

*śrī śrī guru-gaurāṅgau jayataḥ*

# The Essence of Bhagavad-gītā

Śrī Śrīmad Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa  
Gosvāmī Mahārāja

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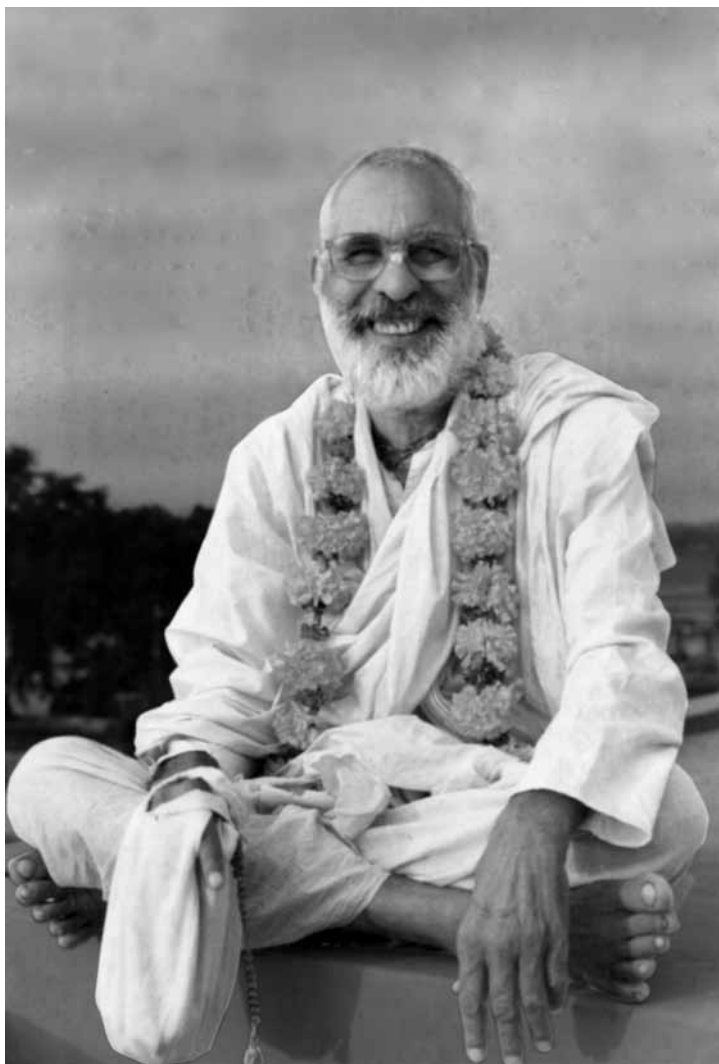
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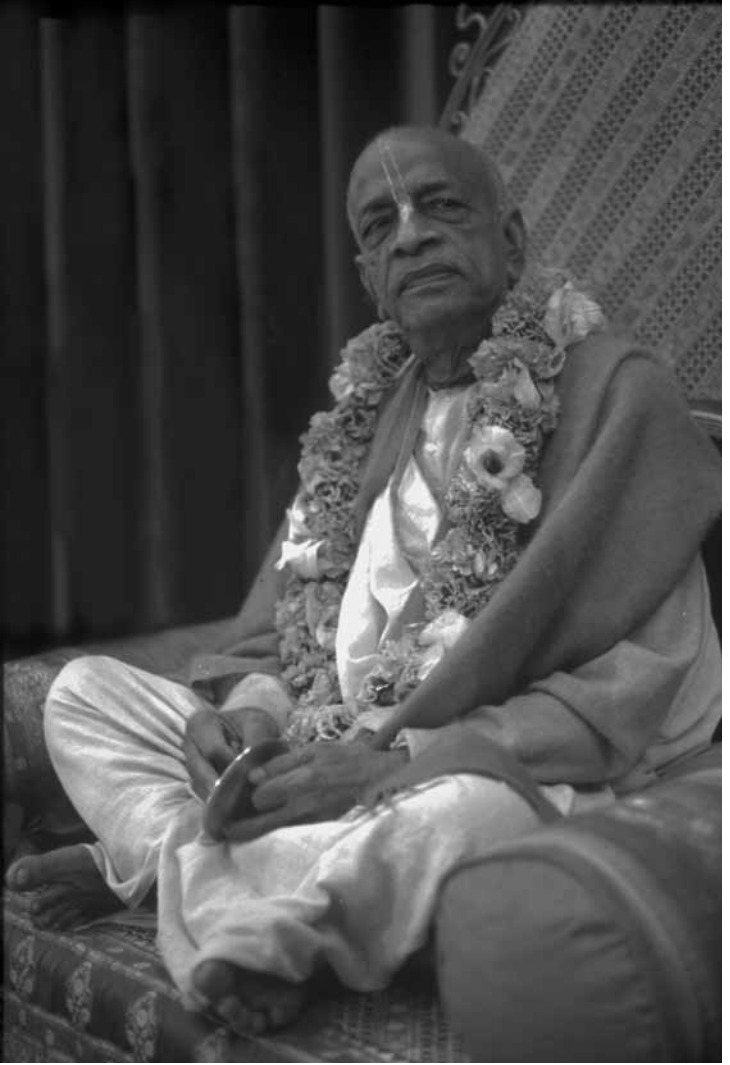
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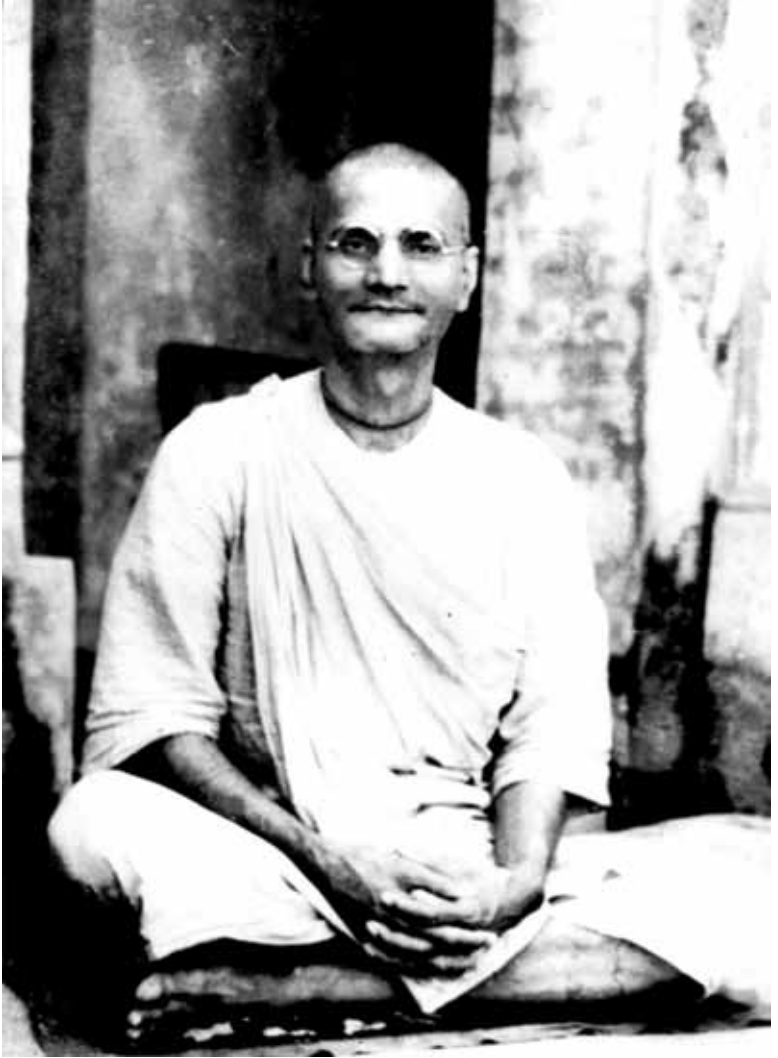
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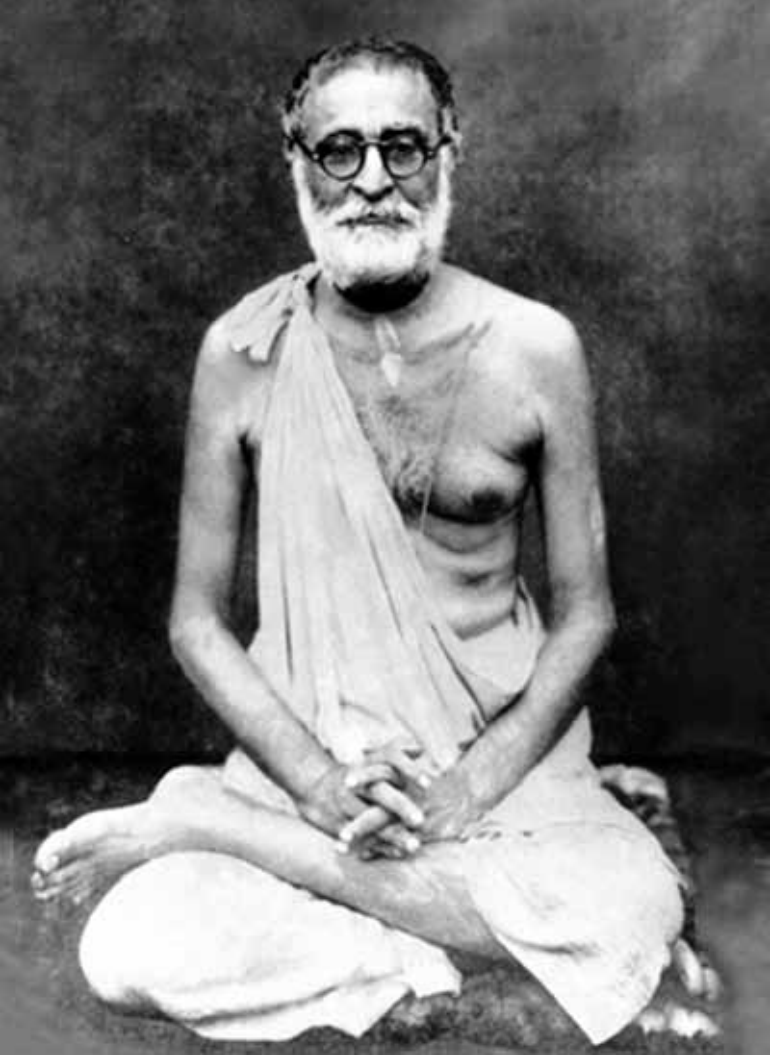
ŚRĪ ŚRĪMAD BHAKTIVEDĀNTA NĀRĀYAṆA  
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GOSVĀMĪ PRABHUPĀDA



## Introduction

The *Bhagavad-gītā* (The Song of God) was spoken by Śrī Kṛṣṇa to his disciple and friend Arjuna, over 5,000 years ago, just before the beginning of the epic Mahābhārata War. Since that time seekers of sacred wisdom have turned to the *Bhagavad-gītā* for answers to the most profound mysteries of life.

The material in this book was taken from lectures on the confidential meanings of the *Bhagavad-gītā*, given by one of the most prominent spiritual authorities of the modern era, Śrī Śrīmad Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Gosvāmī Mahārāja. He is a fully realized spiritual master in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava disciplic succession, extant since the time of Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself. Śrīla Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Gosvāmī Mahārāja has been teaching the ancient science of Kṛṣṇa consciousness for over sixty years. In these talks, Śrīla Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja reveals truths of the *Bhagavad-gītā* that have been carefully maintained and handed down in an unbroken succession of self-realized spiritual teachers for the last 5,000 years.

The eminent 19th century saint and scholar, Śrīla Saccidānanda Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura has said in his explanation of the *Gītā*, “When the supremely compassionate Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, whose vows are infallible, spoke *Śrīmad Bhagavad-gītā*, He seemed to be directing His words at His friend Arjuna. Actually however, He manifested this scripture for the deliverance of the whole world. It is the very form of deep reflection on the essential meanings of all the Vedas, and it is the sole means of attaining the highest goal.”

Citing Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s own words in the *Bhagavad-gītā* to establish pure love and devotion to God as the topmost goal

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of all spiritual seekers, Śrīla Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja explains the journey of the soul towards that ultimate level of spiritual consciousness. Of all the verses in the *Bhagavad-gītā*, the most revealing is in the final chapter where Śrī Kṛṣṇa says, “Always think of Me, become My devotee, worship Me and offer your respects unto Me. Thus you will certainly come to me. I promise you this because you are My very dear friend.” (*Bhagavad-gītā* 18.65)

In this verse are four distinct instructions, which offer devotees of different eligibilities the opportunity to connect with the Lord in perfect loving service. Śrīla Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja brings this subject to life through enchanting tales from the lives of real devotees, some quite famous, and others virtually unknown. The common theme is the extraordinary connection they experience with the Lord by the bestowal of His sweet, unlimited compassion and mercy.

It is the sincere hope and prayer of the editors that by hearing these wonderful deliberations, all may find inspiration and guidance in their own sacred calling. On behalf of the many devotees serving in Gauḍīya Vedānta Publications, we offer this publication to Śrīla Gurudeva, praying that he be pleased with our efforts.

*Humbly in the service of Hari, Guru and Vaiṣṇavas,*

Bhaktivedānta Vaikhanas Mahārāja

Śrī Rādhāṣṭamī  
8th September, 2008  
Bangalore, India

# Chapter One

*man-manā bhava*

## *Always Think of Me*

The scriptures describe many spiritual places, but in the entire universe there is no place like Vṛndāvana. Śrī Kṛṣṇa and His eternal associates performed pastimes there that are unique. One who knows the glories of Vṛndāvana will understand this, especially if he has received the mercy of Vṛndāvana.

The instructions of the *Bhagavad-gītā* serve as a foundation for understanding these things, and upon this foundation is the palace of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* with its twelve floors (twelve cantos). If the foundation of *Bhagavad-gītā* is not there, we will only be able to understand *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* in a mundane way and everything will be ruined.

In the *Gītā* (18.65) we find this verse:

*man-manā bhava mad-bhakto  
mad-yājī mām namaskuru  
mām evaiṣyasi satyaṁ te  
pratijāne priyo 'si me*

Absorb your mind and heart in Me, become My devotee, worship Me, offer your obeisances to Me, and then certainly you will come to Me. I make this promise to you because you are very dear to Me.

Of all verses in the *Bhagavad-gītā*, this is the best. It is even better than the verse that comes after it (18.66), in which Kṛṣṇa

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says, *sarva-dharmān parityajya*: “Give up all forms of religiosity and come exclusively to My shelter. I will free you from all sinful reactions. Do not fear.”

Although this is the final verse, and Kṛṣṇa is telling us to abandon our *dharma* (religious and worldly duties), we may think that some sinful reaction may come to us. But Kṛṣṇa says, “I am responsible for that. I will excuse you from all sins.” Whether it is making our parents or brothers and relatives cry, or it is a wife making her husband cry, or a husband making his wife cry, not doing our duty to society, and not following *varṇāśrama-dharma* these are all *adharma*, irreligious actions, and sinful reaction will come to anyone who does these things. But Kṛṣṇa says, “I promise that I will at once free you from any sinful reaction.”

The verse that we will describe here, “*man-manā bhava...*,” is even better than this verse. The verse “*sarva-dharmān parityajya...*” gives instruction for *śaraṇāgati*, how to surrender to God. But this verse gives the fruit of that surrender, and is therefore even more exalted.

When we read *Bhagavad-gītā* thoroughly, and look through the commentaries of the illustrious spiritual teachers in our line, we see that there are five levels of instructions. First, there are general instructions for everyone. After this secret instructions (*guhya*), then more secret (*guhyatara*), then most secret (*guhyatama*), and finally the most secret of all secrets (*sarva-guhyatama*). These instructions are not given in an expanded form, but in the form of condensed verses.

*sarvopaniṣado gāvo  
dogdhā gopāla-nandanah  
pārtho vatsaḥ sudhīr bhoktā  
dugdham gītāmṛtaṁ mahat*

*Bhagavad-gītā-māhātmyam (5)*

All the scriptures – the Vedas, Purāṇas, Upaniṣads – are like a cow, and Arjuna is the calf. First the cow feeds a little milk to her calf, and she becomes happy by that. Then the milkman Śrī Kṛṣṇa milks the cow, and keeps the remainder of the milk aside. Who is the remainder for? It is for those whose intelligence is pure. Whose intelligence is pure? Is the intelligence of the great scientists and scholars of this world pure? The *Bhāgavatam* doesn't say this. It says that the truly intelligent person is one who performs *bhagavad-bhajana*, worship of the Supreme Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and who is expert in relishing the liquid mellows of devotion to the Lord. One who has understood that engaging in *bhagavad-bhajana* is the essence of life is purely intelligent. After the cow has first fed her calf a little milk, Kṛṣṇa keeps the remainder in a pot for those that are of pure intelligence, who are dear to Him.

## General Instructions

For ordinary people, Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa has said:

*yuktāhāra-vihārasya  
yukta-ceṣṭasya karmasu  
yukta-svapnāvabodhasya  
yogo bhavati duḥkha-hā*

*Bhagavad-gītā (6.17)*

Don't eat or sleep too much, and be regulated in working and recreation, otherwise you will not be able to attain that rare *yoga* wherein a soul meets his Creator. In this verse He has given the general knowledge that we are not these bodies. Be detached from the desires of the body and don't act for them.

*jātasya hi dhruvo mṛtyur  
dhruvaṁ janma mṛtasya ca*

*Bhagavad-gītā (2.27)*

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“One who has taken birth will certainly die, and afterwards he will certainly take birth again. Therefore you should not grieve for that which is inevitable.” Arjuna was crying for everyone – for his son, wife, relatives, friends – and we are also crying for our relatives and friends.

*aśocyān anvaśocas tvam  
prajñā-vādāmś ca bhāṣase  
gatāsūn agatāsūmś ca  
nānuśocanti paṇḍitāḥ*

*Bhagavad-gītā (2.11)*

Those who are wise despair neither for the living nor the dead. Everyone will die, and those that don't go today will go tomorrow or the next day. Don't cry or worry for them, because inside the body is the soul.

*nainam chindanti śastrāṇi  
nainam dahati pāvakaḥ  
na cainam kledayanty āpo  
na śoṣayati mārutaḥ*

*Bhagavad-gītā (2.23)*

“The soul cannot be harmed by any weapon, burnt by fire, moistened by water or withered by the wind.” The soul is eternal, but the body is subject to death, so don't be overly concerned about the body.

In what way should one be concerned for the body? When one is enlightened, one can realise that Bhagavān has given this body in the form of a temple for the purpose of performing worship of Him. Therefore, it should be cared for; we should keep it clean and repair it. Otherwise we won't be able to do *bhajana* (worship). To this extent, caring for the body is all right, but it should be done with a spirit of

detachment. In the end Bhagavān will ask for it back, and it must be returned. He will ask, “I have given you such a rare and valuable human form, and what have you done with it?”

Thus, He has spoken verses like this:

*yā niśā sarva-bhūtānām  
tasyām jāgarti saṁyamī  
yasyām jāgrati bhūtāni  
sā niśā paśyato muneh*

*Bhagavad-gītā (2.69)*

“While ordinary people sleep, the sage is awake in self-realisation, and while the sage sleeps, ordinary people are awake in sense gratification.” Therefore you should simply engage in *bhagavad-bhajana* and considering happiness and distress to be the same go on doing your duty. Up to this point, it is general instruction.

## The Secret Instruction

After this comes *guhya*, secret instruction, which is knowledge of spirit. The soul is *brahman*, its true nature is spirit.

*sthita-prajñasya kā bhāṣā  
samādhi-sthasya keśava  
sthita-dhīḥ kiṁ prabhāṣeta  
kim āsīta vrajeta kim*

*Bhagavad-gītā (2.54)*

Arjuna asks, “What are the symptoms of a person whose consciousness is absorbed in spirit (*brahman*)? How does he speak, how does he sit and how does he walk?”

In the eighteenth chapter the conclusion is given:

*brahma-bhūtaḥ prasannātmā  
na śocati na kāṅkṣati*

*samaḥ sarveṣu bhūteṣu  
mad-bhaktim labhate parām  
Bhagavad-gītā (18.54)*

One who is situated in *brahman* sees spirit everywhere and thinks, “I am also *brahman*.” These thoughts will help him to meditate on *brahman*, and he will not experience happiness or distress. He remains steady throughout whatever comes to him, and merges his consciousness in *brahman*.

*karmaṇy evādhikāras te  
mā phaleṣu kadācana  
Bhagavad-gītā (2.47)*

Śrī Kṛṣṇa says, “Go on doing your duty and don’t desire the fruits of your labour.” In a basic way, this is *brahma-jñāna*, knowledge of our spiritual nature.

## More Secret Instructions

After this comes *guhya-tara*, a more secret instruction, which is *paramātmā-jñāna*, knowledge of the Supersoul. There are two classes of beings: fallible and infallible. Beyond these two classes is the Supersoul, an expansion of the Supreme Personality of Godhead who resides in the hearts of all living entities. Meditate on Him, and if you don’t reach Him, try again. If you fail to reach Him, try again.

*kleśo ’dhikataras teṣām  
avyaktāsakta-cetasām  
Bhagavad-gītā (12.5)*

Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna, “That formless *brahman* that I mentioned to you before – don’t go there. Beware! There will be more difficulty in trying to attach your consciousness to something formless.” Instead, meditate on the Supersoul within the heart.

One who connects with Him is a real renunciate (*sannyāsī*) and a real *yogī*.

*sa sannyāsī ca yogī ca  
na niragnir na cākriyāḥ*

*Bhagavad-gītā (6.1)*

One does not become a real *sannyāsī* just by performing fire sacrifices, or by muttering “I am *brahman*”. This is all more secret instruction

## The Most Secret And The Most Secret Of All

And *guhyaṭama*, most secret, is given in the ninth chapter. Pure devotion (*bhakti*) is given there, but it is devoid of knowledge of the transcendental loving relationships and exchanges (*rasa*) between the Lord and His devotees. Although it is pure *bhakti*, it is not full of *rasa*.

At the end of the eighteenth chapter, the most secret of all secrets (*sarva-guhyatama*), is given. It is full of *rasa*, and is the highest limit of *bhakti*:

*sarva-guhyatamaṁ bhūyaḥ  
śṛṇu me paramaṁ vacaḥ  
iṣṭo 'si me dṛḍham iti  
tato vakṣyāmi te hitam  
man-manā bhava mad-bhakto  
mad-yājī mām namaskuru  
mām evaiṣyasi satyaṁ te  
pratijāne priyo 'si me*

*Bhagavad-gītā (18.64–5)*

“Because you are very dear to Me, I am telling you this most confidential of all instructions.” What is that instruction? Prior to this, Śrī Kṛṣṇa had explained the worship of Bhagavān with awareness of His opulence. This is worship of the Lord in his

form as Nārāyaṇa. However, in this verse, four extraordinary activities are described. The first is *man-manā bhava*, always think of Me; the second is *mad-bhakto*, become My devotee; the third is *mad-yājī*, worship Me; and the fourth is *mām namaskuru*, offer obeisances to Me. If you cannot do the first, then do the second. If you can't do that, then do the third. If you can't do that, then just offer obeisances, and everything will follow from that.

## Absorb Your Mind And Heart In Me

Now we will speak on the first part of this verse: *man-manā bhava* – “Absorb your mind and heart in Me.” This is not a simple thing. If we want to absorb the mind in any one activity, we must fix our eyes, ears, nose and all our senses on it. If the mind cannot concentrate on something, it is more or less uncontrolled. Sometimes our mind is contemplating sense enjoyment, and sometimes we think about Kṛṣṇa. This is the conditioned state. The highest form of worship is to fully absorb the mind in the lotus feet of Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

When will this be possible? In the beginning stage of faith (*śraddhā*), it is not possible. Then the stage of spiritual taste for devotional practice (*ruci*), will come, and still it won't be possible. In the stage of spiritual attachment (*āsakti*), we can give perhaps one-half of our heart to Him. In the stage of devotional ecstasy (*bhāva*), maybe we can give three-quarters of our heart to Him. It is only in the stage of pure divine love (*prema*), that we can fully give our hearts to Kṛṣṇa.

The *gopīs* (cowherd damsels) of Vṛndāvana have set the ideal example of absorption in Kṛṣṇa. They are Kṛṣṇa's topmost devotees, and their love for Him is unparalleled. After Kṛṣṇa

had left Vṛndāvana, He sent His very intimate friend Uddhava to console the *gopīs*. Kṛṣṇa told Uddhava, “When you get to Vṛndāvana, you will meet the *gopīs*, who are the most dear to Me. They have given their hearts to Me completely, and they know nothing besides Me. They have even forgotten all of their bodily needs and functions.

“What is the condition of someone who has forgotten all bodily needs? They have forgotten eating, drinking, bathing, decorating themselves with ornaments and clothing, and arranging their hair. Their bodies will certainly become thin and weak. In their love for Me they have forgotten all of their bodily relations: their husbands, sons, friends, brothers, wealth and property. They have no love for anyone but Me. Day and night they are deeply remembering Me.

“Uddhava, in this world you have not seen such an example of how one person can give her heart to another. Somehow or other the *gopīs* are holding onto their lives. How much longer can they live like this? I don’t know if they can be saved or not. Therefore go quickly, and save their lives. Give them My message: ‘I am definitely coming to Vṛndāvana tomorrow or the next day.’ For this they are holding onto their lives. They will think, ‘Kṛṣṇa has said that He is coming, and He cannot tell a lie.’ Clutching onto this hope, it is as if their lives are hanging on a delicate tree limb. If the limb breaks, they will fall and give up their lives. So go quickly.”

The *gopīs* are the perfect example of absorbing the mind and heart in Kṛṣṇa, *man-manā bhava*. We understand that giving our heart to someone is very difficult, but if someone takes our heart, then it becomes very easy. Otherwise we are simply unable to give our hearts. In the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (1.2.23) it says:

*nāyam ātmā pravacanena labhyo  
na medhayā na bahunā śrutena  
yam evaiṣa vṛṇute tena labhyas  
tasyaiṣa ātmā vivṛṇute tanūṁ svām*

“Kṛṣṇa reveals Himself only to whom He chooses. Only that person can realise Him, no one else. Being pleased with that person’s attitude of service, Kṛṣṇa manifests His own form.”

Śrī Kṛṣṇa will select a heart that is dear to Him and then say, “Come, I will take your heart.” Even if we really desire to give our heart to Kṛṣṇa, it is very difficult. But if He desires to take our heart, then it is possible. But we must make our heart such that when Kṛṣṇa sees us it will inspire greed within Him. The heart must be pure in all ways; if there is any impurity remaining there, He will not take it. However, mere purity is also not sufficient, for many *jñānīs* (spiritual philosophers) also have hearts that are pure. We must add some special fragrance that will attract Kṛṣṇa. *Bhakti-rasa*, the ecstatic moods of transcendental service in direct relationship to Kṛṣṇa, should be flowing in the heart. That is why the *gopīs* of Vṛndāvana are so dear to Kṛṣṇa; their hearts are full of this *bhakti-rasa*.

## Stealing The Heart

How does Kṛṣṇa take a heart? This story will show how. Kṛṣṇa would take the cows out to graze for the day in the forests of Vṛndāvana. His complexion was the colour of a dark raincloud, and His curly, black hair dangled around His face. He appeared very beautiful and charming. His friends were spread out in the four directions chanting, “Sādhu! Sādhu!” (meaning “Excellent! Excellent!”). They were praising Kṛṣṇa and singing and playing their flutes and horns. Even the blind

people of Vraja would come out to try and see Kṛṣṇa and His friends as they celebrated.

Someone would ask, “Where are you going?”

Another would reply, “I am going to see Kṛṣṇa. Take my hand, let’s go!” And with great eagerness they would go.

All the people of Vraja surrounded the road to see Kṛṣṇa taking the cows out to graze. Kṛṣṇa’s parents, Mother Yaśodā and Nanda Bābā were following behind Him saying, “My son, come back soon, don’t go too far away!”

Time and again Kṛṣṇa requested them to go back to their home. Finally, when He promised that He would return later in the day, they slowly went back to their home.

There were many newly married girls who had just arrived in Vraja to live in the homes of their husbands. They all went to the doors of their houses to catch a glimpse of Kṛṣṇa. Some peered through the windows, some climbed up on the roofs, and others climbed to the tops of trees in the nearby groves.

Kṛṣṇa was also searching. He always wanted to see the new girls. In one house, there was a new girl who had just been married two or three days before. She had heard how beautiful Kṛṣṇa appears when He takes the cows out to graze. When she heard He was coming with the cows, her heart became very restless and eager to see Him. But her new mother-in-law and sister-in-law were sitting outside the door. Her sister-in-law was especially harsh towards her. They were telling her, “You are not going! We are going, but you cannot. There is a black snake out there, and if it bites you, you will never be able to remove its poison. Therefore stay in the house! We will be back soon.”

The girl said, “You are going! And you say that I should just sit here in the house? I will also go!”

“No, it’s dangerous – don’t go! Your heart is very immature, and you will never be able to remove the snake’s poison. You just sit here.”

“Nevertheless, I will go with you!”

“No, it’s dangerous! You won’t go.”

“Then I will go alone. All the wives, elderly people, boys, girls, birds, beasts and insects of Vraja are going to see Kṛṣṇa. And in all of Vṛndāvana, only I will not be allowed to see Him? Certainly I will go!”

“No, you won’t!”

“I am most certainly going! Even if you throw me out of this household I will go!”

Then, seeing that Kṛṣṇa was coming near, the mother-in-law and sister-in-law quickly ran to see Him. When they left, the girl stepped forward and began peering out through the crack in the door. Her position was such that she could see out, but no one could see her. Kṛṣṇa was holding the flute to His lips and playing so sweetly, it seemed that the nectar of His heart was emanating through the holes of the flute and inundating the entire area of Vṛndāvana. Those eyes which have not seen Kṛṣṇa in this way are useless. Only the eyes which have seen this beautiful scene are successful.

The *gopīs* were worshipping Kṛṣṇa with their eyes. How? Their eyes were like lamps, and the pure love in their hearts was like the oil. Their eyes were burning as they circled Kṛṣṇa’s form with loving sidelong glances, and they performed worship of Kṛṣṇa with these glances. With great happiness, Kṛṣṇa became shy and accepted all of them.

At the same time, He was looking in the direction of that new girl behind the door. Kṛṣṇa may or may not want to see someone,

but if someone really wants to see Him, He will reciprocate with that person. That day He wanted to see that new girl first of all. He wanted to leave everyone else behind and go there immediately. So, He played a trick using one of His calves. Grabbing the tail of the calf, He gave it a twist, and the calf ran directly to that girl's door, as if it had been trained for that very purpose. At once Kṛṣṇa and the calf arrived at the door. Standing in His threefold-bending posture, with the flute to His lips, and smiling, He gave His audience to that girl. Finished! Her very heart came out from her and He took it and went on His way. She could only stand motionlessly. This is taking a heart: *man-manā bhava*.

If someone attains the mercy of Kṛṣṇa, then certainly He will take their heart. If we are especially eager, wondering in our minds, “When will I be able to see the beautiful form of Śrī Kṛṣṇa?” then Kṛṣṇa will be so pleased and come and take our hearts. That girl had performed austerities for millions of years for this opportunity, and that day she became completely successful.

She was left standing motionlessly. Fifteen or twenty minutes passed since Kṛṣṇa had left and entered the forest. The dust raised by the boys and their cows had long settled. The girl was still standing motionlessly because without her heart or mind, she was helpless. Then the cruel sister-in-law said to her, “The black snake Śyāmasundara has bitten you, and now you will never be able to remove the poison!”

Shaking the girl, she somehow managed to bring her inside the house. “Here! Take this churning stick and churn some yoghurt. By doing some hard work your mind will return to you.”

But the girl took the wrong pot, and instead began churning mustard seeds. It made a terrible noise. Sometimes she would

churn, and sometimes she would stop. Where was her mind and heart? Kṛṣṇa had taken them: *man-manā bhava*.

Again the sister-in-law came and said, “What are you doing? I will complain to my mother about you!” At once the mother-in-law came and said, “Lift up this pot. Go and bring water.” They placed a large pot on her head, and on top of that, a smaller pot. They also gave her a small child and said, “Look after this child and see that he doesn’t cry!” They put a long rope in her hand to lower the pots down into the well, and sent her off.

And so she went. When she arrived at the well, she made a noose for lowering the pot down into the well. But instead of wrapping the noose around the pot, she placed it around the child as if she was going to lower him into the well! Everyone nearby shouted, “Hey! What are you doing?” They came running over, and took the rope from her hands, saving the child.

One *gopī* said, “It appears that a ghost has possessed her!”

Another *gopī*, who knew everything said, “It wasn’t just an ordinary ghost, it was the ghost of Nanda!”

Vṛndāvana is the place for those who are unable to give their hearts to their children and family. They leave everyone crying for them and like refugees come to Vṛndāvana and cry exclusively for Kṛṣṇa. Even very fine sons and daughters of kings come to Vṛndāvana to give their hearts to Kṛṣṇa and engage in *bhajana*.

Kṛṣṇa told Arjuna, “This is *man-manā bhava*. Absorb your mind in Me as the *gopīs* did.”

Arjuna replied, “My Lord, this is a battlefield! How is it possible for me to give my heart here? You told me to fight against Grandfather Bhīṣma, Droṇācārya and Karṇa. I am unable to do it.”

Next He will explain “*mad-bhakto* – become My devotee.”

## Chapter Two

*mad-bhakto*

# *Become My Devotee*

In the last chapter we explained the best and most secret verse of *Bhagavad-gītā*. Using examples, we explained the meaning of *man-manā bhava*, “Absorb your mind always in thinking of Me.” Kṛṣṇa gave this instruction to Arjuna on a battlefield.

We are also in the midst of a battle. We are at war with the tendencies of the mind, which is restless by nature. There was a war going on between the Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas in Kurukṣetra. The instruction to absorb the mind in Kṛṣṇa (*man-manā bhava*) was difficult for Arjuna at that time; it is also just as difficult for us now.

The Pāṇḍavas’ army consisted of seven large military divisions called *aksauhinis* and the Kauravas’ army consisted of eleven. Opposing us is also an army of eleven *aksauhinis*, but we are alone. Kṛṣṇa was the driver of Arjuna’s chariot, but our driver is bad and deformed intelligence. Arjuna had a chariot given to him by the demigod Agni that could not be burnt or destroyed. But what kind of chariot do we have? We have only our material body, which is subject to disease and death.

Arjuna had the Gāṇḍīva bow for fighting, but what do we have? We have no help; such is our position of weakness. Who was sitting

on the flag of his chariot? Hanumān. Arjuna had all kinds of help, but his mind became disturbed and he said, “My Lord, I am unable to absorb my mind in thinking only of You.”

The body is our chariot, the soul is its passenger and the mind is its charioteer. What is the nature of the mind? Restless; it gives us no help at all. By its direction we will fall down or stray from the path.

At first, with hands folded together, Arjuna said:

*śiṣyas te 'haṁ śādhi mām tvām praṇanam*  
Bhagavad-gītā (2.7)

In all ways I am now surrendered unto You. As You instruct me, I will do.

He heard all of Kṛṣṇa's instructions, and then said, “I am unable to do this *man-manā bhava*. How will I absorb my mind in this way? It is not possible. Many powerful warriors have gathered here to fight against us: Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Karṇa, Duryodhana and Duḥśāsana.”

Opposing us also are six powerful warriors. What are they? They are the urges of speech, the tongue, the stomach, the genitals, the uncontrolled mind and anger. We cannot conquer even one of these warriors. Even such exalted personalities as Viśvāmitra and Nārada were affected by one of these foes, the sexual urge. Besides these urges, we have to contend with countless sinful desires and unwanted impurities in the heart.

Therefore Kṛṣṇa said, “*Mad-bhakto* – become My devotee.”

Arjuna considered, and said, “Saying one will become a devotee is easy, but to actually do it is very difficult.”

To become a devotee, one thing is especially necessary:

*anyābhilāṣitā-śūnyam*  
*jñāna-karmādy-anāvṛtam*

*ānukūlyena kṛṣṇānu-  
sīlanam bhaktir uttamā*

*Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu (1.1.11)*

Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī has instructed us, “Devotional service should be devoid of all desires other than the aspiration to bring happiness to Śrī Kṛṣṇa. It should not be covered by knowledge and activity for material gain.”

One should not have any type of material desire for attaining *bhakti*, the service of Śrī Kṛṣṇa or of His pure devotee. There cannot be a scent of any separate desire in the heart. What to speak of the desire itself, there cannot be even a scent of it. There are to be no tendencies of *jñāna*, the cultivation of knowledge directed towards impersonal liberation, or *karma* – fruitive activity.

There is an apparent contradiction here. We are told that we must not have any tendency towards material activity or accumulating knowledge. The difficulty is that no one can live without activity. We must eat and wear clothing to protect ourselves from the cold. We are performing some material activity even when we are asleep. Breathing, changing position and dreaming are all material activities. We cannot live for even one moment without performing some sort of activity, and anyone who says that he can is a pretender.

The question is how will we ensure that activity is not material and does not cover our *bhakti*? The solution is to perform our activity for the pleasure of Bhagavān; then it will not cover *bhakti*. For example, when we are eating, we shouldn’t forget the Lord. Rather, we should first cook and offer the food for His pleasure, and then eat the remnants with honor in order to maintain our bodies for His service.

In our present condition we are also unable to live without knowledge. Knowledge is necessary, because without it we will not even know where to place our feet while walking and we will fall down.

Although knowledge and material activity will remain, they must be kept in a position of servitude to *bhakti*, otherwise our *bhakti* will become covered. We can do this by engaging our knowledge and activity in Kṛṣṇa's service. For instance, we can go to the market and bring good quality fruits and vegetables for the service of the Deity. He will accept the offerings and give mercy to everyone. Acting in this way will increase our *bhakti* instead of covering it. On the other hand, if we act for our own enjoyment, everything is spoiled, even if we offer the results of our activity to Kṛṣṇa. This action will cover our *bhakti*, so we must be aware of this.

For example, if we bring first-class ingredients such as the best milk, pure cow's ghee, and coconut, and we make a very beautiful sweet, with silver topping. It is somewhat proper to make this preparation thinking, "I have made this. I collected the necessary funds, and brought the ingredients. I will offer it to Bhagavān and then enjoy it." This way of expressing devotion is not completely pure. Food or anything else should not be offered only after preparing it; rather, it should be offered to Bhagavān from the very beginning.

*yajñārthāt karmaṇo 'nyatra*

*Bhagavad-gītā (3.9)*

"Your action should be a sacrifice for Bhagavān." This is the instruction of *Bhagavad-gītā* (9.27) – whatever you eat or drink should be for sacrifice.

*yat karoṣi yad aśnāsi*

*yaj juhoṣi dadāsi yat*

*yat tapasyasi kaunteya  
tat kuruṣva mad-arpaṇam*

“Whatever you eat, if you prepare food, if you perform a sacrifice, if you are keeping a garden – all should be an offering to the Deity.” In general the spiritually inclined people of this world are offering only the *results* of their activities to Bhagavān. But Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu and the teachers in our Gauḍīya line have taught, “Don’t do things in this way! Be careful! You’ll be trapped!” Rather we should first offer our very selves to the Deity: “I am Yours.” Then whatever we eat or do will automatically be for Bhagavān.

*śravaṇam kīrtanam viṣṇoḥ  
smaraṇam pāda-sevanam  
arcanam vandanam dāsyaṁ  
sakhyam ātma-nivedanam  
iti puṁsārpitā viṣṇau  
bhaktiś cen nava-lakṣaṇā  
kriyeta bhagavaty addhā  
tan manye ’dhītam uttamam*

*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (7.5.23–4)*

“Hearing (*śravaṇam*) and chanting (*kīrtanam*) about Kṛṣṇa, remembering Him (*viṣṇu-smaraṇam*), serving His feet (*pāda-sevanam*), worshipping Him (*arcanam*), praying to Him (*vandanam*), becoming His servant (*dāsyaṁ*), becoming His dear friend (*sakhyam*) and fully surrendering to Him (*ātma-nivedanam*): this is ninefold *bhakti*. Performing these nine types of devotion is the topmost knowledge.”

If devotional activities are performed, and the results are offered to Bhagavān afterwards, then it is devotion mixed with personal desire. It is not pure *bhakti*. The people of this world generally don’t know this, but pure devotees understand the

shortcomings in this mentality. We should first offer our very selves, and not simply the results of our activities.

It is like a small boy eating, while sitting in the lap of his father. When the boy sees some food, he puts it into his mouth, and some into the mouth of his father, and the father is pleased. Why? The boy is fully dependent on him. Even if he punishes the boy, the boy would never leave him. In order to develop a relationship like this with Bhagavān, we first offer everything to our *guru*, because in our present condition he is to be seen as Bhagavān.

When we develop a direct relationship with Bhagavān, then there will be no necessity of formal offerings. The *gopīs* are eating and decorating themselves, but they do not make any formal offerings to Kṛṣṇa. They are using many good-quality things in the course of dressing and decorating themselves and applying their ornaments – but who is it all for? Whatever they do is for the pleasure of Kṛṣṇa. As soon as something comes to them, it is automatically for Kṛṣṇa. In this way we should do everything exclusively for the pleasure of Kṛṣṇa.

Such singular, undivided devotion (*bhakti*) is difficult to attain, and it requires that we have some spiritual merit from our previous lives. And if in this birth, by the mercy of Bhagavān and his devotees, we have been graced with the company of highly advanced devotees, then pure *bhakti* can come.

## The Story Of Bilvamaṅgala Ṭhākura

The story of Bilvamaṅgala Ṭhākura nicely illustrates this point. Although he had accumulated spiritual merit from his previous lives, some specific desires for material enjoyment still remained in his heart. He kept company with the prostitute

Cintāmaṇi, and underwent all sorts of difficulties and dangers to visit her. One stormy night in order to cross the flooded river to get to her palace on the other side, he used a floating corpse, thinking it was a log, While trying to climb up to her window, he grabbed a deadly snake, taking it as a vine. However, she had become exclusively devoted to Lord Kṛṣṇa and she rejected and rebuked him. After that he resolved to renounce worldly pleasures and pursue a spiritual path.

Having a great desire to meet Kṛṣṇa, he left his home and began heading towards Vṛndāvana. Perhaps five days later he stopped at a well to get some water. There, he saw a young girl who gave him some water to drink. But he forgot about drinking the water and began gazing at her. He followed her to her home, and there a *brāhmaṇa* came to the door thinking, “Why has this great personality come?”

Bilvamaṅgala asked, “Who is the girl that lives here?”

The *brāhmaṇa* replied, “She is my wife.”

Bilvamaṅgala said, “Call her. I want to speak with her a little.”

So he called her, and when she came, Bilvamaṅgala asked her, “Please give me both of your hairpins.”

The *brāhmaṇa* and his wife thought, “He is a travelling mendicant. Perhaps he has a thorn or splinter in his foot that he wants to remove.”

They gave him the hairpins. He did have a thorn he wanted to remove, but that thorn was in his heart, and he was unable to reach it. He took the hairpins and plucked out his eyes.

There is a saying in Hindi that means, “If there is no bamboo, there will be no flute.” These eyes can be the root cause of our attachment to this world: the form of a woman

attracts a man, the form of a man attracts a woman, and for each other they are the personification of *māyā*, illusion. Therefore *Srīmad-Bhāgavatam* and other scriptures have warned us to be very careful about this.

Bilvamaṅgala, now blind, continued on his journey to Vṛndāvana. He was in such a mood of deep separation from Kṛṣṇa that all of his senses were centred on Bhagavān. On the way, there were many obstacles such as mud-holes and streams, but he was undeterred in his determination. He meditated deeply on Kṛṣṇa as he made his way towards Vṛndāvana. Then one day a young boy came to him and said in a sweet voice, “Bābā, where are you going?”

Being pleased, Bilvamaṅgala replied, “My son, I am going to Vṛndāvana. Where are *You* going?”

“I am also going to Vṛndāvana – I make My living there.”

“Vṛndāvana? Then come with me, and hold my walking stick.”

They went off together, and wandering and wandering, they arrived in Vṛndāvana, the eternal home of the Lord.

On the way, what happened? Inside his heart, Bilvamaṅgala experienced so many realisations about Kṛṣṇa that were just like nectar. During his journey, he composed and sang beautiful poetry in praise of the Lord. Just to hear these enchanting songs of love, Kṛṣṇa Himself came as that young boy, and personally led His devotee by the hand to Vṛndāvana.

## Kṛṣṇa Personally Cares For His Devotees

The following story illustrates how Kṛṣṇa cares for those who have really become His devotees. There was a *brāhmaṇa* devotee of Kṛṣṇa who had read many scriptures and many commentaries

on *Bhagavad-gītā* and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. He read the *Gītā* every day, and while reading, many spiritual sentiments would arise within him. He wrote down his realisations and desired to publish them so that ordinary people would be able to easily understand them. In this way he was engaged in *bhajana*. From the beginning he never took any employment. He would only beg for one hour each day, and the rest of the time he would study the scriptures and hear and chant Kṛṣṇa's holy names, glories and pastimes.

The *brāhmaṇa* and his wife were very content together, living on whatever Bhagavān gave them. They had no material desires at all. They only read the *Gītā* and contemplated spiritual topics. In the early afternoon, when most people took their main meal of the day, he went begging. His wife prepared whatever he collected, and the couple subsisted solely on that.

His wife had only one piece of clothing. One day, having no cloth of his own, the *brāhmaṇa* took his wife's cloth and tore enough from it to cover himself, so that he could go out and beg. Before going out, he had been writing down the meaning of *Gītā* verses one after the other. Then he came upon this verse:

*ananyās cintayanto mām  
ye janāḥ paryuṇāsate  
teṣām nityābhīyuktānām  
yoga-kṣemaṁ vahāmy aham*

*Bhagavad-gītā* (9.22)

He began to analyse this verse: “*Ananyās cintayanto mām*: those whose minds are fully self-controlled, and have no other object of meditation besides Kṛṣṇa. *Ye janāḥ paryuṇāsate*: one who worships Kṛṣṇa in all ways, especially by the medium of hearing and chanting becomes situated very near to Him. *Teṣām*

*nityābhīyuktānām*: for those who are fixed in performing *bhajana* like this, then its result also is for the happiness of Kṛṣṇa, not for themselves. Even if a person of bad conduct engages in this type of exclusive *bhajana*, then Kṛṣṇa will accept him. And if that exclusive sentiment is not there, then Kṛṣṇa will never reveal Himself.

This verse is related to the preliminary practice of devotion (*sādhana*), not the stage of perfection. To those who have exclusively taken shelter of Kṛṣṇa, He is their protector and maintainer. Besides Him, there is no other.”

This *brāhmaṇa*’s nature was very humble and surrendered. While studying this verse, many nice sentiments arose within his heart. Then he came to the last line of the verse. “*Yoga-kṣemaṁ vahāmy aham*: Kṛṣṇa is saying that for His devotees who engage in *bhajana* in this way, He will supply all of their requirements such as food and water, and even collect them and carry them Himself.”

The *brāhmaṇa* stopped and thought, “How can this be? This is not right. I am now an old man, over seventy years old. Up until today Bhagavān has never directly looked after us like this. We have been engaged in exclusive *bhajana*, and today there is not a single mouse in our home. Why? Because there is no food in the house! We don’t even have any earthen pots to catch the rainwater. There is nothing in our home, not even any foodstuffs for today’s meal. I will go out to beg and whatever I acquire, we will take only that. Isn’t Bhagavān seeing this? Is He not inside all souls witnessing everything? Certainly He hasn’t taken care of us as He is saying in this verse. Maybe if we require something, He would inspire another person to come and help us, but He would never carry a burden for us on His own head. I cannot accept this.”

He took a red pen and scratched this verse out thinking, “It is not possible for Kṛṣṇa to have spoken this verse. Someone else must have inserted it.”

Then he went begging thinking, “Kṛṣṇa will carry what we require on His own body? Perhaps He would inspire a king or some wealthy man to come and help us, but He wouldn’t carry anything on His own head. The all-knowing and all-powerful Lord? I have heard that he made the poor *brāhmaṇa* Sudāmā into a king, but He didn’t physically carry any burden for him. I have never heard this.”

He put it out of his mind and went on begging. Wandering and wandering, three o’clock passed and he still hadn’t collected a single thing. At one house the owner said to him, “Bābā, I am sorry, but our house is impure. For three days we cannot give anything because one of our family members has just died.”

It was the same wherever he went, so after some time he started for home empty-handed. Meanwhile, at his home, what was happening? A beautiful young boy with a dark complexion and wearing yellow cloth arrived at the gate carrying a long stick on his shoulders, with a bag of goods on each end. In one bag was rice, dahl, ghee and spices, and in the other, sugar, vegetables and different things. He did not appear strong enough to carry it all. He was young, perhaps only fourteen years old, and His limbs were very delicate. He was perspiring, and arriving at the gate, He called out, “Oh Mother! Oh wife of my *guru*, please open the door!”

The *brāhmaṇa*’s wife replied, “What? My husband has no disciples.”

The boy replied, “Yes, yes, it is possible. I am a disciple of your husband.”

She thought, “What is this? Where has He come from?” She was unable to open the door because she didn’t even have enough clothing to properly cover herself. But Kṛṣṇa understood everything, so He handed His own shawl through the door for her to wear. He said, “Mother, Gurujī has sent Me. We have obtained all of these things today. He grabbed Me and sent Me here, saying that he will be coming soon. I asked him to please wait a minute so I could get a drink of water, but he said, ‘No, You can drink water later. Go immediately to my home.’ He could see that I am such a young boy, still he loaded all of this on Me and sent Me here.”

Hearing this, the *brāhmaṇa*’s wife began to weep, and thought, “Such a tender young boy, and He is perspiring as well! Doesn’t this *brāhmaṇa* have any mercy? He himself will come empty-handed, after loading everything on this poor boy? He has no mercy.”

Showing her His back, the boy said, “Mother, he has also scratched Me with his nails.”

“Oh! It looks like it will bleed!” She took Him on her lap and said, “My son, when he comes, I will give him a good talking to! He poses as a big, self-controlled devotee, but he cannot even show mercy to a child! My dear son, please come inside.” She brought Him inside and said, “Sit here and I will prepare something. You will not leave here without being fed.”

She went to the kitchen and began to prepare the rice, *dahl* and vegetables that He had brought. Then there was a knock at the door; the *brāhmaṇa* had arrived. “Open the door!” he said.

Very annoyed, the *brāhmaṇa*’s wife went to the door and said, “Have you brought anything? You have come empty-handed? You loaded everything on that poor boy and then

scratched Him with your nails? Don't you have even a little mercy?"

The *brāhmaṇa* replied, "What are you talking about?"

"You know very well – that boy you sent here loaded up with everything you collected."

"Who? I don't know anything about this!"

"You loaded it all on that poor child and you have brought nothing yourself!"

"Where is he then?"

"Come inside and see!"

They went inside the house, but the boy was nowhere to be seen. They searched the entire house, and all they found was a thread of yellow cloth where He had been sitting. After searching and not finding Him, the *brāhmaṇa* took his *Gītā* in his hands and opened it. Discovering that the red ink with which he crossed out the verse was no longer there, he began weeping bitterly, and said, "Today, for us, see how Bhagavān has personally carried our burden! This is our evidence. My doubt is now dispelled."

This is *bhakti*, and an example of the practice (*sādhana*) that produces *bhakti*. Arjuna said, "My Lord, to do this, here on this battlefield, will be very difficult. I could not do *man-manā bhava*, and I also cannot do *mad-bhakto*. Please tell me a method that is simple, straight and easy."

Next the Lord will explain "*mad-yāji* – worship Me."



## Chapter Three

*mad-yājī mām namaskuru*

# Worship Me and Offer Obeisances to Me

*sarva-guhyatamaṁ bhūyaḥ  
śṛṇu me paramaṁ vacaḥ  
iṣṭo 'si me dṛḍham iti  
tato vakṣyāmi te hitam  
man-manā bhava mad-bhakto  
mad-yājī mām namaskuru  
mām evaiṣyasi satyaṁ te  
pratijāne priyo 'si me*

*Bhagavad-gītā (18.64–5)*

Because you are so dear to Me, I am now telling you this most hidden and confidential truth. Hear this from Me; it is for your benefit. Always think of Me, become My devotee, worship Me, offer prostrated obeisances to Me, and then certainly you will come to Me. Because you are dear to Me, I make this promise.

Here, the word *paramaṁ* means the supreme essence of all the scriptures. If one is not surrendered by his mind, body and words to the feet of the spiritual master and Bhagavān, then Kṛṣṇa will not reveal these truths to him. How must we surrender to the *guru*? As it says in the *Gītā*:

*tad viddhi praṇipātena  
pariprasnena sevayā  
upadekṣyanti te jñānam  
jñāninas tattva-darśinaḥ*

*Bhagavad-gītā (4.34)*

One who approaches the *guru* with these three tendencies: submission (*praṇipātena*), relevant inquiry (*pariprasnena*) and sincere service (*sevayā*) is qualified to understand this knowledge. If someone approaches the *guru* and demands answers to his questions, or if he doesn't attentively listen to the answers and has to ask the same questions again, then the *guru* will only give him superficial instructions. He will not give *sarva-guhyatama*, the most hidden knowledge. Concerning this, Kṛṣṇa has taken a vow that anyone whose heart has not been purified by austerities, who is not surrendered and who has not served *guru* and Vaiṣṇavas, the essential knowledge of the *Gītā* will not be given.

First Kṛṣṇa told Arjuna to perform sacrifice:

*yajñārthāt karmaṇo 'nyatra  
loko 'yaṁ karma-bandhanaḥ*

*Bhagavad-gītā (3.9)*

Perform your work as a sacrifice to Bhagavān otherwise it will be a cause of material bondage.

After that the Lord gave knowledge of *brahman*, and then knowledge of the Supersoul (Paramātmā): “Try to meditate on the form of Viṣṇu who is the size of a thumb inside your heart”:

*yoginām api sarveṣāṁ  
mad-gatenāntarātmanā  
śraddhāvān bhajate yo mām  
sa me yuktatamo mataḥ*

*Bhagavad-gītā (6.47)*

Yoga is better than fruitive work (*karma*), impersonal knowledge (*jñāna*) or dry austerity (*tapasya*). And of all types of *yogīs*, the one who has surrendered to Paramātmā, who is fully united with Him in *yoga* and who is exclusively worshipping Him with faith, is the best.

Up to here Kṛṣṇa has not revealed His ultimate form; He has only recommended that we should be inclined towards the Supersoul within the heart (Paramātmā). Then at the end of the *Gītā* He gives the verse that we are discussing, *man-manā bhava*. When He says that we should always think of Him, to whom is He referring? Śyāmasundara, who has very, very beautiful hair, and on whose head the peacock feather is always present; He who is standing in His threefold-bending posture under a *kadamba* tree in a grove of *Vṛndāvana*; He who is holding the flute to His beautiful lips, with the nectar of His heart pouring out from the holes of the flute. We should always think of *this* Kṛṣṇa, Who has not revealed this form in the *Gītā* until this verse.

We have given the example of the *gopīs* to explain what is meant by absorbing the mind in Kṛṣṇa. In relation to becoming Kṛṣṇa's devotee, we explained about chanting, hearing, remembering and so on, and we looked at how some great devotees performed regulated devotional service. It may be somewhat possible to absorb the mind in Kṛṣṇa at the stage of devotional ecstasy, but it is only at the stage of fully developed, transcendental love that we can really think of Kṛṣṇa always.

It is very rare that someone will reach the stage of ecstatic love. In the process of becoming a devotee (*mad-bhakto*), first there is the development of faith, then firmly established practice, followed by awakening of transcendental taste, then

a deepening transcendental attachment and finally, ecstatic love. At this point it can be said that one has truly become a devotee, and can actually begin to think of Kṛṣṇa.

Next Kṛṣṇa says, “*Mad-yājī.*” *Yājī* means *yajña*, sacrifice. If one has not yet developed any real love for Bhagavān, but has just a little faith, then he can perform *yajña*. This sacrifice is a remedy for material entanglement. A verse concerning this is found in the conversation between Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu and Rāya Rāmānanda (Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, *Madhya-līlā* 8.69). The Deity may be worshipped with sixteen kinds of paraphernalia, or with twelve kinds, or with five kinds, but if there is no love in the worship, Bhagavān will never be satisfied. When hunger and thirst are present, then food and water are tasteful. Food will only be tasteful to the degree that there is hunger. If we are not hungry, and someone serves us some nicely prepared vegetables, we will say indifferently, “Oh, what have you made?” Then tasting it, we will say, “There is not enough salt in it,” or “There is too much salt.” We will consider the sweet rice to be too thin, the *chapātī* to be out of shape and the *rasagullā* to be flat, not round as it should be. But if we are hungry, we may take a stale *chapātī*, add some water and perhaps squeeze a lemon on it, and consider that it is very tasteful. If we are hungry, then food will be tasteful.

Similarly, if a devotee has no love, then Bhagavān will not be hungry and will not be satisfied by that devotee’s worship. If Bhagavān is made hungry by a devotee’s pure love (*prema*), then whether there have been sixteen kinds of paraphernalia used or only one kind, He will accept it.

*patraṁ puṣpaṁ phalaṁ toyam*  
*yo me bhaktyā prayacchati*

*tad ahaṁ bhakty-upahṛtam  
aśnāmi prayatātmanaḥ*

*Bhagavad-gītā (9.26)*

Kṛṣṇa says here that if one simply offers Him a leaf, a flower, some fruit or water with love, He will accept it. Whatever is offered with love He will accept. In a devotee's heart there should always be this love that creates hunger in Kṛṣṇa.

There is one point here that we must understand. We should not be thinking, "Why is this offering for the pleasure of the Lord? Ultimately it is for our own happiness." In the *Bhāgavatam* (1.2.6) it says:

*sa vai puṁsām paro dharmo  
yato bhaktir adhokṣaje  
ahaituky apratihata  
yayātmā suprasīdati*

The supreme *dharma* for human society is pure devotion to Adhokṣaja, the Transcendental Person. This devotion must be free of ulterior motives and practised constantly to completely satisfy the self.

In this verse, Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the one to be pleased, and if He is satisfied, our worship is successful. If we have performed an activity for our own pleasure, we can understand that it is only done out of lust.

There is one point to consider here. If Bhagavān is pleased, then the individual devotee automatically becomes satisfied and happy as well. However, worship offered for our own interests is not pure *bhakti*, but devotion with selfish motives. We must understand this point well. No desire for our own pleasure should remain, otherwise the worship becomes impure. Most householders pray when they are performing Deity worship,

“Oh Lord, I offer the fruit of all of my activities to You.” But what is it really for? “I just desire the happiness and peace of myself and my family.” We should not offer Deity worship with such ulterior desires.

## Kṛṣṇa Protects His Devotee’s Vow

We have given an example from the scriptures, now we will tell a story from our own experience here in Mathurā. From it we can see how we should have love and attachment for our *pūjā* (worship) and the object of our worship, Śrī Kṛṣṇa. There was a man who was worshipping a *śālagrāma-śilā* (a Deity form of the Lord). He didn’t know all of the *mantras* (prayers) and finer details of *pūjā*, but in an ordinary way he was going on with his service. His vow was that by four o’clock every morning he would return home from bathing in the river Yamunā and bring some Yamunā water to use for his *pūjā* and for applying his *tilaka*. He would not use any water except Yamunā water, and with great faith he performed his *pūjā* without deviation for ten or fifteen years.

Then one new moon night in the month of Māgha [January–February], a very strong wind was blowing and it was raining severely for the entire night. The water of the Yamunā had risen and was flowing very fiercely near Viśrāma-ghāṭa (a public bathing place in Mathurā), where he would usually bathe and collect his water. He was shivering from the cold. It was approximately three o’clock in the morning, but he wasn’t sure of the time. In those days in Mathurā, hardly anyone wore wristwatches. People would simply look to see the positions of the stars and in this way estimate the time. But on this night the stars could not be seen due to the dense clouds. After bathing

in the Yamunā, it was so dark and the rain so heavy, that he became lost and could not make out the way to his home. He was in great anxiety about protecting his vow, thinking, “How will I make it home? What shall I do?”

Just then he saw a small boy coming towards him. The boy had a large bag on His head folded over twice to protect Him from the rain, and He was carrying a lantern in His hand. In a very sweet voice, He asked the man, “Bābā, where are you going?”

The man told Him the name of his street and his house number, and the boy replied, “Yes, I know that place. I am going near there. Come, I will show you the way.”

The man placed his faith in the boy and they went off together. On the way the boy didn’t say anything at all and the man thought to himself, “Why has this young boy come out on a night like this?” Shivering, he continued following the boy until He turned and said, “Bābā, here is your street. Your house is up that way. I am going onward.”

The man began walking towards his house, but then some doubt arose in his mind, and he turned and looked in the direction of the boy. But he didn’t see the boy or His light. Putting his hand to his head, he began to repent: “To protect my vow, Bhagavān came in that dress, holding a lantern to show me the way.”

This is true worship. We should have this kind of firm determination with no consideration of our own happiness or unhappiness. This is real spiritual hunger, and if we perform *pūjā* with this hunger, with this *prema* (pure love), then will Bhagavān not accept it? Therefore Kṛṣṇa says *prayatātmanaḥ* (*Bhagavad-gītā* 9.26): if anyone simply offers Him something with faith and love, He will certainly accept it.

Sometimes our Gurudeva reprimands us when we are serving him, and we become upset thinking, “Guruji used to be so affectionate to me, but now he is treating me like this. I will leave him.” This is wrong, and we shouldn’t think in this way. Many difficulties will come to test us in our service to our Gurudeva, but our resolution should be: “Birth after birth, I will never leave my Gurudeva or my Lord.”

There is another story related to *pūjā* and service to the Deity. There was a *brāhmaṇa* who was performing Deity worship, and after completing the *pūjā* he would make an offering of food. For this he would receive some wages. If he first received payment, he would perform the *pūjā*, but if he didn’t receive any wages, he wouldn’t do it. So what was his real motive? In Bihar and Bengal there are such professional priests who travel from house to house. They receive only uncooked food for the *pūjā*, such as rice, vegetables and fruit, and some flowers and clothing also. They then show these items to the Deity, complete the *pūjā*, and then stash all of the items in their clothing. They go to a great many houses doing *pūjā* like this, and at the end of the day they look to see, “How much have I collected?” and then return home.

So this *brāhmaṇa* would only perform *pūjā* wherever he could earn his wages. Once, when he was going away for a couple of days, he lovingly called his son and said, “My dear son, every day after bathing our household Deity, make the offering of food.” The boy had not learned much about *pūjā*, but still he replied, “I will do as you ask.”

Later while his mother was preparing *chapātis* and vegetables, the boy bathed the Deity with Ganges water and *tulasī* leaves and after dressing Him, he placed the Deity back on His altar. Next he placed the *chapātis* and vegetables before the Deity,

and carefully placing a *tulasī* leaf on each preparation, said, “My Lord, please take Your meal now. I don’t know all of the appropriate *mantras* (prayers), but You please eat. I will remain standing here.”

He stood there for some time and then earnestly said, “My Lord (Ṭhākuraḷī), I have been standing here for nearly half an hour now, and looking at Your plate I see that You still have not eaten. When my father offers You food, You eat it with great delight in only three or four minutes. But just because I don’t know the *mantras*, You are not eating. Will You remain hungry just because my father is not here? Then I also will not eat. As long as You don’t eat, I will also not take anything.”

With great love and sincerity he was saying this. If this sentiment is not in our chanting of the *mantra*, then the *mantra* will never be effective. The *mantra* is meant to awaken this sentiment within us, and if we are serving the Deity without this sentiment, then how will He ever accept what we offer?

After waiting a few moments more, the boy said, “O Lord, You will not eat? Then I will go to sleep without eating or drinking.”

Then Bhagavān could no longer restrain Himself. He leapt down from His altar, took His seat and ate the offering with both hands. He didn’t leave anything whatsoever on the plate, and He was very pleased. The boy took the empty plate back to the kitchen and said, “Mother, Bhagavān has finished eating. With great difficulty, I finally got Him to accept the offering.”

The boy’s mother said, “What do you mean ‘He ate it’? Where have the *chapātīs* gone? Where are the vegetables?”

“He ate them.”

“He ate them? How is it possible?”

The next day the boy fed Bhagavān in the same way, and the following day the father returned home. His wife said to him, “For two nights we have gone to sleep without eating or drinking anything.”

“Why?” the *brāhmaṇa* asked.

“Ṭhākuraḥ has eaten everything that was offered to Him.”

“Ṭhākuraḥ has eaten? How?”

The *brāhmaṇa* did not have faith that the Deity was actually eating the offerings made by his son. After some deliberation, the *brāhmaṇa* called his son and said, “My dear son, a rat must have taken the offerings. They especially like to make their homes under old altars like we have here. With great comfort he is living and is easily getting whatever he needs to eat, and he is also getting plenty of ghee to drink.”

But his son insisted, “No, Ṭhākuraḥ has eaten it all!”

“All right, all right. Tonight, you make the offering again.”

That night, unknown to his son, the *brāhmaṇa* hid nearby while his son was making the offering to see if the Deity was really eating it or not. The boy said, “Lord, don’t be late. Please come quickly and take Your meal.” But the Deity stayed in His place, so the boy said, “Lord, why are You not eating? Have You become shy? Why? What has happened?”

Then softly a voice came: “Today, your father is watching from over there. Therefore I will not come.”

The boy replied, “Why? You must come and eat. If you don’t eat, I will be very unhappy.”

Then the Deity said, “Go over and simply touch your father.”

The boy did so, and at that time the boy’s pure spiritual sentiment arose within the heart of his father, and then the *brāhmaṇa* could see how the Deity was actually eating the offering.

This is the necessary sentiment for performing *pūjā*. If there is no such sentiment, no such faith, then there is no qualification for *pūjā*. Therefore Kṛṣṇa says (*Bhagavad-gītā* 9.26):

*patraṁ puṣpaṁ phalaṁ toyam  
yo me bhaktyā prayacchati  
tad ahaṁ bhakty-upahṛtam  
aśnāmi prayatātmanaḥ*

I accept whatever is offered to Me by those who have this exalted sentiment of pure devotion.

## Offer Obeisances To Me

Arjuna said, “My Lord, it is not possible for me to do this type of worship here on this battlefield. Please tell me an even easier way.”

Then Kṛṣṇa said, “You need something easier? Then *mām namaskuru*: just offer obeisances unto Me.”

Not just any obeisances, but the meaning of the word *namaskāra* is offering it sincerely, without any false ego.

*sarva-dharmān parityajya  
mām ekaṁ śaraṇam vraja*

*Bhagavad-gītā* (18.66)

Give up all kinds of religion and just surrender exclusively to Me.

Taking this instruction to heart we should offer obeisances to Kṛṣṇa. For one who offers *namaskāra* to Kṛṣṇa like this just once, it is as if he has jumped into a vast body of water – which is the ocean of material existence – and then looks back and sees that he has already crossed over it.

One will not enter the cycle of birth and death again. One will no longer be forced into the womb of a mother if he has

offered obeisances to Kṛṣṇa just once with exclusive surrender. This is the meaning of *mām namaskuru*.

So Arjuna said, “My Lord, I offer obeisances to You not just once, but hundreds of times!”

In this verse, Kṛṣṇa says, “*Mad-bhaktō* – become My devotee. *Man-manā bhava* – absorbing your mind and heart in Me, engage in *bhajana* unto Me. At the end of that *bhajana*, *mad-yājī* – worship Me, and after performing *pūjā* offer prostrated obeisances to Me.”

Now all of the four activities described in this verse have become one. With great faith, sentiment and love, sincerely follow all of the limbs of *bhakti*, and offer your *namaskāra* (obeisance) to Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa. This is *sarva-guhyatama*, the most hidden treasure, and the supreme instruction of *Bhagavad-gītā*. If anyone earnestly follows just this one verse, they will certainly cross over the ocean of material existence and attain exclusive *prema* at the feet of Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

In condensed form, this verse of the *Gītā* is showing us how to attain highest *bhakti*, like Kṛṣṇa’s devotees in Vṛndāvana. Then in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* this conception is described more elaborately. Therefore the beginning book is *Bhagavad-gītā*, and we should never disrespect the *Gītā* in any way. The instructions in it should serve as the foundation upon which we will construct a palace of *bhakti* wherein we will perform *pūjā* to Śrī Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa with great love. This is the essence of *Bhagavad-gītā*.

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