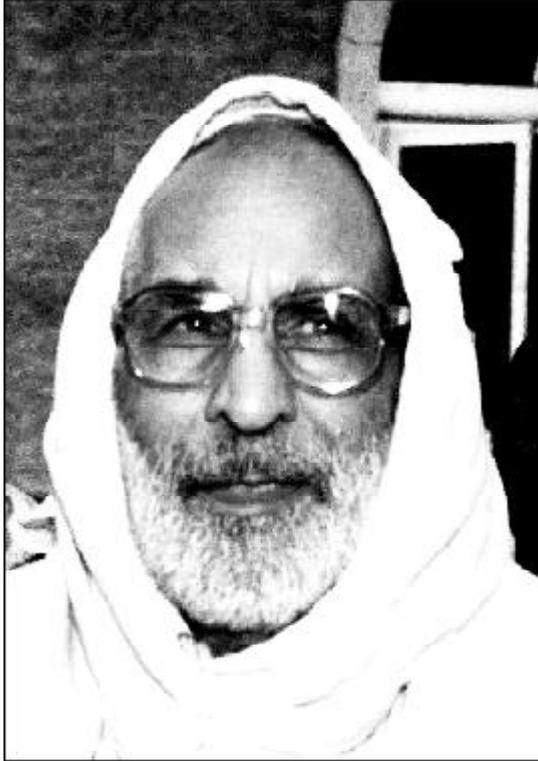


# **THE ESSENCE OF BHAGAVAD-GITA**

**SRI SRIMAD  
BHAKTIVEDANTA  
NARAYANA MAHARAJA**



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CHAPTER ONE  
ALWAYS THINK OF ME

The scriptures describe many spiritual places, but there is nowhere like Vrindavana in the entire universe. Anyone who knows the glories of Vrindavana will understand this, especially if they have received the mercy of Vrindavana. There Sri Krishna and His eternal associates have performed pastimes which are uniquely wonderful. The perfection of spiritual life is to remember these pastimes, and ultimately to become completely absorbed in the transcendental service moods of Krishna's eternal associates in Vrindavana, and in their exchanges with Him.

These moods and pastimes are described and explained in *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, which is the supreme transcendental literature. However, to understand *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, we must first understand the instructions of the *Bhagavad-gita*. These instructions serve as a foundation, upon which is constructed the palace of the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* with its twelve floors (the twelve cantos). As long as we do not have the foundation of the instructions of *Bhagavad-gita* we can only understand *Srimad-Bhagavatam* in a mundane way, and everything will be ruined. This especially applies to the most confidential topics contained within the Tenth Canto.

In the *Bhagavad-gita* (18.65) we find this verse:

*man-mana bhava mad-bhakto mad-yaji mam namaskuru  
mam evaisyasi satyam te pratijane priyo 'si me*

“Absorb your mind and heart in Me, become My devotee, worship Me, offer your obeisances to Me, and certainly you

will come to Me. I make this promise to you because you are very dear to Me.”

This is the best of all verses in the *Bhagavad-gita*. It is even better than the verse after it (18.66), in which Krishna’s says, *sarva dharman parityajya*: “Give up all forms of religiosity and come exclusively to My shelter. I will free you from all sinful reactions. Do not fear.”

The *man-mana bhava* verse (18.65) that we will describe here is even better than this verse. The verse *sarvadharman parityajya* (18.66) gives instruction for devotional surrender, but the *man-mana bhava* verse (18.65) gives the fruit of that surrender, and is therefore even more exalted.

When we read the *Gita* thoroughly, and especially when we look through the commentaries of the prominent teachers in our line, we see that there are five levels of instructions in the *Bhagavad-gita*. First, there are general instructions for everyone. After this are secret instructions, then more secret, then most secret, and finally the most secret of all secrets. These instructions are not given in an expanded form, but in the form of condensed verses.

## GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

For ordinary people, Lord Krishna has said, “Don’t eat or sleep too much. You should be regulated in working and recreation, otherwise you will not be able to attain that rare *yoga* wherein a soul meets his Creator.” (*Bhagavad-gita* 6.17).

This is the general knowledge that we are not these bodies, so we should be detached from the desires of the body and not act for them. “One who has taken birth will certainly die, and afterward he will certainly take birth again.” (*Bhagavad-gita* 2.27)

Arjuna was crying for everyone – for his son, wife, relatives and friends – and we are also crying in the same way. Krishna advises us: “Those who are wise do not despair for the living or the dead.” (*Bhagavad-gita* 2.11)

Everyone will die, and those who don't go today will go tomorrow or the next day. We should not cry or worry for them, because inside the body is the soul: "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 unduly concerned about the body." (*Bhagavad-gita* 2.23)

It is all right to take care of our bodies to a certain extent. This body that Bhagavan, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, has given us is like His temple, and we should care for it so that we can perform His *bhajan*. We should keep it clean and repair it, because otherwise we won't be able to do *bhajan*. It is all right to care for the body to this extent, but it should be done with a spirit of detachment.

In the end, Bhagavan will ask for the body back, and it must be returned. He will say, "I have given you such a rare and valuable human form, so what have you done with it?" That is why He has spoken verses such as: "While ordinary people sleep, the sage is awake in self-realisation, and while the sage sleeps, ordinary people are awake in sense gratification." (*Bhagavad-gita* 2.69)

We should simply engage in *bhagavad-bhajan*, *bhajan* to Bhagavan, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and go on doing our duty, considering happiness and distress to be the same. Up to this point, Krishna is giving general instructions.

## THE SECRET INSTRUCTION

After this comes the secret instruction, which is knowledge of Brahman. Brahman is spiritual substance. The spirit soul is Brahman, and so is the Supreme Spirit. Arjuna asks. "What are the symptoms of a person whose consciousness is absorbed in Brahman? How does he speak, how does he sit, and how does he walk?" (*Bhagavad-gita* 2.54)

In the eighteenth chapter the conclusion is given: "One who is situated in Brahman sees Brahman everywhere, and he thinks, 'I am also Brahman.' Thinking in this way, he will meditate on Brahman, and will not experience happiness or distress. He remains steady in any situation, and merges his consciousness in Brahman." (*Bhagavad-gita* 18.54) "Go on doing your duty and don't desire the fruits of your labour." (*Bhagavad-gita* 2.47) In a general way, this is knowledge of Brahman.

### MORE SECRET INSTRUCTIONS

After this comes the more secret instruction, which is knowledge of Supersoul. There are two classes of living entities, namely the fallible entities in the material world, and the infallible entities in the spiritual world. Beyond these two classes is Supersoul, an expansion of the Supreme Personality of Godhead who resides in the hearts of all living entities, is described as being the size of one's thumb. Meditate on Him, and if you don't reach Him, try again. Again not reaching Him, try again. "That formless Brahman that I mentioned to you before don't go there! Beware! It is extremely difficult to attach your consciousness to something which is formless." (*Bhagavad-gita* 12.5) Instead, meditate on the *paramatma* within the heart.

"One who links with Supersoul in *yoga* is really in the renounced order of life (a *sannyasi*) and is a real *yogi*. One does not become a real *sannyasi* merely by refraining from prescribed activities, or by muttering 'I am Brahman.' (*Bhagavad-gita* 12.56) This is all more secret instruction.

### THE MOST SECRET AND THE MOST SECRET OF ALL

*Guhyatam*, the most secret instruction, is given in the Ninth Chapter of *Bhagavad-gita*. Pure transcendental devotional

service (*bhakti*) is given there, but it is devoid of *rasa*. Although it is pure *bhakti*, it is not full of *rasa*. The most secret of all secrets is given at the end of the eighteenth chapter. It is the highest limit of *bhakti*, because it is full of *rasa* “Because you are very dear to Me, I am telling you this most hidden of all instructions.” (*Bhagavad-gita* 18.64)

Now, what is that instruction?

“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.” (*Bhagavad-gita* 18.66)

Before this point. Sri Krishna had explained worship of Bhagavan with awareness of His opulences; this is worship of Narayana. However in this verse, four extraordinary activities are described. The first is *man-mana bhava*: always think of Me; the second is *mad-bhakta* become My devotee; the third is *mad-yaji*: worship Me; and the fourth is *mam 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 (*pranama*), and everything will come from that.

## ABSORB YOUR MIND AND HEART IN ME

Now we will speak on the first part of this verse, *man-mana 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 Krishna. This is the conditioned state. The highest form of worship is to absorb the mind fully in the lotus feet of Bhagavan. But when will this be possible?

In the beginning stage of *sraddha* (faith), it is not possible to

absorb the mind and heart in Krishna. Even at the stage of *ruci* (taste), it is still not possible. Only after this can we really begin to give our heart. In the stage of *asakti* (spiritual attachment), we can give perhaps one-half of our heart to Krishna. In the stage of *bhava* or devotional ecstasy maybe we can give three-quarters of our heart to Him, and at the stage of *prema*, or fully developed, transcendental love, we can fully give our hearts to Krishna.

The *gopis* (cowherd damsels) of Vrindavana have set the ideal example of absorption in Krishna. They are Krishna's topmost devotees, and their love for Him is unparalleled. After Krishna had left Vrindavana, He sent His very intimate friend Uddhava to console the *gopis*. Krishna told Uddhava, "When you get to Vrindavana, you will meet the *gopis*, who are the most dear to Me. They have given Me their hearts completely, and they know nothing besides Me. For Me they have forgotten all of their bodily needs and bodily 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 have become thin and weak. They have forgotten all of their bodily relations in their love for Me: their husbands, sons, friends, brothers, wealth and property. They have no love for anyone but Me, and day and night they are remembering Me deeply.

"Uddhava, in this world you have not seen such an example of someone giving their heart to another person. They are barely holding onto their lives, and their life-airs have risen up to their necks. How much longer can they live like this? I don't know if they can be saved or not.

"Go quickly, and save their lives. Give them My message: 'I am definitely coming tomorrow or the next day.' This hope that I will return is the only reason that they are holding onto their lives. They will think, 'Krishna has said that He is com-

ing, and He cannot tell a lie.’ As they cling to this hope, it is as if their very lives are hanging on the delicate limb of a tree. If the limb breaks, they will fall down. In other words, they will give up their lives. So go quickly.”

The *gopis* are the perfect example of absorbing the mind and heart in Krishna. We understand that it is very difficult to give our heart to someone, but it becomes very easy if someone takes our heart instead. Otherwise we simply cannot give our hearts. In the *Katha Upanisad* (1.2.25) it says:

“Sri Krishna will select a heart which is dear to Him and then He will say, ‘You come! I will take your heart.’”

Even if we really desire to give our heart to Krishna, it is very difficult, but it is possible if He desires to take our heart. Then we must make our heart so attractive to Krishna that he becomes greedy when He sees us. Certainly, the heart must be pure in all ways, for He will not take it if there is any impurity remaining there. However, purity alone is not enough, for many *jnanis* have pure hearts which do not attract Krishna. We must add some special fragrance which will attract Krishna when it reaches His nose. *Bhakti-rasa*, the ecstatic moods of transcendental service in direct relationship to Krishna, should be flowing in the heart. That is why the *gopis* of Vrindavana are so dear to Krishna; their hearts are full of this *bhakti-rasa*.

## STEALING THE HEART

How does Krishna take a heart? This story will show how: Krishna was taking the cows out to graze for the day in Vrindavana. His bodily complexion was the colour of a dark rain cloud, His curly black hair was dangling on His face, and He appeared very, very beautiful and charming. His friends were spread out in the four directions chanting “*Sadhu! Sadhu!*” (meaning “Excellent! Excellent!”) and praising Krishna, and singing and playing their flutes and horns.

As they were going along like this, even the blind people of Vraja would come out to try and see. One would say, "Where are you going?" Someone would reply, "I am going to have *darsan* (audience) of Sri Krishna. Take my hand, let's go!" And with great eagerness they would go. All the people of Vraja surrounded the road to see Krishna taking the cows out to graze. Mother Yasoda and Nanda Baba were following behind Krishna, saying, "My son, come back soon, don't go too far away!" Time and again, Krishna told them to return, and finally when He promised that He would certainly return later in the day, they slowly went back to their home.

There were so many newly-married girls there who had just arrived in Vraja to live in the homes of their new husbands. They all went to the doors of their homes to catch a glimpse of Krishna. Some were even peering through vents, some climbed up on their roofs, and others climbed to the tops of trees in the *kunjjas* (groves). Krishna was also searching: He always wants to see new girls. In one house, there was a new girl who had just been married two or three days before. She had heard a long time before how marvelously beautiful Krishna appears when He is taking the cows out to graze. When she heard Krishna coming with the cows, in her heart she became very restless and eager to have His *darsana* (audience). But her new mother-in-law and sister-in-law were sitting outside the door, and her new sister-in-law was especially nasty towards her. They both told 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. So, stay in the house! We will be back soon."

The girl said, "You are going, and I will 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 remove the snake's poison. You just sit there."

"Still 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 even the insects of Vraja are going for *darsana* of Krishna. Am I to be the only one in Vrindavana who does not receive His audience? Certainly I will go!”

“No! You won’t go!”

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

Then, seeing that Krishna was coming near, the mother-in-law and sister-in-law quickly ran to see. When they left, the girl stepped forward and peeped out through the crack in the door. Her position was that she could see out, but no one could see her. Krishna was holding the flute to His lips and playing so sweetly that it seemed the nectar of Ills heart was emanating through the holes of the flute and inundating the entire area of Vrindavana. Those eyes which have not seen this should be set on fire. Only the eyes which have seen this beautiful scene are successful. Krishna may or may not want to see someone, but if someone really wants to see Him, He will certainly see 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 just then He played a trick with a calf. Grabbing the tail of the calf, He gave it a twist, and the calf ran directly to that door, as if it had been trained for that very purpose.

Krishna and the calf arrived at that door in an instant. Standing in His threefold-bending posture, with the flute to His lips, and smiling, He gave His *darsana* (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-mana bhava*. If someone attains the mercy of Krishna, 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 Sri Krishna?” then Krishna 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, and fifteen or twenty minutes passed. Krishna had left and entered the forest, and the dust raised by the cows and boys had long settled. She 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 Syamasundara has bitten you, and now you will never remove the poison!”

Shaking the girl, somehow she 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, and it made a terrible noise. Sometimes she would churn, and sometimes she would stop. Where was her mind and heart? Krishna had taken them: *man-mana bhava*. Again the sister-in-law came, and she said, “Hey! What are you doing? I will go and 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. Like this she went. Arriving 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 put 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 taking the rope from her hands, saved the child. One *gopi* said, “It appears that a ghost has possessed her!” Another *gopi* who knew everything, said, “It wasn’t just an ordinary ghost, it was the ghost of Nanda!”

Vrindavana is the place for those who cannot give their hearts to their children and family. They leave everyone crying for them and come like refugees to Vrindavana, and cry exclusively for Krishna. Even very fine Sons and daughters of kings come to Vrindavana, give their hearts to Krishna, and engage in *bhajan*.

Krishna told Arjuna, "This is *man-mana bhava*. Absorb your mind in Me as the *gopis* did."

Arjuna replied, "Prabhu, this is a battlefield! How is it possible for me to give my heart here? You have told me to fight against Grandfather Bhisma, Dronacarya, and Karna. Therefore I am unable to follow this instruction."

Next Krishna will explain *mad-bhakto* – Become My devotee."

CHAPTER TWO  
BECOME MY DEVOTEE

In the last chapter we began to explain the best and most secret verse of the *Bhagavad-gita*, and its instruction, *man-mana bhava*: “Absorb your mind always in thinking of Me.” We also showed that the *gopis* are the ideal example of this.

Krishna gave this instruction to Arjuna on a battlefield, and we are also in the midst of a battle. At Kuruksetra, there was a war between the Pandavas and the Kauravas, and we are at war with the tendencies of the mind, which is restless by nature. Just as the instruction to absorb the mind in Krishna (*man-mana bhava*) was difficult for Arjuna at that time, so it is also difficult for us now.

The Pandavas’ army consisted of seven *aksauhinis* or military phalanxes, and the Kauravas’ army consisted of eleven *aksauhinis*. We also have an army of eleven *aksauhinis* opposing us, and we are alone. Krishna was the driver of Arjuna’s chariot, but our driver is deformed and bad intelligence. Arjuna had a chariot given to him by Agni that could not be burnt or destroyed, but what kind of chariot do we have? Only the material body, which is subject to disease and death. Arjuna had the Gandiva bow to fight with, but we have no such weapon for fighting. Who was sitting on the flag of Arjuna’s chariot? Hanuman. We have no help; such is our position of weakness.

Arjuna had all kinds of help, but when he heard Krishna’s instruction, his mind became disturbed at once, and he said, “Oh Lord, I am unable to absorb my mind in thinking of You alone.”

If Arjuna's mind was disturbed, what is our situation? Our mind is the charioteer which drives the chariot of our body, and the soul is its passenger. What is the nature of the mind? It is restless, and gives us no help at all. If we follow its direction, we will fall down or stray from the path.

In the beginning of *Bhagavad-gita*, Arjuna folded his hands and said. "I am now surrendered unto You in every way. I will do as You instruct me." (*Bhagavad-gita* 2.7) However, when he heard all of Krishna's instructions, he said, "I cannot perform *man-mana-bhava*. How will I absorb my mind in this way? It is not possible. Opposite us are Bhisma, Drona, Karna, Duryodhana, and Duhsasana. So many great warriors (*maharathis*) are assembled together to fight against us."

We also have six warriors opposing us, namely the urges of speech, the tongue, the stomach, the genitals, the uncontrolled mind, and anger. We cannot conquer even one of these warriors. Personalities as exalted as Visvamitra and Narada were also affected by one of these warriors, the sexual urge. The *Ramayana* relates that Narada once desired to marry a princess, but Visnu gave him the face of a monkey, so he was defeated at the ceremony in which the princess selected her husband.

Besides these warriors, we have to contend with countless sinful desires and other unwanted impurities in the heart. Therefore Krishna said, "*Mad-bhaktah*: you become My devotee."

Arjuna deliberated and said, "It is easy to say that one will become a devotee, but it is very, very difficult to actually do it."

One thing is especially necessary in order to become a devotee. Srila Rupa Gosvami has instructed us, "Devotional service should be devoid of all desires other than the aspiration to bring happiness to Sri Krishna, and should not be covered by knowledge and activity for material gain." One must not have any type of material desire. If we are to attain *bhakti*, the service of Sri Krishna or of a real devotee, we cannot have

any other desire in the heart. What to speak of the desire itself, there cannot be even a scent of it. Pay attention to this, and become like this, and then you will understand *bhakti*; otherwise it will be very difficult.

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 man can live without activity. We must eat, and we must wear clothing to protect ourselves from the cold. We are performing some material activity, even when we are asleep; breathing, changing position and dreaming is all material activity. 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 does not cover our *bhakti*? The solution is to perform our activity for Bhagavan; then it will not cover *bhakti*. For example, when we are eating, we shouldn't forget the Lord; rather, we should eat for the Lord and His service.

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

Therefore 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 Krishna's service. For instance, we can go to the market and bring good quality fruits and vegetables for the service of the Deities, and They will then accept the offerings and give *prasada* to everyone. Acting in this way will increase our *bhakti* instead of covering it.

If, on the other hand, we act for our own enjoyment, everything is spoiled, even if we offer the results of our activity to Krishna. This action will cover our *bhakti*, so we must be careful of this. Suppose, for example, that we bring first-class in-

redients such as the best milk, pure cow's ghee, and coconut, and we make a very beautiful sweet, and then add 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 Bhagavan and then I will enjoy it." however, it is not completely correct. It should not be offered only after preparing it; rather, it should be offered to Bhagavan from the very beginning. "Your action should be a sacrifice for Bhagavan." (*Bhagavad-gita* 3.9)

This is the instruction of the *Gita*: "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." (*Bhagavad-gita* 9.27)

In general, the spiritually inclined people of this world are going on like this. But Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu and the great teachers in His line have taught, "Don't do things in this way! Beware! You'll be trapped!" Rather, we should first offer our very selves to the Deity, saying, "I am Yours." Then whatever we eat or do will automatically be for Bhagavan. "Hearing and chanting about Krishna, remembering Him, serving His feet, worshipping Him, praying to Him, becoming His servant, becoming His dear friend, and fully surrendering to Him – this is the nine-fold process of *bhakti*. Performing these nine types of *bhakti* constitutes the topmost knowledge." (*Srimad Bhagavatam* 7.5.23-24)

However, if the results of all these nine processes are offered to Bhagavan only *after* they have been performed, then this is merely mixed devotional service. The people of this world generally don't know this. They think that activities should be performed and just the results should be offered to Bhagavan, but pure devotees understand the shortcomings in this. Those who follow the path of activity offer the results of their activities, but pure devotees first offer their very selves.

It is like a small boy sitting in the lap of his father and eating. The boy puts food into his own mouth, and his father's

mouth as well, but his father is not offended; he is pleased. Why? The boy is fully dependent on him. Even if he punished the boy, the boy would never leave him. Very advanced devotees have an informal and intimate relationship like this with Bhagavan, but in order to develop such a relationship, we must first offer everything to our *guru*, because in our present condition he is to be seen as Bhagavan.

When we develop a direct relationship with Bhagavan, we will not need to make formal offerings. The *gopis* are decorating themselves and eating, but they don't make any formal offerings or worship Krishna ceremoniously. They use many excellent articles when they dress and decorate themselves, and apply their ornaments, but who is it all for? Whatever they do is only for Krishna's pleasure. As soon as something comes to them, it is automatically for Krishna.

We should follow their example and do everything exclusively for Krishna's pleasure. It is difficult to attain such *bhakti*; we must have some merit from our previous lives. And if, by the mercy of Bhagavan and the Vaisnavas, we have been graced with the company of pure Vaisnavas in this birth, then pure *bhakti* can come.

### THE STORY OF BILVAMANGALA THAKURA

The story of Bilvamangala Thakura nicely illustrates this point. Although he had some merit from his previous lives, some specific desires for enjoyment still remained in his heart. He kept company with the prostitute Cintamani, and one night he underwent all sorts of difficulties and dangers to visit her. He used a floating corpse to cross the river to her palace, and a snake to climb up to her window. In the meantime, she had become exclusively devoted to Krishna, and she therefore rejected Bilvamangala and rebuked him. After that he became renounced.

Now having a great desire to meet Krishna, he left his home

and began to proceed towards Vrindavana. Some days later, while he was at a well, a young girl gave him some water to drink. When she did so, he forgot about drinking the water, and began to gaze at her instead. He followed her to her home, and her husband came to the door thinking, "Why has this great soul come to my house?"

Bilvamangala asked, "Who is this girl?"

The *brahmana* replied, "She is my wife."

Bilvamangala said, "Call her. I want to speak with her a little."

The *brahmana* called her, and when she came, Bilvamangala asked her, "Please give me both of your hairpins."

The *brahmana* and his wife thought, "He is a traveling mendicant, so perhaps he wants to remove a thorn or splinter from his foot," and they gave him the hairpins. Bilvamangala did have a thorn he wanted to remove, but it was in his heart, and he could not reach it. Therefore he took the hairpins and pierced both his eyes.

There is a saying in Hindi which means, "If there is no bamboo, there will be no flute." These eyes can be the root cause of our attachment to this world, because the form of a woman attracts a man, and the form of a man attracts a woman; both forms are the personification of *maya* (material illusion). Therefore *Srimad-Bhagavatam* and other scriptures have warned us to be very careful about this.

Now blind, Bilvamangala went on his way. He was in such a mood of deep separation from Krishna that all of his senses were now centred on Bhagavan. He encountered many obstacles, such as mud-holes and streams, but he was resolved in his determination and meditated deeply on Krishna as he was going towards Vrindavana.

One day a young boy came to him and said in a sweet voice, "Baba, where are you going?"

Bilvamangala was pleased, and replied, "My son, I am going to Vrindavana. Where are You going?"

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

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

They went off together, and walked and walked until they arrived in Vrindavana. On the way what happened? Inside his heart, Bilvamangala experienced so many realisations about Krishna that were just like nectar. Indeed, it was Krishna Himself who came and led him to Vrindavana.

### **KRISHNA PERSONALLY CARES FOR HIS DEVOTEES**

The following story illustrates how Krishna cares for those who have really become His devotees.

Once there was a *brahmana* devotee of Krishna, who had read many scriptures and many commentaries on the *Gita* and *Bhagavatam*. From the beginning he never took any employment. Every day, he would beg for just one hour in the early afternoon, when most people take their main meal. His wife would prepare whatever he collected, and the couple would subsist solely on that. The rest of the time he would study the scriptures, and hear and chant Krishna’s holy names, glories and pastimes.

The *brahmana* and his wife were very content together, living on whatever Bhagavan gave them. They had no material desires at all. They only read the *Gita* and contemplated spiritual topics. While he was reading the *Gita* every day, he would have many spiritual realisations, and he wrote them down so that he could publish them for ordinary people to understand. That is how he was engaged in *bhajan*.

One day, he read verse (9.22) in *Bhagavad-gita*, and he began to analyse it as follows: ‘Devotees become situated very close to Krishna when their minds are fully self-controlled, when they meditate exclusively on Krishna and worship Him in every way (especially through the medium of hearing and chanting His names, glories, qualities and pastimes) for

Krishna's happiness, and not for themselves. Even if a person of bad conduct engages in this type of exclusive *bhajan*, then Krishna will accept him. And if that exclusive sentiment is not there, then Krishna will never reveal Himself. This verse is related to devotional service in practice [*sadhana*], and not to the stage of perfection. Krishna protects and maintains those who have taken exclusive shelter of Him."

This *brahmana* was very humble and surrendered by nature, and many nice sentiments arose in his heart as he was studying this verse. Then he came to the last line, which says, *yoga-ksemam vahamy aham*: "When My devotees engage in worship [*bhajan*] like this, I will supply all of their requirements such as food and water, and even collect them and carry them (*vahamy*) Myself."

The *brahmana* stopped reading and thought, "How can this be right? I am more than seventy years old now, and so far Bhagavan has never looked after us directly like this. We have been engaged in exclusive *bhajan*, yet today there is not a single mouse in our home. Why? Because there is no food in the house, not even any foodstuffs for today's meal! We don't even have any earthen pots to catch the rainwater. We just take whatever comes when I go out to beg. Doesn't Bhagavan see this? Isn't He in every soul witnessing everything? He certainly hasn't taken care of us as He is saying in this verse. Maybe if we require something, He would inspire someone else to come and help us, but He would never carry a burden for us on His own head. I can't accept this. Krishna cannot possibly have spoken this verse. Someone else must have inserted it." Thinking like this, he scratched this line out with a red pen.

That day, he had to tear a piece from his wife's cloth to cover himself when he went out to beg. As he went out, he thought, "Krishna will carry what we require on His own body? Perhaps He would inspire a king or some wealthy person to come and help us, but would the all-knowing and all-

powerful Prabhu carry anything on His own head? I don't think so. I have heard that he made the poor *brahmana* Sudama 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 begging, but he was unsuccessful. He wandered here and there, but by three o'clock he still hadn't collected a single thing. One man said to him, "Baba, I am sorry, but our house is impure. One of our family members has just died, so we cannot give anything for the next three days." It was the same wherever he went, and he started for home empty-handed.

Meanwhile, what was happening at his home? A beautiful young boy arrived at the gate. He had a dark complexion and wore bright yellow cloth, and on his shoulders he carried a long stick with a bag of goods on each end. The bag on one end contained rice, *dahl*, *ghee*, and spices, and the bag on the other end contained sugar, vegetables, and different things. The boy did not appear to be strong enough to carry the load. He was quite young – perhaps only fourteen years old – and His limbs were very delicate. He was perspiring heavily. When the boy came to the gate, He called out, "O Mother! O wife of My *guru*! Please open the door!"

The *brahmana's* wife replied, "What are you saying? My husband has no disciples."

The boy replied, "But I am a disciple of your husband."

She thought, "Who is this? Where has He come from?"

She could not open the door because she didn't even have enough clothing to cover herself properly, but Krishna understood everything, and He handed His own shawl through the door for her to wear. He said, "Mother, Guruji has sent Me. We have collected all of these things today. He caught hold of Me and sent Me here, saying that he will be coming soon. I asked him to please wait a minute so that I could get a drink of water, but he said, 'No, You can drink water later. Go to my home immediately.' He could see that I am such a young

boy, but he still loaded all of this on Me and sent Me here.”

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

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

“Oh! It looks as if it will bleed!” exclaimed the *brahmana's* wife, and she took Him on her lap. “My son, when he comes, I will give him a good talking to! He poses as a great, self-controlled devotee, but he can't 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 for You to eat. You won't leave here until I have fed You.”

She went to the kitchen and began to prepare the rice and *dahl* and vegetables that He had brought. While she was engaged in this way, there was a knock at the door; her husband had arrived.

“Open the door!” he said.

The *brahmana's* wife went to the door in a very angry mood, and said, “Have you come empty-handed, without bringing anything yourself? You loaded everything on that poor boy, and then scratched Him with your nails? Don't you have even a little mercy?”

“What? What are you talking about?” the *brahmana* asked.

“You know very well. I'm talking about that boy you sent here loaded up with everything you collected.”

“Who? I don't know anything about all this!”

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

“Where is He then?”

“Come inside and see for Yourself!”

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 they had searched for the boy and found that He was not there, the *brahmana* took his *Gita* in his hands and opened it. To his amazement, he discovered that the red ink with which he had crossed out the verse was no longer there. He began to weep bitterly, and said,

“Just see how Bhagavan has carried our burden for us today! This is our evidence. My doubt is now dispelled.”

This is *bhakti*, and it is an example of the practice [*sadhana*] that produces *bhakti*.

Arjuna said, “Prabhu, it will be very difficult to do this here on this battlefield. I could not perform *man-mana bhava*. absorbing the mind in thinking only of You, and neither can I do *mad-bhaktah*, becoming Your devotee. Prabhu, please tell me a method which is simple, straight, and easy.”

Next Krishna will explain *mad-yaji*: “Worship Me.”

## WORSHIP ME AND OFFER OBEISANCES TO ME

“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 your full *pranama* to Me, and then certainly you will come to Me. I promise you this because you are dear to Me.” (*Bhagavad-gita* 18.64, 65)

Here, the word ‘*paramam*’ means ‘the supreme essence of all the scriptures.’ If one has not surrendered his mind, body, and words at the lotus feet of *guru* and Bhagavan, Krishna will not reveal these truths to him. How must we surrender to the *guru*? In the way that *Gita* instructs us: “You will attain this knowledge by satisfying your *guru* with submission, relevant inquiry, and service. He can teach you this because he has seen the truth.” (*Bhagavad-gita* 4.34)

One becomes qualified to understand this knowledge by approaching the *guru* with the following three ways of behaving: *pranipatena* or submission, *pariprasnena* or relevant inquiry, and *sevaya* or sincere service. On the other hand, the *guru* will only give superficial instructions to one who demands answers to his questions, or who doesn’t listen attentively to the answers, and has to ask the same questions again. The *guru* will not give *sarva-guhyatam*, the most hidden knowledge, to such a person. Krishna has taken a vow that the essential knowledge of the *Gita* will not be given to anyone whose heart has not been purified by austerities, who is not surrendered, and who has not served *guru* and Vaisnavas.

At first, Krishna only told Arjuna to perform sacrifice: “Per-

form your work as a sacrifice to Bhagavan, otherwise it will be a cause of material bondage." (*Bhagavad-gita* 3.9)

After that He gave knowledge of Brahman, and then knowledge of Supersoul: "Try to meditate on the form of Visnu who is the size of a thumb inside your heart." "Yoga is better than fruitive works, empirical knowledge, or austerities. And of all *yogis*, the one who has surrendered to Supersoul, who is fully united with Him in *yoga*, and who worships Him exclusively with faith, is the best." (*Bhagavad-gita* 6.47)

Up to this point, Krishna has not revealed His ultimate form; He has only recommended that we should be inclined towards Supersoul within the heart. Then at the end of the *Gita*, He gives the verse that we are discussing, *man-mana bhava* (18.65). When He says that we should always think of Him, to whom is He referring? He means Syamasundara, whose transcendental body is the colour of a beautiful, dark rain-cloud, who has very beautiful hair, and who always wears a peacock feather on his head. He is standing in His three-fold bending posture under a *kadamba* tree in a delightful grove of Vrindavana, pouring out the nectar of His heart through the holes of the flute that He is holding to His beautiful lips. We should always think of this Krishna. Krishna has not revealed this form in the *Gita* until this verse.

We have given the example of the *gopis* to explain what is meant by absorbing the mind in Krishna. In relation to becoming Krishna'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 Krishna at the stage of devotional ecstasy, but it is only at the stage of fully developed, transcendental love that we can really always think of Krishna. It is very rare that someone will reach the stage of ecstatic love (what to speak of *prema*) in the process of practice. In the process of becoming a devotee (*madbhakto*), first there is faith, then firmly established practice,

taste, transcendental attachment, and finally ecstatic love. From this point it can be said that one has really become a devotee, and can really begin to think of Krishna.

Next Krishna says, *mad-yaji*.

'*Yaji*' means *yajna*, sacrifice. If one has not yet developed any real love for Bhagavan, but has just a little faith, then he can perform *yajna*. This sacrifice is a treatment for material entanglement. A verse concerning this is found in the conversation between Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu and Raya Ramananda. "The Deity may be worshipped with sixteen kinds of paraphernalia, or with twelve kinds, or with five kinds, but if there is no *prema* (love) in the *puja* (worship), Bhagavan will never be satisfied. "

Food and water will appeal to us only to the extent that we are hungry and thirsty. If someone serves us some nicely prepared vegetables when we are not hungry, we will say indifferently, "Oh, what have you made?" Then we'll taste it and say, "There's not enough salt in it," or "There's too much salt." We will think that the sweet rice is too thin, the *chapati* is out of shape, and the *rasagulla* is flat, and not round as it should be.

But if we are hungry, we can take a stale *chapati* add some water and perhaps squeeze a lemon on it, and think that it is quite delicious. If we are hungry, any food will be tasty. Similarly, if the devotee has no *prema*, Bhagavan will not feel hungry for his offering, and will not be satisfied by that devotee's worship. On the other hand, if a devotee's *prema* has made Bhagavan hungry, He will accept the offering, whether there are sixteen kinds of paraphernalia, or just one kind. In *Bhagavad-gita* (9.26), Krishna says that if one simply offers Him a leaf, a flower, some fruit, or water with love, He will accept it. He will accept whatever is offered with love.

A devotee should always have this love that makes Krishna hungry. There is one point that we must understand here. We should not think, "Why is this offering for Bhagavan's pleas-

ure? Ultimately it is for our own happiness." *Srimad-Bhagavatam* states: "The supreme *dharma* (occupation) for human society is pure devotion to Adhoksaja, the Transcendental Person. This devotion must be free from ulterior motives and practised constantly to satisfy the self completely." (*Srimad-Bhagavatam* 1.2.6)

In this verse, Bhagavan Sri Krishna 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 Bhagavan is pleased, then the individual devotee automatically attains his own satisfaction. 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, "Prabhu, I offer the fruit of all of my activities to Your feet." 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 desires.

### KRISHNA PROTECTS HIS DEVOTEE'S VOW

Now we will tell a story from our own experience, which shows how we should have love and attachment for our Deity worship. There was a devotee here in Mathura who was worshipping a *sa1agrama-sila*. He didn't know all of the *mantras* and finer details of *puja* (worship), but he went on with his worship in an ordinary way. His vow was that by four o'clock every morning he would bathe in the river Yamuna and return home with some Yamuna water to use for his *puja*, and for applying his *tilaka*; he would not use any water except Yamuna water.

For about ten or fifteen years, this devotee followed his vow without deviation, and performed his *puja* with great

faith. Then came one new-moon night in the month of Magha. It was extremely dark, a very strong wind was blowing, and had rained very hard the entire night. The water of the Yamuna had risen and was flowing very fiercely near Visrama Ghata (a bathing place in Mathura) where he usually bathed and collected his water. He was shivering from the cold. It was about three o'clock in the morning, but he wasn't sure of the time. In those days people did not have wristwatches; they would estimate the time just by seeing the positions of the *Dhruva* and *Sukra* stars. But on that night the stars were hidden by dense clouds.

When he had bathed in the Yamuna, it was so dark and the rain was so heavy that he could not see his way home, and he got lost. In great anxiety, he thought, "How will I manage to get home in time to fulfil my vow? What shall I do?" Then he saw a small boy of Mathura coming. He 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. The boy asked in a very sweet voice, "Baba, 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, "Baba, here is your street. Your house is up that way. I am going onward."

The man began to walk towards his house, but then a 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 grieve deeply: "To protect my vow, Bhagavan came in that dress, holding a lantern to show me the way."

This is worship. We should have this kind of firm determination without considering our own happiness or unhappiness. This is real hunger, and if we perform *puja* with this hunger and this *prema*, will Bhagavan not accept it? He will. Therefore in *Bhagavad-gita* (9.26). Krishna says, *prayatatmanah*: 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 make a mountain out of a molehill, 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."

### OFFER OBEISANCES TO ME

Arjuna said, "Prabhu, it is not possible for me to perform this type of formal worship here on the battlefield. Please tell me an even easier way."

Krishna replied, "You need something easier? Then *mam namaskuru*: just offer obeisances (*pranama*) unto Me." This does not mean making a gesture of offering obeisances in a very casual way, but means to offer obeisances without any false ego. "Give up all kinds of religion and just surrender exclusively to Me." (*Bhagavad-gita* 18.66)

We should take this instruction to heart and offer obeisances to Krishna in this spirit. When one offers obeisances to Krishna like this just once, it is as if he has jumped into a vast body of water — the ocean of material existence — from above, and then at once looks back and sees that he has already crossed it. "Even one who has performed ten horse sacrifices takes birth again, but one who has just once offered obeisances to Krishna never takes birth again."

One who has offered obeisances to Krishna just once with exclusive surrender will not enter the cycle of birth and death again. He will not be forced into the womb of a mother again. This is the meaning of *mam-namaskuru*: “Offer obeisances unto Me.” Accordingly, Arjuna said, “Prabhu, I offer obeisances to You not just once, but hundreds of times!”

In this verse, Krishna says. “*Mad-bhaktah*: become My devotee. *Man-mana bhava* engage in My *bhajana*, absorbing your mind and heart in Me. At the end of that *bhajana*, *mad-yaji*: worship Me, and after performing *puja*, *mam-namaskuru*: “Offer your full obeisances unto Me.”

Now all the four activities described in this verse have become one. Offer your obeisances to Bhagavan Sri Krishna with great faith, sentiment, and love, sincerely following all of the limbs of *bhakti*. This is *sarva-guhyata*, the most hidden treasure, and *paramam vacah*, the supreme instruction of the *Bhagavad-gita*. If anyone earnestly follows just this one verse, he will certainly cross over the ocean of material existence and attain exclusive *prema* at the feet of Sri Krishna.

This verse of the *Gita* explains in a very condensed way the means of attaining the *bhakti* of Vraja, whereas knowledge that Krishna is God is submerged in the sweetness of intimate loving exchanges. The *bhakti* of Vraja is unique, for it is only in Vraja that Krishna agrees to be bound by His devotees’ love. This conception is delineated in an expanded form in the *Srimad-Bhagavatam*.

*Bhagavad-gita* is the beginning book, and we should never disrespect the *Gita* 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 *puja* to Sri Radha and Krishna with great love. This is the essence of the *Bhagavad-gita*.

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