIVE KṚṢṢNA'S MESSAGE

*Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself sets up the system by
which His teachings find their way to us.*

by His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda

Founder-Ācārya of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness

*śrī-prahrāda uvāca
kaumāra ācāret prājño
dharmān bhāgavatān iha
durlabhaṁ mānuṣaṁ janma
tad apy adhruvam arthadam*

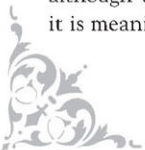
Prahlāda Mahārāja said: One who is sufficiently intelligent should use the human form of body from the very beginning of life—in other words, from the tender age of childhood—to practice the activities of devotional service, giving up all other engagements. The human body is most rarely achieved, and although temporary like other bodies, it is meaningful because in human life



one can perform devotional service. Even a slight amount of sincere devotional service can give one complete perfection.

—Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 7.6.1

Today I shall explain the importance of Kṛṣṇa consciousness as it was conceived by one of the greatest devotees in this disciplic succession. You know we are in disciplic succession. We do not manufacture anything by mental concoction. We do not approve that method. We receive knowledge from the authorities, and out of many such ācāryas, or authorities, who



**Who is an
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behaves in
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and teaches
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that
knowledge.**

have appeared and disappeared, Prahlāda Mahārāja is one.

We don't say "born" and "died," but "appeared" and "disappeared". This is the explanation: None of us, neither Kṛṣṇa nor we living entities, are born or die; we appear and disappear. In the *Bhagavad-gītā*, Lord Kṛṣṇa says on the battlefield, "My dear Arjuna, don't think that you or Me or all the kings and soldiers who have assembled on this battlefield did not exist in the past and will not exist in the future." That means they existed in the past, they're existing at present and, they would exist also in the future. That means we are all eternal.

The body is changing, and the final change, when you transmigrate from one body to another, is called death. But actually, there is no death. *Na jāyate mriyate vā kadācit* [*Bhagavad-gītā* 2.20]. In the *Bhagavad-gītā* you'll find that the living entity is never born and never dies. *Na hanyate hanyamāne śarīre*. One may say, "I see that he is dying." But he is not dying; he is finishing this present body.

An example is given: *vāsāmsi jīrṇāni yathā vihāya* [*Bhagavad-gītā* 2.22]. Just as one changes his dress, when the present body is unworkable he changes to a new body. When the eyes cannot see, there is blindness. Similarly, when the hand cannot work, the leg cannot work, the tongue cannot work—because at the last stage these mechanical arrangements of this body will stop functioning—that is called death. Try to understand: If I cannot see, that does not mean I am dead. Similarly, when the senses of the body cannot function, that also does not mean that I am dead. This is to be understood with a little intelligence and a cool head.

Prahlāda Mahārāja, a great devotee, is in the line of disciplic succession. He's considered one of the great ācāryas, authorities. Who is an ācārya? An ācārya is one who knows the intricacies of Vedic knowledge, behaves in terms of that knowledge, and teaches his disciple in terms of that knowledge. The word ācārya means a person whose behavior is to be followed—we don't just follow someone according to our taste—and that ācārya comes in the standard disciplic succession.

TWELVE GREAT AUTHORITIES

We are discussing the instructions of Prahlāda Mahārāja because he happens to be one of the stalwart ācāryas. The names of such authorized ācāryas are mentioned in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. Who are they? *svayambhūh nāradaḥ śambhuḥ* . . . [*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 6.3.20]. *Svayambhūh* means Brahmā. Brahmā is born without any material father and mother. Therefore he is called *svayambhūh*, "self-manifested." He is the only living creature within this universe born without a father and mother. That means without a material father and mother. But he has his father. His father is the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Nārāyaṇa. Brahmā is born out of the lotus flower grown from the abdomen of Nārāyaṇa. Therefore he's called *svayambhūh*. Before him there was no existence of material creation.

Next is Nārada. Nārada is born from Brahmā. Then Śambhu, who is also born of Brahmā. Śambhu is Lord Śiva. He is

also one of the ācāryas.

Next are the Kumāras, who are also sons of Brahmā. The word *kumāra* means *brahmacāri*, celibate. When they were born, Brahmā wanted to create living entities to fill the universe, so he wanted many sons and grandsons.

Brahmā requested his four Kumāra sons, "My dear boys, get yourself married and increase the population."

But the Kumāras said, "My dear father, we are not going to marry. We are not going to be entangled in this material way of life. We shall remain as *brahmacāris* and cultivate Kṛṣṇa consciousness."

Oh, the father was very angry.

"Oh, you are refusing my order?"

From his anger Lord Śiva was born. Lord Śiva's name is also Rudra because he was crying (*rudra*) from the very beginning of his birth. He too is one of the authorities.

Kapila, another ācārya, is the son of Devahūti, and He's considered an incarnation of the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

Next is Manu, the father of mankind. From *manuḥ*, the word "man" is derived.

Now Prahlāda's name comes. Then Janaka, the great king whose daughter, Sitā, was married to Lord Rāmacandra. Therefore, Sitā's name is also Jānaki, "the daughter of Mahārāja Janaka." He is also a great authority.

Then Bhīṣma. You have heard the name of Bhīṣma, the grandfather of Arjuna. He is also one of the authorities.

Then Mahārāja Bali, a king. He was a grandson of Prahlāda Mahārāja. All these persons became authorities by their exemplary character for advancing in Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Therefore they are considered authorities.

Next is *vaiyāsakīḥ*, which means "the son of Vyāsadeva," or Śukadeva Gosvāmī. He's also an authority. And the verse ends with the word *vayam*, "we," meaning Yamarāja, the controller of sinful activities and the speaker of the verse. He is like the superintendent of police, appointed by Kṛṣṇa. He is also one of the authorities. How can you deny the superintendent of police as an authority? As the superintendent of police is

an authority in the state, so Yamarāja is an authority.

AN ATHEIST'S SAINTLY SON

Today we are speaking about the instructions of one of the authorities, Prahlaḍa Mahārāja. What is the history of Prahlaḍa Mahārāja? He was born in the family of a great atheist. His father was a great atheist, Hiranyakaśipu. *Hiranya* means gold, and *kaśipu* means enjoyment in soft bedding. He was concerned with two things: money and sense enjoyment. That was his business, and he wanted to train his boy in that way. But fortunately, the boy happened to be a great devotee by the instruction of Nārada. He was born in the family of atheists—his father was a great atheist. But because he was blessed by a great devotee, Nārada, he became a great devotee.

Now, Prahlaḍa took the opportunity of spreading Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Where? In his school. He was a five-year-old boy, and as soon as he would get the opportunity, he would spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness to his classmates. That was his business.

And so, many times Prahlaḍa Mahārāja's father called in the teachers: "What education are you giving to my child? Why he is chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa? [Laughter.] Why are you spoiling my boy?" [Laughter.]

You see? So don't think that I am spoiling these boys and girls by teaching them Hare Kṛṣṇa.

So the teacher said, "My dear sir, I teach your son very nicely about politics, economics, and, as you want, to become a very clever man in the material world. But unfortunately I do not know wherefrom your son has learned this Hare Kṛṣṇa. So please excuse me. I am trying to make your son forget this nonsense Hare Kṛṣṇa, but I do not know how. By nature, he chants Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, and not only is he spoiling himself, but he's spoiling my whole school. [Laughter.] Because as soon as he chants Hare Kṛṣṇa, all the boys join with him, and they clap and they dance. So this is going on."

THE GAUḌĪYA VAIṢṆAVA SUCCESSION

Now, this edition of the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* here on the table is a great,

grand edition. Each verse contains eight commentaries by great stalwart devotees. They represent different disciplic successions of devotees. There are four authorized disciplic successions. As I have already mentioned, Brahmā is one of the authorities. He has a disciplic succession: from Brahmā to Nārada, from Nārada to Vyāsadeva, from Vyāsadeva to Madhvācārya, from Madhvācārya to—I am making a shortcut—Mādhavendra Purī, from Mādhavendra Purī to Īśvara Purī, from Īśvara Purī to Lord Caitanya, from Lord Caitanya to Svarūpa Dāmodara, from Svarūpa Dāmodara to the six Gosvāmīs, from the six Gosvāmīs to Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī, the author of *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, and from him to Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura, from Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura to Viśvanātha Cakravartī, from Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura to Jagannātha dāsa Bābājī, from Jagannātha dāsa Bābājī to Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, from Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura to Gaurakiśora dāsa Bābājī Mahārāja, and from Gaurakiśora dāsa Bābājī to my spiritual master. And then we are descended.

In this way, the disciplic succession is coming. What is the significance of the disciplic succession? If you receive knowledge from the descendants of these authorities, then you get perfect knowledge. Perfect knowledge is imparted by the supreme perfect, God, and it is received by Brahmā. And the same knowledge is handed over to Nārada. Nārada hands it over to Vyāsadeva, Vyāsadeva hands it over to Madhvācārya, and so on. If a ripe fruit on the top of the tree falls down all of a sudden, it is destroyed. But if it is handed over from up to down, down, down, then it comes as it is, and you can enjoy the undamaged fruit. Similarly, when knowledge is handed down by disciplic succession, then you can enjoy the reality.

That is confirmed in the *Bhagavad-gītā*. In the fourth chapter you'll find that Kṛṣṇa says, *imaṁ vivasvate yogam proktavān aham avyayam* [*Bhagavad-gītā* 4.1]. "First of all, I spoke this yoga system to Vivasvān." Vivasvān is the name of the controlling deity in the sun planet.

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As we have got many presidents, each higher planet has a president. According to Vedic language, they are known as the moon-god or the sun-god or Varuṇa, and so on. You also can occupy such posts if you become qualified. Just as you can become the President, you can also occupy the predominating post in the sun planet, in the moon planet, and in all the other planets. That is also confirmed in the *Bhagavad-gītā* [7.23]: *devān deva-yajo yānti*. Anyone who aspires to be elevated to the planetary system inhabited by the demigods can go there.

So Kṛṣṇa says, "First of all, I narrated this yoga system to Vivasvān." Vivasvān is the predominating deity of the sun. He was taught the *Bhagavad-gītā*. And Kṛṣṇa says, *Vivasvān manave prāha*: "And Vivasvān, this gentleman, spoke the truth about *Bhagavad-gītā* to Manu." I have already mentioned the name of Manu. Manu means the father of mankind. That means that from the sun planet, the message of *Bhagavad-gītā* was handed down to the chief man of this

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planet, the father of mankind, Manu. And Manu handed over this knowledge to his son named Ikṣvāku.

Ikṣvāku is a great king. He happens to be the original king in the family in which Lord Rāmacandra appeared. It is called *Sūrya-vamśa*, the descendants from the sun. There are two classes of *kṣatriyas*, or rulers. One is coming from the sun planet, and the other is coming down from the moon planet. According to the *Mahābhārata*, those of Indo-European stock also belong to the *kṣatriya* family.

Kṛṣṇa says in the next verse, *evam paramparā-prāptam imāṁ rājarṣayo viduḥ* [Bhagavad-gītā 4.2]. In this way, this knowledge was received by disciplic succession of *rājarṣis*. *Rājarṣi* means a monarch who is just like a sage. In the history given in the *Mahābhārata* there were many kings who were like sages. In name they were monarchs, but they were always thinking of the welfare of the citizens. Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira is an example.

Then Kṛṣṇa says, *sa kalāneha mahatā yogo naṣṭaḥ parantapa* [Bhagavad-gītā 4.2]: "Now this *paramparā* system, or disciplic

succession, has been broken by the influence of time." Just imagine. It was coming down from the sun planet, so there is every possibility of that occurring. Suppose I hand over some knowledge to you and you hand over to some other person, in succession. There is the possibility that there may be some deviation from the exact knowledge I delivered at the beginning. That is called the breakage of the *paramparā* system. Kṛṣṇa says, "That *paramparā* system, by the force of time, is now broken; therefore I again begin that *paramparā* system with you, Arjuna."

Therefore if we understand the *Bhagavad-gītā* as it was understood by Arjuna, then we get real knowledge. That is the way to understand *paramparā*. Although we are not present before Kṛṣṇa, if the message of Kṛṣṇa is received through the *paramparā* system as it was understood by Arjuna, then we get the message from Kṛṣṇa directly. This is the system. But if I interpret in my own way, then the *paramparā* system is broken.

I gave an account of our *paramparā* system from Lord Caitanya. We do not manufacture any knowledge by our fertile brain. We accept knowledge as it is coming down from the supreme authority. That is perfect knowledge. For example, we receive knowledge from our parents: "This is called a lamp, this is called a table, this is called a book." If you protest, "Why shall I call it a book? I may call it something else" you can do that, but that is a deviation from the knowledge.

The *paramparā* system is considered the perfect system of knowledge. I may be imperfect or my disciple may be imperfect, but if we stick to the knowledge coming down from the *paramparā* system, then we are perfect.

This is such a simple, nice thing. The parent teaches the child, "This is called a watch or a timepiece." If he accepts it, he hasn't got to make any research—"Why is it called a timepiece?" It is a very easy system. "My father has told me this is a timepiece. I accept it as a timepiece," and everyone will understand that this is a timepiece. But if I

manufacture some name out of my fertile brain—"This is this" oh, people will call me crazy. "What are you saying?" So the *paramparā* system is very nice.

Take the phrase "Man is mortal." You have learned from your parents or teachers that man is mortal. Now, if you want to research whether or not man is mortal, it will take a long, long time. But if you accept it from the authorities—"Man is mortal" your knowledge is perfect.

The *paramparā* system of knowledge is given in the Vedas. This system of knowledge is followed by the great *ācāryas*, and Prahlāda Mahārāja is one of the great *ācāryas*.

PRAHLĀDA'S ADVICE

Try to accept what Prahlāda Mahārāja is advising to his classmates. What is he advising? *kaumāra ācaret prajñō dharmān bhāgavatān iha* [Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 7.6.1]: "My dear friends, Kṛṣṇa consciousness should be practiced from childhood." Why childhood? Because if one is intelligent he can understand, "There is no certainty whether this is my childhood or my old age."

Generally we think that we die when we are old. But who can say that I'm not old enough to die in the next moment? If I have to gain something supernatural which will give me the ultimate benefit of my life, then why shall I wait for old age? Immediately let me begin. If Kṛṣṇa consciousness is a very nice thing, and if it will give me the highest benediction of life, then if I am intelligent I must begin it immediately, without any delay. But generally people think that childhood or youth should be enjoyed.

In one verse, Śaṅkarācārya laments that boys, youths, and old man are very happy in their materialistic way of life. A spiritualist like Śaṅkarācārya, or Lord Jesus Christ, is unhappy, "Oh, what foolish things they are doing!" That is the thankless task of persons who are spiritually enlightened. They can see plainly how others are spoiling their valuable life simply for sense gratification.

Prahlāda Mahārāja is teaching the same thing. He says that one should practise *dharmān bhāgavatān* from the begin-

ning of life. Dharma means occupational duty. "Religion" is not a perfect translation of the Sanskrit word *dharma*. Religion is a kind of faith. That we can change. But dharma means your occupational duty, which you cannot change. You have to execute it. What is our dharma? What is our compulsory duty? I have several times analyzed this fact. Our compulsory duty is to serve. Every one of us is serving, and all the boys and girls present here can know it. Nobody can deny that he or she is serving. Everyone is serving. That is our compulsory duty. I may change myself to become a Mohammedan or a Christian or a Hindu, but my real occupational duty is to render service to others. That cannot be changed.

That is the real enunciation of "religion."

Therefore in the Vedic system it is called *Sanātana-dharma*, the eternal occupational duty you cannot cease. Prahlāda Mahārāja is advising, *dharmān bhāgavatān*. *Bhāgavata* means "pertaining to Bhagavān." And Bhāgavan means the Supreme Personality of Godhead. *Bhāgavata* is the adjective form of the noun Bhāgavan. The real form of the word is *bhāgavat*. *Vat* means possessing, and *bhaga* means opulences. One who possess all the opulences is called *bhāgavat*. And from *bhāgavat* this word has come: *bhāgavata*.

So *bhāgavata* means pertaining to God and His devotees. This book is

called *Bhāgavata* because it deals only with the subject of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, nothing more. And you'll find described in this book the dealings between Bhāgavan, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and His devotees. There are two kinds of *bhāgavatam*: the devotee *bhāgavatam* and the book *Bhāgavatam*. Prahlāda Mahārāja advises that from childhood, if one is very intelligent, then his duty is *dharmān bhāgavatān*—he should engage himself in the execution of the occupational duties in relationship with devotees and the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

Thank you very much. ☸

IN MEMORIAM

The trustees of the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust India hereby place on record their great feeling of separation from, and deep gratitude for services rendered by His Holiness Narmadā Swami Mahārāja, who left this world the day after Śrīla Prabhupāda's disappearance day, *Kārtika Śukla Pañcamī*, at Śrī Vṛndāvana Dhāma. He was 79 years old.

Narmadā Mahārāja retired to Vṛndāvana 3 years ago, when ill health prevented him from continuing as Manager of the BBT at Juhu, Mumbai. He rendered very important and totally selfless service to the BBT there from 1982 onwards.

Narmadā Mahārāja joined ISKCON at an advanced age after attending the ISKCON Ratha-yātrā at Surat during 1981. So practically he served the BBT from the time he joined ISKCON. He rose to the post of Manager and Trustee from the humble service of godown (warehouse) manager, which was his first service in BBT.

Over the years, Narmadā Mahārāja developed the reputation of being an absolutely honest, no-nonsense man-



His Holiness Narmadā Swami Mahārāja

ager. He was an icon of devotion to duty. He was very strict in his dealings, but he had his "soft-side" which was also well known to many leaders of ISKCON in India. He was liberal to the temples in giving them BBT books as long as they made regular payments to the BBT. Because of his honesty, integrity and kindness, he was respected and well liked by both ISKCON India's senior leaders as

well as the ISKCON India temple presidents. His management skills were highly respected by all. It is understood that his diligence, integrity and management skills were a major contribution that helped the Juhu BBT to prosper in no small way.

Narmadā Mahārāja also served as temple president of ISKCON New Delhi, Juhu Mumbai, and Hyderabad. After retiring to Vṛndāvana he was bedridden, but until the end he was in full control of his mental faculties. His dealings during the final period of his life are a lesson in humility and in devotion to Śrī Śrī Rādhā Kṛṣṇa. The example he set of a person who knows that his departure from the material body is imminent

and thus fixed his mind on the Lord reminds us of Mahārāja Parikṣit and Mahārāja Khaṭvāṅga. His life in the Kṛṣṇa Consciousness movement was glorious and his departure from this material world was glorious. His life and the sterling example he set should be an inspiration to the younger generation of ISKCON devotees. ☸







The Song Goes Ever On

A brief look at Uddhava and the Uddhava Gitā.

by Satyarāja Dāsa

At a recent academic conference, I found myself engulfed in a discussion about the *Bhagavad-gītā*, the battlefield dialogue between Kṛṣṇa, or God, and his dedicated devotee Arjuna, the heroic warrior.

“The *Gītā* gives us the most profound philosophy,” I said to one of the scholars. “It shows us how Kṛṣṇa interacts with His loving devotees.”

A nearby eavesdropper, hearing only the barest details of my discussion, queried, “Oh, are you talking about *Gīta-govinda*, where Kṛṣṇa shows His love for Rādhā?”

“Well, no, I . . .”

Another scholar, standing only a few feet away, chimed in: “I think he was talking about the *Anugītā*, a summary of the *Bhagavad-gītā* found later in the *Mahābhārata*.”

At an academic conference of scholars who specialize in India’s religious texts, my reference to “the *Gītā*” turned out to be a careless one—India is full of *Gītās*, the *Bhagavad-gītā* being one amongst many.

When I returned home, I decided to look at Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books to see which *Gītās* he considered important. To my surprise, in the Third Canto of the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (3.4.32, purport), Prabhupāda says something interesting about the *Uddhava Gītā*: “Undoubtedly, the *Bhagavad-gītā* was spoken by the Lord on the

Battlefield of Kurukṣetra just to encourage Arjuna to fight, and yet to complete the transcendental knowledge of *Bhagavad-gītā*, the Lord instructed Uddhava. The Lord wanted Uddhava to fulfill His mission and disseminate knowledge which He had not spoken even in *Bhagavad-gītā*.”

It is not that Śrīla Prabhupāda is here minimizing the importance of the *Bhagavad-gītā*, which elsewhere he praises as the most profound philosophy known to man. But he is saying something about the unique importance of the *Uddhava Gītā*.

KṚṢṆA’S OTHER GĪTĀ

The *Uddhava Gītā* is found in the Eleventh Canto of the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, Chapters 7-29. It is one of many *Gītās* associated with the worship of Kṛṣṇa. Though the *Bhagavad-gītā* is arguably the most famous of these *Gītās*, the tradition offers us *Gīta-govinda*, *Gopī Gītā*, *Veṅṇu Gītā*, *Bhramara Gītā*, and several others. *Gītā* means “song,” and within the context of sacred literature, it refers to particularly mellifluous and blessed songs of divine truth, uttered by great devotees or by the Lord himself. The songs include both philosophical and devotional outpourings.

Uddhava Gītā is among the most important of the genre, for it focuses on Kṛṣṇa’s final instructions before leaving the earthly plane. Moreover, these instructions

The Uddhava Sandeśa



He conveys the Lord's message: He is all-pervasive, and so the *gopīs* are always united with Him in love. But these words ring hollow in the presence of the *gopīs'* passionate longing for the love of their lives. Still, Uddhava tells them that they must cultivate the ability to see Kṛṣṇa spiritually, in their heart of hearts. It is for this reason that He remains separate from them—so that they might develop a deeper vision, understanding Him to be always united with them in a love whose intensity cannot be shaken by mere physical absence.

Though the *gopīs* accept all that Uddhava says as philosophically accurate, they are still adamant that union

is better than separation, and they ask whether Kṛṣṇa still remembers them, His faithful *Vṛndāvana* companions. While their pain is somewhat assuaged by Uddhava's presence, they are ultimately inconsolable in their unrequited love.

Uddhava is amazed by their unwavering devotion, and he again praises them as true models for all Kṛṣṇa devotees. So moved is he that he prays to be reborn as a shrub, creeper, or herb in *Vṛndāvana*, so that he might catch the dust kicked up by their feet. (*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 10.47.61-63) 🌸

In addition to his brief appearance in the Third Canto of the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* and his elaborate role in the Eleventh (*Uddhava Gītā*), Uddhava is also prominent in the Tenth Canto. There, Kṛṣṇa sends Uddhava to *Vṛndāvana* to console His devotees, who are pining for Him. Uddhava's message to the people of *Vṛndāvana* is known as *Uddhava Sandeśa* ("Uddhava's Message").

Uddhava speaks first with Nanda and Yaśodā, reminding them that Kṛṣṇa is eternally present with them, and within them; He dwells in the hearts of all living beings. The next

day, Uddhava delivers a similar message to the *gopīs*. When the *gopīs* see him for the first time, they are struck by his resemblance to Kṛṣṇa, both in his physical features and in his apparel. This resemblance, of course, increases their sense of separation from their beloved. Before speaking to them, Uddhava listens to their outpouring of love: he hears them lament with aching hearts, bemoaning their intolerable position, their vacant world in Kṛṣṇa's absence. (*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 10.47.4-21).

Overtaken by their unmotivated and uninterrupted devotion, Uddhava praises them as the best of all devotees.

are delivered to Uddhava, recognized by the tradition as a *mahā-bhāgavata*, or "greatest among the devotees," and as *mukhyam kṛṣṇa-parigrahe*, "foremost of those who are intimate with Kṛṣṇa." (*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 3.4.24) He is also Kṛṣṇa's cousin, and practically His twin in appearance.

For these reasons and others, it is curious that the *Uddhava Gītā* has never

enjoyed the fame of its sister text, the *Bhagavad-gītā*, with which it shares several verses in common. In certain ways, the *Uddhava Gītā* goes further than the *Bhagavad-gītā*, as Prabhupada tells us, illuminating the *Bhagavad-gītā's* central teaching of devotion to Kṛṣṇa and emphasizing the importance of seeing Kṛṣṇa everywhere, in everyone, and at all times.

WHO IS UDDHAVA?

The *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* introduces Uddhava in the Third Canto. Uddhava meets the Pāṇḍavas' uncle Vidura, who asks Uddhava about his conversation with Kṛṣṇa (*Uddhava Gītā*) and about Kṛṣṇa's associates and family members. The *Bhāgavatam* (3.2.2) informs us at this point of Uddhava's single-minded devotion—from the age of five he was



In certain ways, the *Uddhava Gītā* goes further than the *Bhagavad-gītā*, illuminating its central teaching of devotion to Kṛṣṇa and emphasizing the importance of seeing Kṛṣṇa everywhere, in everyone, and at all times.

absorbed in Kṛṣṇa and nothing more. It also reveals the depth of Uddhava's love for Kṛṣṇa. On remembering Him, "Uddhava had all the transcendental bodily changes due to total ecstasy, and he was trying to wipe away tears of separation from his eyes." (*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 3.2.5) Clearly, Uddhava is no ordinary player, even in this most transcendental of plays.

Uddhava begins to answer Vidura's questions by poetically telling him, "The sun of the world, Lord Kṛṣṇa, has set, and our house [the *Kuru* dynasty] has now been swallowed by the great snake of time." (*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 3.2.7) He recounts Kṛṣṇa's pastimes in *Vṛndāvana*, many of which took place near the *Yamunā* river, where Vidura and Uddhava now sit. He then describes the many events that took place in Mathurā and in *Dvārakā*, in the latter part of Kṛṣṇa's manifest pastimes.

Though Vidura, at this point, wants Uddhava to be his spiritual master, Uddhava is concerned about etiquette. Vidura is senior to him, and so, ultimately, he sends him to Maitreya, a sage in whom Uddhava has great confidence. Maitreya was present while Uddhava received instructions from Kṛṣṇa, and so Maitreya, too, heard truth directly from the lips of the Lord. Hence Uddhava's certainty that Maitreya could ably guide Vidura.

In this portion of the *Bhāgavatam* are two significant verses about Uddhava from the lips of Lord Kṛṣṇa himself: "Now I shall leave the vision of this world, and I see that Uddhava, the foremost of My devotees, is the only one who can be directly entrusted with knowledge about Me. Uddhava is not inferior to Me in any way because he is never affected by the modes of material nature. Therefore he may remain in this

world to disseminate specific knowledge of the Personality of Godhead." (*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 3.4.30-31)

A TASTE OF THE UDDHAVA GĪTĀ

The setting of the *Uddhava Gītā* is the last night of Kṛṣṇa's manifest pastimes on this planet. He is planning to leave at a predetermined time, and His loving devotee Uddhava, knowing Kṛṣṇa's plan, approaches Him: "O Lord *Keśava*, my dear master, I cannot tolerate giving up Your lotus feet even for a fraction of a moment. I urge You to take me along with You to Your own abode." (*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 11.6.43)

Kṛṣṇa, of course, is naturally inclined to comply with His devotees' wishes. Still, He has a higher mission for Uddhava: to stay and sing His glories again and again. Kṛṣṇa explains the importance of detachment and tells Uddhava to roam the world as a renunciant, specifically to go to *Badarikāśrama*, high in the *Himālayas*, and to tell the sages there of His life and teachings.

Just to be clear on what these teachings are, Kṛṣṇa explains in great detail the philosophy summarized in the *Bhagavad-gītā*. He begins by saying that the material world is ephemeral and that God and the soul are eternal. He explains the distinction between the body and the self, the soul, just as He does in the *Bhagavad-gītā*. But here He adds scriptural references and analogies to enhance His argument.

Uddhava asks Kṛṣṇa how one can realize the truth of the soul, since the material world and its illusions are so immediate, so alluring. How one can relinquish attachments and control the mind?

Kṛṣṇa explains that the human intellect is capable of cultivating

spiritual knowledge. Kṛṣṇa stresses the importance of approaching a guru, but He also says that one can observe many truths by heeding the "spiritual master" known as nature. He enumerates for Uddhava twenty-four teachers of the true spiritual seeker, including the earth, the air, and the sky. From the air, for example, one can learn to come in touch with sense objects while remaining unaffected by them.

Kṛṣṇa next explains the complexities of karma, giving vivid examples of just how entangling karma can be. He recommends only pure works, done on His behalf.

Kṛṣṇa then explains the three modes of material nature—goodness, passion, and ignorance—and how to become free from their influence. He points out the importance of keeping company with devotees, giving elaborate details on how to identify who is truly advanced in spiritual life, and who is not.

Kṛṣṇa also conveys to Uddhava the art of meditation, explaining that meditation reaches its perfection when one learns how to meditate on Him. He then points out the importance of deity worship and delineates the specifics of formal worship of installed deities. This leads to an elaborate discussion of *bhakti-yoga*, the science of devoting oneself to God.

Kṛṣṇa then outlines the yogic *siddhis*, or the mystic powers one may develop through yoga. He explains that such powers can be an asset but are more often a deficit, distracting practitioners from the path of devotion.

Uddhava asks Kṛṣṇa to list His divine attributes, so that devotees will have substance for meditation and contemplation. Kṛṣṇa is pleased by the request, praising Uddhava as expert in asking appropriate questions: "On the

Battlefield of *Kurukṣetra*,” Kṛṣṇa says, “Arjuna . . . asked Me the same question that you are now posing.” After this reference to His conversation with Arjuna, Kṛṣṇa explains how He can be seen in the world and, nearly echoing His own words in the *Bhagavad-gītā*’s Tenth Chapter, enumerates His opulences as the Absolute Truth: “I am the ultimate goal . . . I am the three-lettered *omkāra* . . . I am the *Gāyatrī* mantra . . . I am the *Himālayas*,” and so on. He adds several that are not in the *Gītā*, such as “Among jewels, I am the ruby, and among flowers, the lotus.”

The next two chapters of the *Uddhava Gītā* detail the ancient social and spiritual system known as *Varnāśrama Dharma*. Kṛṣṇa makes it

clear, as He does in the *Bhagavad-gītā*, that one fits into this system according to quality and work, not birth (as in the modern-day caste system). The original system is meant to help practitioners use their God-given talents and inclinations to gradually become God conscious.

DIFFERENT INSTRUCTIONS FOR DIFFERENT STUDENTS

As the *Uddhava Gītā* comes to a close, Kṛṣṇa again emphasizes the importance of *bhakti-yoga*, or devotion to Him, and makes two additional points: (1) He asks Uddhava to try to see the Supreme Soul, Kṛṣṇa Himself, in all living beings and at all times. There is a spiritual oneness to all things, Kṛṣṇa tells Uddhava, and

yet He—God—remains a distinct and transcendent individual as well. This is the great mystery of spiritual life. (2) Kṛṣṇa tells Uddhava to renounce the world and accept the life of a mendicant. Students of the *Bhagavad-gītā* will notice that this instruction seems diametrically opposed to that given to Arjuna. In the *Bhagavad-gītā*, Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna to unhesitatingly fight on behalf of the righteous. In other words, Kṛṣṇa tells him to work in the world for a divine purpose, on God’s behalf, not to renounce all action and sit on his laurels like a would-be yogi.

Is Kṛṣṇa contradicting Himself by telling Uddhava to become a renunciant, to shy away from worldly activities? Not in the slightest. Arjuna was a warrior, in the middle of a battle, and many were depending on him to do his duty. But Uddhava’s temperament was different. He was inclined to the mood of the *gopīs*. [See the sidebar “*Uddhava Sandeśa*.”] The teachings of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, as delivered in both the *Bhagavad-gītā* and the *Uddhava Gītā*, take each person’s unique psychophysical make-up into account, celebrating the diversity of creation and the special way in which each of us is meant to serve God.

In the last verse of *Uddhava Gītā* (*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 11.29.49), Śukadeva Goswami, the narrator of the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, feels intense love for the Lord and utters the following words: “I offer my obeisances to that Supreme Personality of Godhead, the original and greatest of all beings, Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa. He is the author of the Vedas, and just to destroy His devotees’ fear of material existence, like a bee He has collected this nectarean essence of all knowledge and self-realization. Thus He has awarded to His many devotees this nectar from the ocean of bliss, and by His mercy they have drunk it.” ❀

Satyarāja Dāsa is a disciple of Śrīla Prabhupāda and a regular contributor to BTG. He has written twenty books on Kṛṣṇa consciousness, and is the editor of the recently published *Holy War: Violence and the Bhagavad-gītā*. He lives with his wife and daughter near New York City.

Uddhava’s Gratitude



Śukadeva Gosvāmī said: Hearing the words spoken by Lord Kṛṣṇa, and having thus been shown the entire path of yoga, Uddhava folded his hands to offer obeisances. But his throat choked up with love and his eyes overflowed with tears; so he could say nothing.

Steadying his mind, which had become overwhelmed with love, Uddhava felt extremely grateful to Lord Kṛṣṇa, the greatest hero of the Yadu dynasty. My dear King Parikṣit, Uddhava bowed down to touch the Lord’s lotus feet with his head and then spoke with folded hands.

Śrī Uddhava said: O unborn,

primeval Lord, although I had fallen into the darkness of illusion, my ignorance has now been dispelled by Your merciful association. Indeed, how can cold, darkness, and fear exert their power over one who has approached the brilliant sun?

In return for my insignificant surrender, You have mercifully bestowed upon me, Your servant, the torchlight of transcendental knowledge. Therefore, what devotee of Yours who has any gratitude could ever give up Your lotus feet and take shelter of another master?

—*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 11.29.35-38

HAPPY NEW YEAR

A scrutinizing look at the new year greeting

by Caitanya Carāṇa Dāsa

As the world enters a New Year, we wish all of you, our esteemed readers, a very "Happy New Year!" As spiritual scientists, let us discuss how we can go further than just wishing; what we can do to make this wish transform into a reality. Let us first analyze this greeting "Happy New Year!" from the perspective of science.

TIME - WHAT IS IT?

Let's begin with the word "Year". A year is a unit for measuring time. And what is time? Though the reality of time, especially in the form of its effect on us, is undeniable, time is one among the many fundamental truths of life that defy scientific definition. Be that as it may, we measure time by the movement of the cosmic bodies. As per current scientific understanding, one year is the time in which the earth completes one revolution around the sun. For an object orbiting continuously in a circular path, no point on the orbit can be considered special. So scientifically there's nothing "new" about the new year; the earth is going to continue in its same old path!

WHAT'S NEW?

All of us have an inherent attraction for something new. Have you ever thought why? Is it not because the old is, in some way or the other, unsatisfactory? The old lifestyle, the old relationships, the old job - all these leave us feeling incomplete and unfulfilled. And the fond hope is that the new will

change that "same old story".

But really what's going to be actually new in our lives? People change their externals to "make things better". But from a scientific viewpoint, everything is just atoms! And all that causes the astounding variety seen with our eyes is the sub-microscopic variations in the atomic and molecular structures, such as a different number of electrons orbiting within the atom of a particular element. Now what is the most dramatically "new" thing that a person can do? Most likely, get a new girlfriend! But that just means getting someone whose skin pigments have a slightly different atomic arrangement! (Talks about personality are, after all, "unscientific"!) So changing the atomic arrangement around you (new house, new car, new job, new spouse and the like) or the atomic arrangement inside you (mundane "new year resolutions") and hoping that, it will make the "new" year "happy" is not a very realistic hope.

THE HAPPINESS PARADOX

And what about "Happy"? Happiness is another fundamental reality of life that is beyond the realm of science. For the reductionistic scientists, pleasure or pain is nothing more than certain C fibres or Delta fibres firing in certain parts of the body. So they postulate "non-existence of happiness" theories to win Nobel prizes in order to ultimately become happy!

IS SCIENCE EVERYTHING?

You know very well that the sweet

greeting "Happy New Year!" is often expressed with genuine good wishes. Do you think it has no meaning? The current scientific understanding certainly strips this greeting (and in fact all greetings and even life at large) of all meaning. Anyway, can everything in life be "scientific"? Would a chemist give his wife a bunsen burner as a wedding gift? If a neurologist found that his wife was upset with him, would he do a brain scan to find out what was wrong? The point is simple: neither is life just a bunch of atoms and molecules nor is a sentient human being just an ultra-super computer.

PARADIGM SHIFT

Let us now ascend to a realm higher than that portrayed by science. The Vedic wisdom explains that each one of us is a sentient, eternal and blissful spiritual personality having inherently the nature of befriending and loving God and all living beings. The Vedic scriptures also wish us a genuinely felt "Happy New Year." In fact, they wish that every moment of our life be happy and new. Not only that, they go much further and delineate a practical process by which this wish can be transformed into a reality. Let's investigate.

The Vedas agree with the common understanding that to become happy something new has to be done. But the understanding of new as given in the Vedic wisdom is significantly different from the general understanding.

(please turn to page 26)



Pilgrimage to Bangladesh

Hare Kṛṣṇa devotees make a rare visit to sites in Bangladesh connected with Lord Caitanya's movement.

By Indradyumna Swami



Deities of Jagannātha, Baladeva, and Subhadrā (above) reside in a temple in Benāpōle, near the site where Haridāsa converted the prostitute Lakṣahīna.

January 30-February 10, 2004

The Bangladesh ambassador had just approved my visa to enter his country. As I got up to leave, he took a photo guidebook from his desk, quickly signed it, and gave it to me with a handshake.

It read: "To Mr. Tibbitts with love. May you find the happiness you're looking for in our beautiful Bangladesh. Mohammed Ilah."

I had no doubt I would find happiness in Bangladesh, but it would be of a specific nature. The former Indian State of East Bengal (known as East Pakistan after the partition of India by the British in 1947) became the sovereign state of Bangladesh in 1972 after a war for independence. Being part of India's rich spiritual past, it contains many holy places especially dear to the followers of Lord Caitanya. Numerous devotees of Lord Caitanya were born there, and the Lord Himself performed many divine pastimes throughout Bangladesh's towns and villages. The capital, Dhaka, was a favourite place of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī in the 1930s. He once called Dhaka a second Vṛndāvana because it contains more than seven hundred Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa temples.

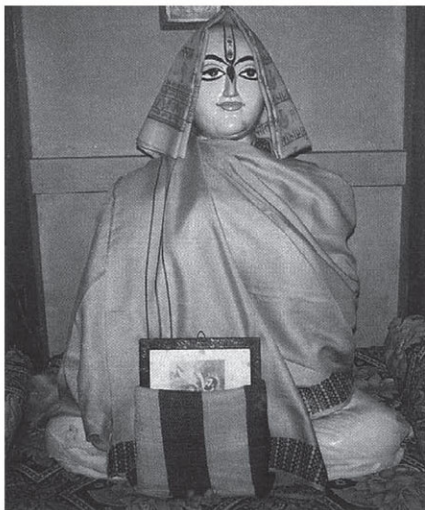
I would be travelling to these holy places with a dear Godbrother, Rādhānātha Swami. Months ago, we had met in our travels and discovered that we shared an attraction to the pastimes and songs of Śrīla Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura, one of the principal ācāryas in our Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava line. He appeared after Lord Caitanya's departure from this world. For years we had longed to visit his birthplace, Kheturi, in Bangladesh. I would be meeting Rādhānātha Swami and several of his disciples in Dhaka the next day.

HELP AT IMMIGRATION

At the Dhaka airport I handed the immigration officer my passport and a form all passengers had to complete



In Benāpole, pilgrims can offer respects to the deity of Haridāsa Thākura (right) and, at a nearby temple, Lord Caitanya and Lord Nityānanda (below). A shrine (far right) honors Lakṣmīra at the spot where she sat daily to chant 300,000 names of the Lord.



with their personal details. I was in Western clothes, as Hindus make up only ten percent of the population and there is sometimes tension between them and the majority Muslims.

After studying the form for a moment, the officer looked up and said, "You wrote that you'll be staying in a hotel, but you didn't mention which hotel. You have to tell me which hotel or I can't let you in."

I had no idea of the name of any hotel in Dhaka. I stood there for a moment, and then the officer motioned me to a nearby room. Suddenly, an Indian man stepped forward and rebuked the officer.

"For goodness sake, man, he's a tourist. How is he supposed to know which hotels we have here? Foreigners don't come here often, and when they do we can't treat them like this. Let him through!"

Somehow his words worked, and the officer stamped my passport. As I collected my baggage, the Indian man walked by and whispered softly, "Hare Kṛṣṇa. Have a good trip."

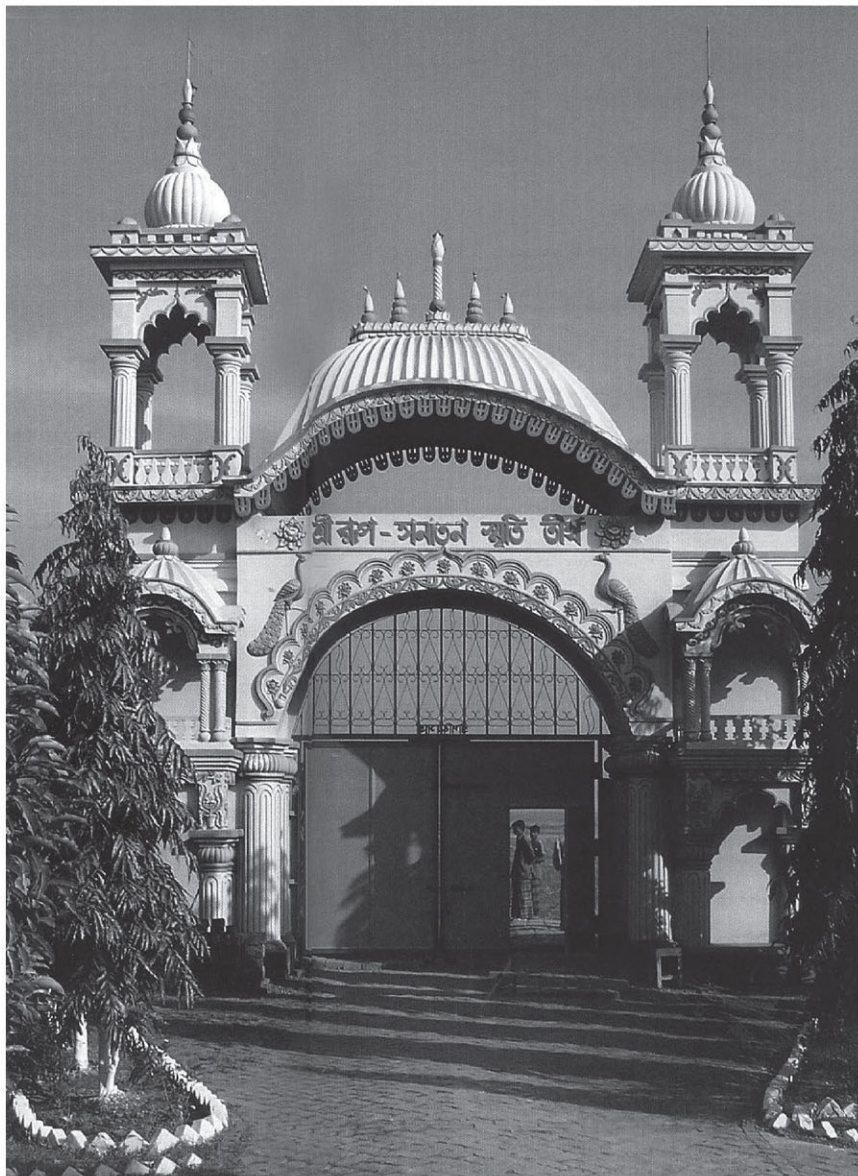
Outside the terminal I met Rādhānātha Swami and twelve brahmachāris from his temple in Mumbai, all in Western dress. We ate and then sat in a nearby field to discuss our itin-

erary. We had only ten days and had to select which holy sites to visit. We decided to begin our journey at the birthplace of Rupa Gosvāmī and Sanātana Gosvāmī in Jessore, in the southwest of the country. Our guide, Cāru Candra Dāsa, ISKCON's regional secretary for Bangladesh, quickly bought our tickets, and two hours later we were on our way.

THE PLACE OF HARIDĀSA

On Rādhānātha Swami's suggestion, from the Jessore airport we took a taxi to Benāpole, a small village in the jungle where Haridāsa Thākura had awakened a prostitute to Kṛṣṇa consciousness. It





The entrance gate at ISKCON Jessore.

was dark when we arrived, but Haridāsa Ṭhākura's room was still open. I almost ran to it. Falling down before his image, I prayed for his mercy. As I studied the altar, I was curious to see the deity of a shaven headed woman in a white sari.

"That's Lakṣahīra," Rādhānātha Swami said, "the prostitute sent by a government official to seduce Haridāsa Ṭhākura. Soldiers hiding in the foliage were supposed to catch them in union and arrest and defame Haridāsa. But af-

ter listening to Haridāsa's chanting of the holy names for three days, Lakṣahīra became purified and took shelter of him. He initiated her, and she became a great devotee."

I prayed for the mercy of Haridāsa Ṭhākura and Lakṣahīra.

The next day we went to the birthplace of Rupa and Sanātana outside Jessore. Like most of the other holy places we would visit, there wasn't much to see. After partition, the minority Hin-

dus were persecuted and many of their temples destroyed. The policy continued after the founding of Bangladesh. So, wherever we would go, all that would be left of most holy places was one or two reminders of the divine pastimes that took place there. This was particularly true at the home of Rupa and Sanātana. There was nothing but a single tree. But when we learned it was the very tree under which the *Gosvāmīs* performed daily worship, we nestled under it and chanted for several hours.

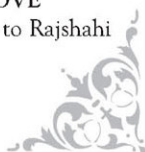
Often a holy place is built up with many shrines and temples to attract pilgrims and impress upon them its importance, but here we had only a single tree on which to focus. As we chanted in the simple jungle environment, I thought that one day it too might become a renowned holy place. For the moment it remains hidden from the world, retaining a charm rich in *Gauḍīya* history and saturated with mercy. As the hours passed, I closed my eyes and absorbed myself in the holy names at the spot where Rupa and Sanātana chanted the very same names.

Our next destination was ISKCON's large temple a few kilometers away. As we drove there I asked Cāru Candra why the temple had not been built at the auspicious site we had just visited. He replied that the local Muslim authorities would not

sell it to us, so ISKCON accepted an offer from a Hindu organization that owned land nearby. It proved to be a better arrangement, because the ISKCON land is situated in the center of 96 Hindu villages. When the beautiful temple was opened in 1999 after years of construction, more than one million people from all over the country attended.

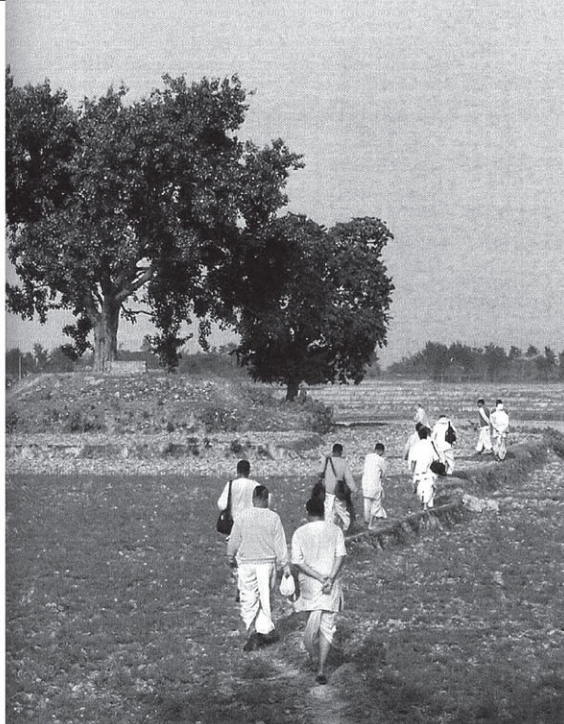
NAROTTAMA, RESERVOIR OF LOVE

Two days later, we flew to Rajshahi





At the birth place of Rūpa and Sanātana (above), devotees chant and dance in front of a five-hundred-year old tree. At right, the pilgrims approach Narottama's place of spiritual practice at Kheturi.



in the northwest, a short distance from Kheturi on the banks of the Padmāvati River. As our car rumbled along the dirt roads leading to the isolated village, my heart beat in anticipation. I prayed we'd find more than a single tree. I wasn't disappointed. Though Kheturi consists of only forty families (thirty-eight Muslim and two Hindu), we were happy to discover a small, walled temple compound just outside the village.

One of Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura's major contributions was organizing at Kheturi the inaugural Gaura Pūrṇimā festival, the yearly observance of Lord Caitanya's appearance. Many important Vaiṣṇavas of the time attended, including Lord Nityānanda's wife, Jāhnavā Mātā. At that historic event, Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura installed six deities: five Kṛṣṇa deities and one pure gold Lord Caitanya deity. The six Vaiṣṇava devotees currently living at the lakeside temple, built by a pious Hindu businessman more than a hundred years ago, told us that Jāhnavā Mātā collected water from the lake for cooking for the Kheturi festival, and to this day the water is used only for cooking. I was unable to discover what happened to most of the deities. I do know that Vraja-mohana was sent to Vṛndāvana soon after the installation and the Caitanya deity was moved to India during

Bangladesh's war for independence. I noticed on the altar, however, six beautiful *śālagrāma-śilās* (deities of Kṛṣṇa in the form of special stones from the Gaṇḍakī River). When I later inquired about them, the *pūjārī* (priest) told me they were from the Kheturi festival era.

We spent most of the next day hearing and chanting. The following day, we walked to a small hill where Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura had performed his daily service to Kṛṣṇa—reading, chanting, praying, writing songs, and so on. It was a four-kilometer walk through the fields, and I was again struck by the fact that such a holy site was so isolated. Marking the spot was only a small stone seat with no inscription. Of course, the fact that there was no significant shrine didn't diminish its spiritual potency, so we again immersed ourselves in chanting, trying to open our spiritual eyes and see the sanctity of the place.

In the afternoon, we visited the place on the Padmāvati River where Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura received the special mercy of Lord Caitanya. Once, while having *kīrtana* with His associates, Lord Caitanya called out, "Narottama! Narottama! Narottama!" and fell to the ground unconscious. When He awoke He revealed that soon a great devotee named Narottama Dāsa would be born

and would be instrumental in carrying on His mission. Mahāprabhu told the devotees that He would deposit His *prema* (love of God) in the Padmāvati and Narottama Dāsa would bathe there and attain pure love of God. Years later, when Narottama Dāsa was still a boy, he bathed in that exact spot and was overwhelmed with ecstatic love for Kṛṣṇa. Imbued with that mercy, he was constantly floating in the ocean of love of God and was empowered to spread that love everywhere.

As we searched for the precise location of this pastime, we came to a small Vaiṣṇava temple on the banks of the river. Inquiring further, we discovered it was indeed the place. The devotee couple and their two children who manage the temple were overjoyed by our unsolicited visit. Because Bangladesh is a Muslim country, it is rare that devotees visit such holy places. The man excitedly showed us the tree under which Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura had bathed and which the couple worship daily. We paid our obeisances to the tree, had *kīrtana* there, and then bathed in the sanctified waters nearby. I had brought a two-litre plastic water bottle for the occasion, and after emptying it, carefully filled it with water from the holy river.



A PRICELESS GIFT

The next morning as we prepared to leave, I went to the main temple at Kheturi for one last viewing of the deities. The *pūjārī* was worshipping the *śālagrāma-silās*, and I was surprised to see him simply throw some water over Them, dry Them quickly, and place Them back on the altar. It was a simple worship at best. He didn't massage Them in oil, which is customary, or even offer sandalwood paste or *Tulasī* leaves. When I saw the small fruit plate he offered Them, I became disappointed. When the superintendent of the temple appeared, I mentioned the seemingly poor standard of worship.

He hung his head and said, "It's true what you say. I've tried to impress this on the priests for years, but they don't seem to care."

I thought, "These are such important deities, a part of the pastimes of Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura. They deserve more than this."

I decided to take a chance.

"Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura is a great source of inspiration for me," I said. "He's a great preacher and a deeply realized devotee. He's one of my heroes. I often think of him while spreading his message in Western countries."



Pausing for a moment and praying for mercy, I then said, "Would you consider giving me one of those *śālagrāmas*? I'll take good care of Him, offering Him opulent worship. And He'll be part of Lord Caitanya's movement in the West, inspiring many devotees."

I was stunned by his reply.

"I've been observing your group closely," he said. "I can see that you are sincere Vaiṣṇavas and that you all have deep affection for Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura. So take any *śālagrāma* you want. Just indicate to the *pūjārī* which one you desire."

I had already chosen the principal *śālagrāma* on the altar. He was the biggest one, exquisitely beautiful and as smooth as glass.

"I'll take Him," I said, motioning with my head (not my finger, which is considered impolite in Vedic etiquette).

The superintendent instructed the *pūjārī*, who took the *śālagrāma* off the altar without any apparent emotion. He quickly put Him in my hand. I stood there, my hand trembling, trying to fathom the mercy I had received.

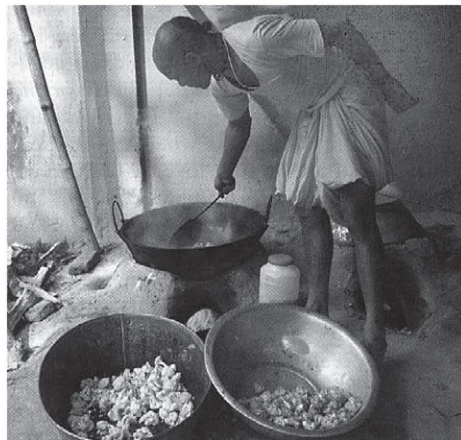
When I went back to my room to collect my belongings for our departure, I showed the deity to Rādhānātha

Swami, who was struck with wonder.

"He's so majestic!" he said.

Sadly, we then left Kheturi, the holy abode of Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura's pastimes. While clutching the precious gift to my heart, I considered that the good fortune of Kheturi received by our small group of pilgrims would now go out to many *Vaiṣṇavas* around the world.

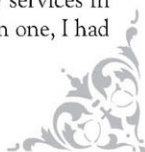
We visited several other holy sites in the following days, such as those of



A cook (top) prepares a feast in Kheturi. At bottom, service at ISKCON Dhaka. At left, the deity of Lord Caitanya installed by Narottama during the Kheturi festival.



stalwart associates of Lord Caitanya like Puṇḍarīka Vidyānidhi, Vāsudeva Datta, Mukunda Datta, and Murārī Gupta. We even visited the ancestral home of Lord Caitanya's father, Jagannātha Miśra, an ancient array of stone buildings in the jungle in northern Bangladesh. But our experiences in Kheturi left the greatest impression upon me. After Kheturi I hankered to get back to my services in the West. In more ways than one, I had



received special mercy, and I wanted to share it with others.

I didn't have long to wait. At the Dhaka airport, while in a lounge preparing to board my flight out of the country, a Muslim holy man approached me. As a security measure, I was dressed in Western clothes and sported a two-week beard. Many Muslims assumed I was one of them, and had been respectfully addressing me with the greeting "*Salaam alaikum*." This particular man pointed to my bottle of special water and said in broken English, "*Allah hu akbar!* I'm very dry. Very thirsty. Please, water."

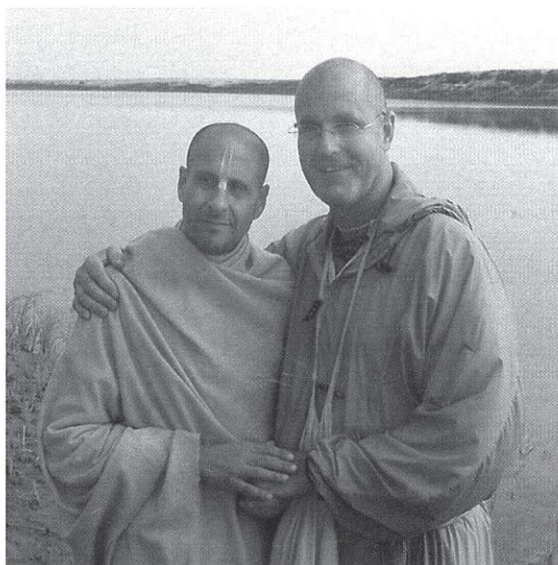
I froze. He wanted to drink from my bottle of water from the Padmāvati River where Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura had received *prema*. Every drop in that bottle was sacred. It was capable of giving more than liberation; it could give love of God. But he thought it was just an ordinary bottle of water. I hesitated for a moment, and several Muslim men looked at me.

Obviously, you don't refuse a Muslim holy man's request for a simple drink of water. So I handed him the bottle, and he proceeded to drink with gusto. I watched in shock as he guzzled more than half the bottle.

He then turned to me and said, "Alah has been very kind to me today!"

"Yes, indeed He has," I replied with a smile.

I thought, "Even before leaving Bangladesh I'm sharing the good fortune of my pilgrimage with others. Indeed, this must be the perfection of visiting a holy place." ❀



Indradyumna Swami (at right in the photo at left) and Rādhānātha Swami savour their friendship on the bank of the sacred Padmāvati, River (below).

(Bottom) The Pañca-tattva deities at ISKCON Dhaka are around 250 years old.



His Holiness Indradyumna Swami travels around the world teaching Kṛṣṇa consciousness. In Poland, each summer he oversees dozens of festivals. Since 1990, these festivals have introduced hundreds of thousands of people to Kṛṣṇa.

Adapted from *Diary of a Travelling Preacher*, Volume 5, Chapter 14. To receive chapters by e-mail as they come out regularly, visit www.travelling-preacher.com



A Lifetime of Devotion to Guru and Kṛṣṇa

A couple from the ISKCON community in Los Angeles proves that age is no obstacle for one who sincerely desires to serve the Lord.

by Karuṇā Dharaṇī Devī Dāsī



The home of Vidura and Mañjarī Mehta smells of worship. A soft scent of ghee wicks and incense and camphor fills the clean, simple rooms. From where I live next door, I regularly hear the conch shell announcing their twice-daily *ārati* for their deities. Today, Rādhā-Gopinātha, Gaura-Nitāi, and Laddu-Gopāla are freshly bathed and immaculate, dressed in bright yellow-

and-white cloth Mañjarī has sewn for Them. I offer my obeisances and take a seat as this couple, Vidura, 85, and Mañjarī, 83, recall for me their first encounter with Śrīla Prabhupāda and his western disciples.

They were strolling along the Chowpatty shore, as they did every evening in Mumbai in 1971. There was not so much to see, just a big stretch of beach and a few buildings. Yet that



Vidura remembers the strong voice of Śrīla Prabhupāda, standing outside the canopy and ad- dressing the gathering crowd, gesturing toward his Western followers - “I am not a miracle worker.”

evening, in a large open area that was usually vacant, stood a big canopy with a group of men inside. They were wearing saffron, the color of cloth for a renunciant in the Mehta's Vedic culture. The men were dancing and were singing the names of Kṛṣṇa, an activity familiar to Vidura and Mañjarī, chanters themselves.

But something was clearly different here. As they drew closer, they saw that it was foreigners who were singing.

This they had never seen—Americans dressed in the traditional sacred robes of their own Hare Kṛṣṇa faith.

At first they couldn't believe what they were seeing. They stood with eyes fixed on the very enthusiastic *sankīrtana* before them. The crowd grew thick with surprised and curious onlookers.

THIS IS NOT A MIRACLE

Vidura remembers the strong voice of Śrīla Prabhupāda, standing outside the canopy and addressing the gathering crowd, gesturing toward his Western followers.

“I am not a miracle worker. These young Americans have become Vaiṣṇava devotees of the Lord.”

A few days later Vidura and Mañjarī saw the same group of devotees at the nearby Mahā-Lakṣmī temple. They remember seeing a *sannyāsi* with a birthmark on the left side of his forehead. They couldn't have known then what significance this *sannyāsi* would someday have in their lives.

“For me, the Western devotees were a very good sight to see,” says Vidura.

Vidura and Mañjarī were both born into Vaiṣṇava families and initiated in the Pustī line of Vallabhācārya, an associate of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu.

Mañjarī has worshiped Bāla (child)-Kṛṣṇa since she was seven years old. She remembers that in her childhood her mother would go every day to worship at the Kuñja-Bihārī temple in her neighborhood at Devgad Baria, Panchmahal District, Gujarat.

Vidura received his education in Ahmedabad, and later he moved to Mumbai, where he worked in a bank and then became the manager of a rubber factory at Grant Road. Vidura was twenty-three and Mañjarī twenty when they married. They have two sons, Madhukar and Kamal. During their years of raising the boys, they visited local temples, taught their sons to chant and worship in their home, and kept up their Kṛṣṇa conscious practice of chanting on beads sixty-four rounds of the mantra *śrī kṛṣṇa śaraṇam mama* (“Lord Kṛṣṇa is my shelter”).

Every year they took the boys on pilgrimage to visit the popular temple of Lord Kṛṣṇa as Śrī Nāthajī, in Nāthdwāra, Rajasthan. When their sons graduated from high school and began college in Ahmedabad, Vidura and Mañjarī began a series of pilgrimages that took them to Gokula, Mathurā, Vṛndāvana, Kedarnath, Badrinath, Haridwar, Rishikesh, Gangotri, Yamunotri, Tirupati, Madurai, Kanyakumari, Māyāpur, Jagannātha Puri, and other holy places.

FINDING THEIR GURU IN AMERICA

Madhukar, the eldest son, graduated in Ahmedabad with a degree in pharmaceutical studies, and he moved to Boston for six more years of education in his field. In 1982, when Vidura and Mañjarī visited him there, Madhukar

brought them to attend the services at the Boston Hare Kṛṣṇa temple.

In the meantime their son Kamal took a job in architecture in Houston.

“We moved to Houston to be reunited with our son Kamal,” says Vidura, “and we began to attend Kṛṣṇa conscious programs every Friday evening. Lecturing at these programs was Tamāl Kṛṣṇa Goswami. We recognized him as the same *sannyāsi* with the birthmark on his forehead whom we had seen twelve years before in Mumbai.”

In Houston the Mehtas soon began their own spiritual home-programs, inviting friends and family to celebrate an evening of Kṛṣṇa conscious singing, speaking, and feasting. Kamal Mehta became active in putting on the programs every week for the benefit of friends, family, and members of the Houston ISKCON congregation. Though the Mehta's had left India, they hadn't given up their spiritual heritage. They continued their personal spiritual practices and added the spirit of giving Kṛṣṇa consciousness that was so evident to them in Śrīla Prabhupāda's discourses at Chowpatty.

Vidura and Mañjarī became initiated by Tamāl Kṛṣṇa Goswami in Houston in 1986. At the time of their initiation they were each chanting sixty-four rounds of the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahāmantra* as well as the mantra *śrī kṛṣṇa śaraṇam mama* of the Pustī line. Their son Kamal was later initiated by Lokanātha Swami and received the name Kṛṣṇa Prema Dāsa.

Eventually Kṛṣṇa Prema's architectural work took him to Tustin, California, near Los Angeles. Vidura and Mañjarī went with him and his wife, Gopī, to help take care of their three sons while the parents were at work.

Every Saturday night all of the Mehtas attended ISKCON programs held in any of forty homes in southern California. (The various programs draw 150 families and include *bhajan*s that go on for well over three hours at every event. In the last few years the number of programs has more than doubled to include Friday nights as well as some Sunday afternoons.)

Nirantara Dāsa, the director of life membership and home programs for ISKCON Los Angeles, asked Vidura to lead the opening *kīrtana* and offer the final *ārati* at every Saturday program. This required a lot of traveling to various homes, but Vidura, a very determined devotee of Kṛṣṇa, enjoyed his assigned duty at every event.

DANGEROUS OPERATION

In July 1996, Vidura was diagnosed with a lumbar disc disease called scoliosis, which severely afflicts the sciatic nerve. After five years, he was in great pain and confined to a wheelchair. His doctor suggested an operation but couldn't guarantee its success.

Vidura wrote to his guru, Tamāl Kṛṣṇa Goswami, for guidance, telling him that he was praying to Lord Kṛṣṇa to either let him die during the operation and take him back to the spiritual world or heal him for vigorous devotional service.

Tamāl Kṛṣṇa Goswami replied that, lacking medical expertise, he could not advise Vidura on whether or not to have the operation, but if Vidura did have it and recovered, he must remember to follow through on his promise to dedicate his life to Kṛṣṇa's service.

Vidura decided to have the six-hour operation. After six months of recuperation, he regained his ability to walk. He now lives at New Dwārka, the ISKCON community in Los Angeles. Nowadays we see Vidura early every morning before *mangala-ārati*, preparing trays for the morning worship. For the last six years, he has offered *mangala-ārati* every morning as well as the Sunday feast *ārati*. After the Sunday feast *ārati* Vidura helps Ravindranātha Dāsa, the head priest, give a *prasādam* sweet to everyone who comes to the temple. For seven years

Mañjari has made the full supply of ghee wicks for the deity worship: five hundred tapered wicks and five hundred lamp wicks every week. They each chant daily thirty-two rounds of the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahāmantra* on their beads.

INSPIRING OTHERS

"Since the passing of Tamāl Kṛṣṇa Goswami," says Vidura, "we have missed him very heavily. He loved us and treated us like his parents. We now feel like orphans in his absence."

Tamāl Kṛṣṇa Goswami once told him, "Vidura, I have done my duty to you, and now it is your turn to do your duty to me."

Vidura humbly asked, "Gurudeva, what is my duty to you?"

Tamāl Kṛṣṇa Goswami replied, "Please bless me. You are my parents."

"Vidura is a very determined, forceful, and principled devotee," says Nirantara, who has known him for fifteen years. "He takes his service very seriously. His dream is that he and his wife will pass away at the same time while doing service to Śrī Śrī Rukmiṇī-Dvārka-dhīṣa. Mañjari is the universal mother. Nothing pleases her more than to cook for and feed devotees."

They are both very fond of their devotee grandchildren. Three generations of Mehtas engage in Kṛṣṇa's service. All three of the Mehta grandsons took the Kṛṣṇa book home-study program administered by Nirantara Dāsa, and they graduated with high honors. They attend home programs and enjoy singing, and they play the harmonium and drums. They also help with life membership and the office that organizes the home programs. They live in New Dwārka and attend college at nearby UCLA and USC.

"New Dwārka is a very spiritual atmosphere," says Nisāntha, who is studying to be a doctor. "I can really feel the difference when I come back to the community here. We visit the deities daily and like to do some service."

Anand, who is pursuing a degree in communications, adds, "And we get to see our grandpa. We feel inspired to see our grandparents serving Kṛṣṇa in their advanced age."

I too am inspired by the example of Vidura and Mañjari Mehta, including their life-long worship and chanting and their training of their family members to be Kṛṣṇa conscious.

Vidura wrote in a letter to his guru, "Please let me tell you that I have experienced profound happiness and joy while doing *ārati* at several ISKCON temples."

Steady devotional service to the Lord in the later years of life is a reward for those who have paid the price of surrender to guru and Kṛṣṇa. Next stop, Kṛṣṇaloka. ❀

Karuṇā Dharanī Devī Dāsī, a disciple of His Grace Virabāhu Dāsa, serves the deities at New Dwārka, where she joined ISKCON in 1979. She lives with her husband and daughter.

SANSKRIT PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

It is commonly seen that राम and कृष्ण in Sanskrit become Rama and Krishna in English with an extra trailing accent on 'a'. To eliminate such confusion we use a system of transliteration that lets us know how to pronounce each word.

Pronounce short a like the u in but, long ā like the a in far (and held twice as long as the short a). Pronounce e like the a in evade, long ī like the i in pique. Pronounce the vowel ṛ like the ri in rim, and ɕ like the ch in chair. Pronounce consonants like ch, jh, and dh as in staunch-heart, hedgehog, and red-hot. Pronounce ś and ṣ like sh. So for Kṛṣṇa say KRISHNA, for Caitanya say CHAITANYA.

Vedic Thought

The word "Brahman" indicates the complete Supreme Personality of Godhead, who is Śrī Kṛṣṇa. That is the verdict of all Vedic literature.

Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu,
Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta
Madhya-līlā 6.147



Acyuta, Drive...

(Continued from page 32)

With that, the Lord took His first step. He expanded Himself into gigantic size with His inconceivable potency, and covered the entire lower and middle planetary systems. Then, expanding to universal size, He took His second step, and with this step the Lord covered the entire heavenly planetary system. He said to Bali Mahārāja, "Now I have covered the entire universe in two steps. You promised to give Me three steps. Where can I put My third?"

Bali Mahārāja realized that the inconceivable Lord, the Personality of Godhead, had come to take from him his ill-gotten gains. He surrendered unto the Lord and said, "You may put Your third step on my head, my Lord." The Lord was pleased with Bali's surrender, and placing His lotus foot on Bali's head, He benedicted him with pure devotional service. That is the Lord's kindness. Kṛṣṇa was pleased with Bali's offering of everything he could give, including his own self. If one rejects all his

past nonsense and surrenders unto Him fully, that is called pure devotion. Bali Mahārāja, in his surrender, rejected an unqualified spiritual master who was interested only in greedy motivations. For this, Bali Mahārāja is called a *mahājana*, or great devotee of the Lord.

Lord Vāmana, in order to further bless His *mahājana* devotee, gave him a kingdom in the lower regions of the universe. The Lord is so kind to His pure devotee Bali Mahārāja that there, on the planet of Bali Mahārāja, He acts as his personal doorman. Whenever someone comes to see the *mahājana* Bali, the Lord in His four-armed form is there to greet the guest. That is Kṛṣṇa's love for His pure devotee who took only a second to surrender. Kṛṣṇa does not mind offering service to His pure devotee Bali as a doorman, any more than He minds offering to drive the chariot of Arjuna, for the Lord is the servant of His servant. He is attracted by the loving attitude of His devotee. ❁

- Śyāmānanda Dāsa

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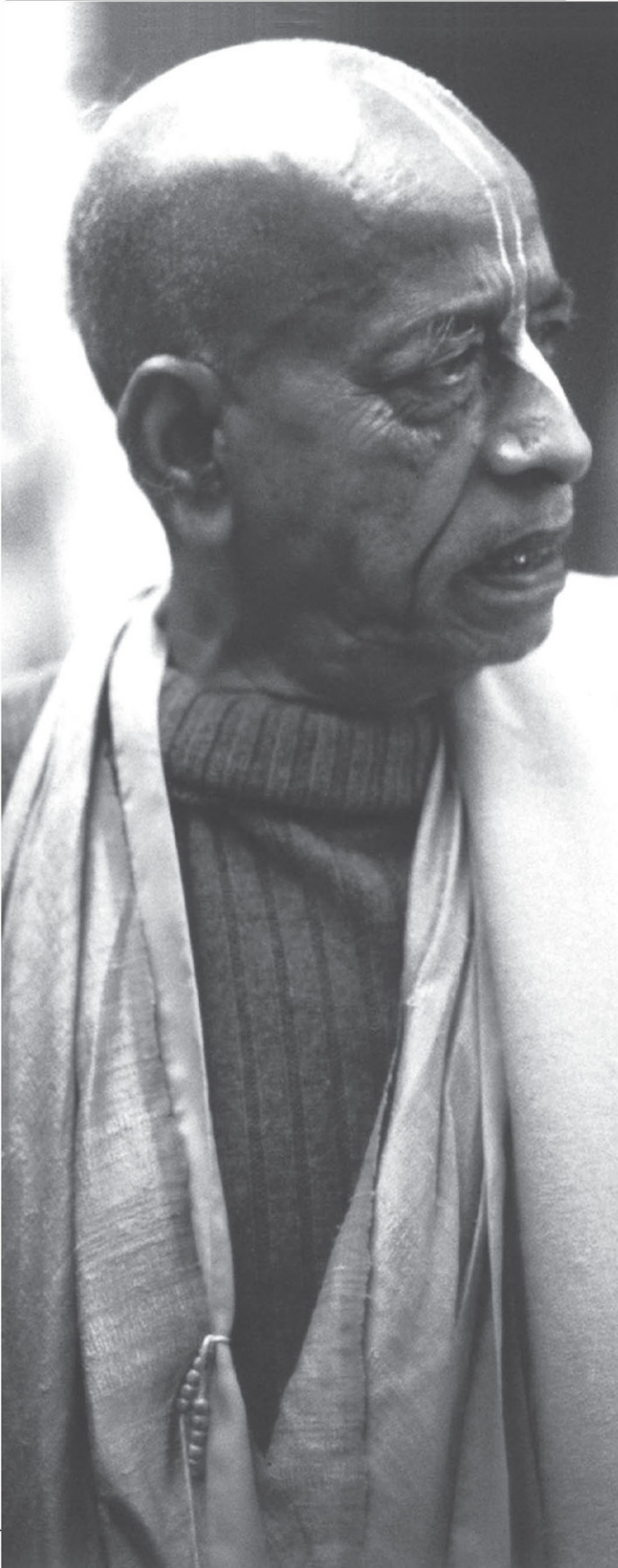
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Unauthorized *Avatāras* vs Authorized *Avatārī*

Following is the continuation of the conversation between His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda and a Christian priest that took place on June 9, 1974 in Paris.

Priest: Near our place in Poona, there was a swami who called himself an *avatāra*, and...

Prabhupāda: That anyone can say. I can say third *avatāra*, he can say fourth *avatāra*.

Priest: So if anyone can say...

Prabhupāda: That is another thing. That is another thing, because everyone can say "I am *avatāra*."

Priest: Exactly.

Prabhupāda: So...

Priest: So how can we have faith on anyone who said he was an *avatāra*?

Prabhupāda: No, no, we don't accept anyone as *avatāra*. We have got documents who is *avatāra*.

Priest: Kṛṣṇa.

Prabhupāda: No, Kṛṣṇa is... Kṛṣṇa is *avatārī*. He is the origin. That is stated here, *aham sarvasya prabhavaḥ* [Bg. 10.8]. You know Sanskrit? What is the meaning of *aham sarvasya prabhavaḥ*? "I am the source of all *avatāras*."

Priest: Yeah, but who has written that?

Prabhupāda: Hm?

Priest: Who has written that? Śrīla Vyāsa.

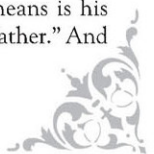
Prabhupāda: Anywhere he has written. Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa has written. Kṛṣṇa has spoken, Vyāsadeva has written, and it is accepted.

Priest: But this is what the Christians say about the Bible, and I don't believe it (inaudible).

Prabhupāda: No, no, you don't believe anything, that is another thing. That is another thing. Without belief, you cannot make progress.

Priest: Ah, you have to go beyond.

Prabhupāda: As soon as you... Just like you learn who is your father. You take the version of your mother and you believe that "He is my father." Otherwise there is no other way. How can you know your father? The only means is his mother recommends, "My dear boy, he is your father." And



Kṛṣṇa does not say that “millions and millions of people know Me.” No. Out of millions and millions of people, one is perfect. And out of millions of perfect person, one may know Him.

that is perfect, that's all. Otherwise you cannot know who is your father is.

Priest: Yeah, but you know...

Prabhupāda: If you say, “Mother, I don't believe it,” you don't believe it, but you cannot know.

Priest: The trouble, you know, is that so many people are coming either in India or (inaudible)...

Prabhupāda: No, no, I mean to say...

Priest: ...that “I am an *avatāra*” or “I am...” So many *bābās* exist — you know as well as I do. Now, who has to say this one is really *bābā*. They are all abusing us. Now, if so many people today pretend to be *avatāras* and they have many disciples.

Prabhupāda: But we don't believe them.

Priest: No, but they have many disciples.

Prabhupāda: Many disciples, that is another thing.

Priest: Millions.

Prabhupāda: Millions, trillions, that is another thing. But we have to see what is the disciple. That we have to see. Simply if somebody... So many disciples by number, we have to see the quality. What is the quality, not the number, not the quantity.

Priest: And if I had said that...

Prabhupāda: It is stated in the *Bhagavad-gītā*,
manuṣyāṇāṁ sahasreṣu
kaścid yatati siddhaye
yatatām api siddhānām
kaścin vetti mām tattvataḥ
 [Bhagavad-gītā 7.3]

Kṛṣṇa does not say that “millions and millions of people know Me.” No. Out of millions and millions of people, one is perfect. And out of millions of perfect person, one may know Him. That He says. So we cannot accept because one is accepted by millions, therefore he is God. We don't accept it.

Priest: That's right.

Prabhupāda: We want to see the quality, not the quantity. So our process is *paramparā*. Just like in India—you have been in India—there are *ācāryas*: Rāmānujācārya, Madhvācārya, Nimbārka, Viṣṇu Svāmī, Caitanya. If the *ācāryas* accept, then we accept. This is our process. We don't go by the millions; we see the quality. Rāmānujācārya, high quality devotee; Madhvācārya, high quality devotee; Caitanya, high quality devotee. If they say he is God, then we accept. This is our process. We don't see how many millions of followers. No. We want to see the quality man. He says yes. So Śaṅkarācārya says “Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead,” Rāmānujācārya

says “the Supreme Personality of Godhead,” Madhvācārya says “Supreme,” Caitanya says “Supreme,” then we accept. That's all. *Mahājano yena gataḥ sa pañthāḥ* [Cc. Madhya 17.186]. *Tarko apratiṣṭhaḥ*. Simply by argument we cannot understand the truth. *Tarko apratiṣṭhaḥ śrutayo vibhinnā*. And if you simply consult Vedic literature, that is also not possible. There are different statements. *Tarko apratiṣṭhaḥ śrutayo vibhinnā, nāsāv munir yasya matam na bhinnam*. A muni, a saintly person, a philosopher is not a philosopher or muni if he does not agree with others. He must disagree, then he becomes. So that is also not the way. *Dharmasya tattvaṁ nihitaṁ guhāyām*: it is very confidential. Then how to know? *Mahājano yena gataḥ sa pañthāḥ* [Cc. Madhya 17.186]. Big personalities, *ācāryas* — that is the process. *Ācāryopāsanam*. What is that, in the Thirteenth Chapter? *Ācāryopāsanam*, we have to understand through the *ācāryas*. That is our process. That is recommended in the *Bhagavad-gītā*, *evam paramparā-prāptam imam rājarṣayo viduḥ* [Bg. 4.2]. We accept Kṛṣṇa as the Supreme Personality of Godhead not by our experience but by the experience of the *ācāryas* who are recognized, and then we follow. Just like Arjuna accepts Kṛṣṇa in the Tenth Chapter. Find out, *param brahmā param dhāma pavitraṁ paramam bhavān* [Bg. 10.12]. Read it.

Pradyumna:

param brahmā param dhāma
pavitraṁ paramam bhavān
puruṣam śāsvataṁ divyam
ādi-devam ajaṁ vibhum
 [Bg. 10.12]

Prabhupāda: What is that translation?

Pradyumna: “Arjuna said: You are the Supreme Brahman, the ultimate, the supreme abode and purifier, the Absolute Truth and the eternal divine person. You are the primal God, transcendental and original, and You are unborn and the all-pervading beauty. All the great sages such as Nārada, Asita, Devala, and Vyāsa proclaim this of You, and now You Yourself are declaring it to me.”

Prabhupāda: So Kṛṣṇa says, and He is confirmed by Vyāsa-deva, Asita, Nārada. This is the process. We do not accept everyone who says “I am *avatāra*, I am God.” We don't accept. But because it is accepted by the *ācāryas*, therefore we accept. Just like the same example I can give: I do not know who is my father, and many people will come, “I am your father.” So we do not accept them. When mother says, “He is your father,” then accept. That is final. I have no experience. It is beyond my experience, because

father existed before my birth. So beyond my experience. So I am finding out who is my father, and so many people are coming, "I am your father." No. But as soon as the mother says, "No, no, this man is your father," then we accept. Then our business is finished. Then we get experience. Father is beyond my experience, but when we receive the knowledge through the mother, then we get experience. Arjuna says that: *paraṁ brahmā paraṁ dhāma pavitrāṁ paramaṁ bhavān* [Bg. 10.12], "You are the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Not only You are saying, but You are accepted by these authorities." That is all. I cannot get my experience of God; that is not possible. God comes, He says, and Kṛṣṇa comes and He is accepted by all the great *ācāryas*, then our business is perfect.

Devotee: This is also a translation of the Tenth Canto of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. It's a description of the activities of Lord Kṛṣṇa. That's in two volumes.

Priest: It's a tremendous work.

Prabhupāda: Our books are selling very nice. Last year we have sold four million copies throughout the whole world.

Devotee: This is Nectar of Devotion by a chief disciple of Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu. He quotes from all different scriptures, the *Purāṇas*, and he supports devotional service.

Priest: This is what you use for your devotional service?

Devotee: They're a model.

Bhagavān: We have many copies downstairs. You can take. It was Lord Caitanya's plan that for the common men there would be much chanting of *Hare Kṛṣṇa* and distributing of *prasādam*. And for those who are intellectually inclined, there is very high philosophy. So by Prabhupāda's grace, we are presenting all these things. It is not different than Lord Caitanya presented five hundred years ago. If you have opportunity later, you can hear some of our *kīrtana* in the temple.

Priest: Yes. This is why I am coming. ❀

In the February issue

Śrīla Prabhupāda concludes by explaining to the priest the significance of chanting the holy names of God.

Happy New Year....

(Continued from page 13)

EXPLORE THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSION

The Vedic scriptures explain that all living beings eat, mate, sleep and defend. In fact, the subhuman beings do nothing but these four activities. And modern man is also doing just these four activities, although in a sophisticated way. Even the entire gamut of scientific advancement is impelled by these four fundamental drives. Unbelievable? Let's see how. The first thing that man did after unravelling the mysteries of the atom is to use the atomic bomb - defence in the most horrendous form seen in the contemporary times. The result of the advent of the information age is the internet, which is mostly an international network of gossip about pornography - that's mating in its grossest form. The leaps in genetic engineering have mostly been actuated by the desire for better meat & other foodstuffs - is that anything higher than eating? Dunlop beds, nowadays water beds and what not - they are all obviously for sleeping. So a little thought will reveal how all the "advanced" activities done by the modern man eventually boil down to eating, sleeping, mating and defending. And there's nothing new in them, no matter how we do them externally. The *Bhāgavatam* describes this in graphic terms: *punaḥ punaś carvita-carvaṇānām* "Chewing the chewed,"

The human being however is meant not to live the same old life of eating, sleeping, mating and defending; he is meant to do something that is radically new. And that brings us to the realm of spirituality. A hog cannot understand the difference between its body and soul; a human being can. A dog cannot worship God or practice *mantra* meditation; a human being can. And spirituality is not just a different ability that a human has; it is his birthright, due to his possessing a higher intelligence that accompanies the human body.

Therefore the Vedic scriptures encourage us to sublimate our attraction for the new by directing it to the realm

of spirit. "*athāto brahmā jijñāsā*" - the first aphorism of the *Vedānta-sūtra* is a clarion call to all its readers: "Therefore inquire about the higher dimensions of life." It is quite surprising to see a book starting with the word 'therefore'. The implication is, "Now, O spirit soul, who has acquired a human body, cease from the animal business of eating, sleeping, mating and defending. Now you are endowed with a higher intelligence in the human form. Therefore inquire about the higher truths of life."

THE REAL "HAPPY NEW YEAR"

And this higher enquiry is not fruitless armchair speculation. The answers to it constitute a practical way of life which bestows upon the seeker unlimited happiness from the spiritual stratum. And this is in fact the Vedic mission: *sarve janāḥ sukhino bhavantu* - Let everyone be happy-not superficially and temporarily by success in the rat race for sense gratification, but deeply and eternally by absorption in loving service to God.

Spiritual life culminates in the development of love of God. Love of God, the Universal Father, precipitates love for all living beings as one's own brothers. This selfless love completely satisfies the self and also makes the lover of God the topmost welfare worker for all living beings. Love of God is our original and real nature, but due to prolonged & excessive contact with matter, it has become completely obscured and is now misdirected towards various material objects. All genuine spiritual practices are meant to revive this love of God, which is presently dormant in our hearts. And God being infinite is eternally new (*nitya-nava-navāyamāna*) and so loving Him is an eternally new and happy experience. Thus revival of our love of God is the ultimate fruition of the wish - "Happy New Year!" ❀

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Vedic Thought

Who, other than one who is not a human
 being, can exist in this world and not be
 interested in the ultimate goal of life? Who can
 refuse the nectar of narrations about the
 Personality of Godhead's activities, which by
 itself can deliver one from all material pangs?

Maitreya Ṛṣi
 Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 3.13.50



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Vaiṣṇava Calendar for the Month of December 2006

1 Dec 2006 Friday : Fasting for Mokṣadā Ekādaśī, Advent of Śrīmad Bhagavad-gītā.

2 Dec 2006 Saturday : Break fast (Mumbai) 06:56 - 10:37.

4 Dec 2006 Monday : Kātyāyanī vrata ends.

8 Dec 2006 Friday : Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura – Disappearance (Fasting till noon).

16 Dec 2006 Saturday : Śrī Devānanda Paṇḍita – Disappearance, Fasting for Saphalā Ekādaśī, Dhanus Saṅkrānti (Sun enters Sagittarius).

17 Dec 2006 Sunday : Break fast (Mumbai) 07:05 - 10:44.

18 Dec 2006 Monday : Śrī Maheśa Paṇḍita – Disappearance, Śrī Uddhāraṇa Datta Ṭhākura – Disappearance.

21 Dec 2006 Thursday : Śrī Locana Dāsa Ṭhākura – Appearance.

23 Dec 2006 Saturday : Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī – Disappearance, Sri Jagadīśa Paṇḍita – Disappearance.

30 Dec 2006 Saturday : Fasting for Putradā Ekādaśī.

31 Dec 2006 Sunday : Break fast (Mumbai) 07:11 - 10:51, Śrī Jagadīśa Paṇḍita – Appearance.

Acyuta, Drive My Chariot

Kṛṣṇa is called *bhakta-vatsala*. He is very affectionate towards His devotees. He takes pleasure in being controlled by His devotees. Although Kṛṣṇa has all good qualities, He is not proud. He drove Arjuna's chariot. Kṛṣṇa wasn't thinking, what will people think if I drive a chariot? No king would ever lower himself to do such menial service. Karna's foster father was a chariot driver and for that reason Karna was not accepted as a *kṣatriya* and was looked down upon. In Draupadi's *svayamvara* she rejected him on these grounds. Yet Kṛṣṇa accepted such a low position to please His devotee. In the battle of *Kurukṣetra*, once when Arjuna's horses became tired he made a hall of arrows and created a lake so that the horses could drink. At that time Kṛṣṇa took care of the horses by plucking out all the arrows from their body, dressing their wounds, massaging them and giving them water. He performed all the duties of a groom.

Why did He take so much trouble? - out of His affection for Arjuna. He takes more pleasure in serving His devotee than He does in being served. So we should learn from this that it is better to serve Kṛṣṇa's servant than to try to serve Him directly.

Before the battle of *Kurukṣetra* was about to begin, Arjuna ordered Kṛṣṇa to take his wonderful chariot a little further up ahead so that Arjuna can see who all have come to fight with him. It is a simple instruction. But its significance lies in the fact that it was administered to none other else than the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

Although Lord Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Personality of Godhead, out of His causeless mercy He was engaged in the service of His friend. He never fails in His affection for His devotees, and thus He is addressed herein as infallible. As charioteer, He had to carry out the orders of Arjuna, and since He did not hesitate to do so, He is addressed as infallible. Although He had accepted the position of a charioteer for His devotee, His supreme position was not challenged. In all circumstances, He is the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Hṛīṣīkeṣa, the Lord of the total senses. The relationship between the Lord and His servitor is very sweet and transcendental. The servitor is always ready to render service to the Lord, and, similarly, the Lord is always seeking an opportunity to render some service to the devotee. He takes greater pleasure in His pure devotee's assuming the advantageous position of ordering Him than He does in being the giver of orders. Since He is master, everyone is under His orders, and no one is above Him to order Him. But when He finds that a pure devotee is ordering Him, He obtains transcendental pleasure, although He is the infallible master

in all circumstances.

As a pure devotee of the Lord, Arjuna had no desire to fight with his cousins and brothers, but he was forced to come onto the battlefield by the obstinacy of Duryodhana, who was never agreeable to any peaceful negotiation. Therefore, he was very anxious to see who the leading persons present on the battlefield were. Although there was no question of a peacemaking endeavour on the battlefield, he wanted to see them again, and to see how much they were bent upon demanding an unwanted war.

One mustn't think that Kṛṣṇa requires the devotee to serve for any length of time before the benediction of pure devotional service is awarded to him. Surrender to Kṛṣṇa may take only a moment if the devotee so desires. This is exemplified in the life of Bali Mahārāja, who had accepted a spiritual master who was unqualified due to his desires for personal aggrandizement. Bali's master, Śukrācārya, guided him to conquer the celestial kingdom of Indra. As Bali did this, the rightful proprietors of the heavenly kingdoms, the demigods headed by Indra, were all chased away. The vanquished demigods, however, were all devotees of the Lord; hence they prayed that He return them to their posts so that they could continue their service of universal administration. In order to answer the prayers of His devotees, the all-auspicious Supreme Personality of Godhead Śrī Kṛṣṇa incarnated Himself as Vāmanadeva, a beautifully effulgent *brāhmaṇa* boy who was no larger than a dwarf. He proceeded at once to the kingdom of Bali Mahārāja, which rightfully belonged to the demigods.

When Vāmana arrived, Bali Mahārāja was most attracted to His extreme beauty. Especially noticeable was Vāmana's glowing effulgence. Śukrācārya, Bali's spiritual master, recognized that this dwarflike *brāhmaṇa* must be the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Therefore, knowing that a *brāhmaṇa* approaches the rich for the purpose of begging something from them, he declared to Bali, "Don't give this boy anything!"

Bali, on the other hand, wanting to offer something, ran forward to the *brāhmaṇa* boy out of spontaneous attraction, declaring that He could have whatever He wanted. Bali was ready to surrender everything, but Lord Vāmanadeva declared that since He Himself was a *brāhmaṇa*, He needed only enough land upon which to sleep. A *brāhmaṇa* is very humble in his material needs. Therefore, Lord Vāmanadeva requested of him, "Please give Me three steps of land."

"Is that all You want?" Bali asked.

"Please ask for whatever You would like."

Vāmanadeva said, "Three steps of land will be enough."

(please turn to page 23)

