

Kṛṣṇa Kills the Demons

(Of course, we should take note that it is Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa who kills the demons in Vraja — not Vrajendra-nandana Kṛṣṇa. This Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa does not stand as a separate form or personality, but is within the form of Vrajendra-nandana Kṛṣṇa who is Svayam Bhagavān Kṛṣṇa — all other incarnations are within Him when He descends. We should also take note that Kṛṣṇa does not always “kill the demons”. But He is, in all cases, dealing with those who have antagonistic, non-devotional mentalities. And He always deals with them most appropriately – whether that means death or reform! We should also note that Balarāma kills two of the demons who enter Vraja – Dhenukāśura and Pralambāśura.)

Kṛṣṇa's activities are of two types: *nitya* (eternal, daily) and *naimittika* (occasional). In Goloka, the *aṣṭa-kālīya-līlā* unfolds. In the earthly pastimes, occasional pastimes are enjoined within the *aṣṭa-kālīya-līlā*. Kṛṣṇa's birth, His going from and returning to Vraja and His killing of the demons are occasional pastimes. These occasional pastimes of Kṛṣṇa are unavoidable for the devotees still living in the material world. They are present in Goloka in an indirect way, but are present fully only within the material world. Furthermore, the occasional pastimes, which are unfavorable to unbroken meditation upon the daily eightfold pastimes, have a symbolic significance for the instruction of aspiring devotees. By remembering these pastimes, the devotees aspire to destroy their own demoniac mentalities and tendencies.

The significance of some of the *naimittika-līlās* are as follows:

- 1) **Pūtanā** represents the fake guru who teaches *bhukti* and *mukti* (material enjoyment and liberation). Devotees attached to *bhukti* and *mukti* represent Pūtanā. Being merciful to the pure devotees, Kṛṣṇa, as a baby, killed Pūtanā to protect the newly born affection of the devotees for Him. *Persons who are on the path of attachment (rāgānugā-bhakti) should avoid the first obstacle, accepting a bogus guru, by discussing Pūtanā's arrival in Vraja in the guise of a nurse. There are two types of gurus — antaraṅgā, or internal, and bahiraṅga, or external. One who accepts argument as his guru and who learns the process of worship from such a guru is said to have accepted the shelter of a bogus guru. When argument poses as nourishment for the living entities' constitutional duties, this may be compared with Pūtanā's falsely posing as a nurse. The external guru is he from whom the science of worship is learned. One who knows the proper path of attachment and who instructs his disciples according to their qualification is a sad-guru, or eternal guru. One who does not know the path of attachment yet instructs others in this path, or who knows that path and instructs his disciples without considering their qualification is a bogus guru and must be given up.*
- 2) The cart demon, **Śakatāśura**, represents the load-bearing produced by old and recently acquired bad habits and philosophy, and by laxity and pride. The mood created by contemplating baby Kṛṣṇa as He breaks the cart removes this evil. *Those who do not*

understand the purpose of the regulative principles but simply carry the burden of following them out of formality are unable to develop attachment. When one destroys Śakatā, who personifies carrying the burden of the regulative principles, the second obstacle is overcome. Bogus gurus who did not consider their disciples' qualification for the path of attachment and who thus instructed many Śakatā-like people to accept service in the mood of mañjarīs and sakhīs committed offences in the form of disrespecting confidential subject matters, and fell down. Those who worship according to such instructions also gradually fall away from spiritual life, because they do not attain the symptoms of deep attachment for those topics. Yet they may still be delivered by the association of devotees and proper instructions. This is called breaking Śakatā.

- 3) The whirlwind demon, **Tṛṇāvarta**, represents the vanity of false learning, the consequent use of faulty arguments and dry logic, the quest for *mukti*, and association with such falsely proud people. This includes all types of atheists believing in material causality. Being merciful on seeing the affection of the devotee for Him, baby Kṛṣṇa kills Tṛṇāvarta and removes these obstacles to the devotee's worship. *The third obstacle is false arguments. It is difficult for one's ecstatic emotion to be awakened until Tṛṇāvarta, in the form of a whirlwind, is killed in Vraja. In the form of Tṛṇāvarta, the arguments of philosophers, Buddhists, and logicians are all obstacles to cultivating the ecstatic emotions of Vraja.*
- 4) The **Yāmala-arjuna trees** represent the intoxicated pride and arrogance stemming from high birth and wealth, which breed violence, illicit sex, debauchery and addiction to wine, and which also leads to loose speaking and shameless brutality to other living beings. Kṛṣṇa, being merciful, removes this sin by breaking the twin Yāmala-arjuna trees.
- 5) **Vatsāsura**, the demon who assumed the form of a calf, represents performing sinful activities out of an immature mind under the control of greed and the bad influence of evil company. By the mercy of Kṛṣṇa, this fault is vanquished. *The living entities are sober by nature, but when they are disturbed due to possessing a body made of blood and flesh it is called bāla-doṣa, or juvenile offences. This is the fifth obstacle, in the form of Vatsāsura.*
- 6) **Bakāsura**, the demon who assumed a huge duck-like form the size of a hill, represents false dealings performed out of deceit, cheating, cunning and hypocrisy. Without eliminating these, *śuddha-bhakti* does not appear. *The most clever Bakāsura, who is the personification of cheating religion, is the sixth obstacle for Vaiṣṇavas. This is called nāma-aparādha, offences against the holy name of the Lord. Those who do not understand their qualification but accept the instruction of a bogus guru and engage in the process of worship meant for exalted devotees are cheated ass-like people. And those who have understood their ineligibility yet with a goal to accumulate money and prestige still follow the process of worship meant for exalted devotees are called cheaters. Until*

this cheating in the name of religion is destroyed, one's attachment will not awaken. Such people deceive the entire world by making a show of sectarian formalities and pseudo-renunciation. Those who see and respect such proud people's show of external formalities cannot attain love for Kṛṣṇa and are like thorns in the side of the world. It is to be understood here that one should not disrespect a swanlike person just because he has accepted external formalities that are generally considered detestable. It is the eternal duty of Vaiṣṇavas to develop the symptoms of love by associating with and serving devotees, while remaining indifferent to external formalities.

- 7) **Aghāsura**, the demon who assumed the form of a gigantic snake, represents the malignant sinful mentality that desires to cause trouble and violence to others out of hatred and malice. This tendency, being one of the offences to Harināma must be killed by Kṛṣṇa. *Aghāsura, the personification of intolerance and cruelty, is the seventh obstacle. Due to a lack of compassion for the living entities there is a possibility that one's attachment will gradually diminish, because compassion cannot remain separate from attachment. The basis of compassion for living entities and devotion to Kṛṣṇa is the same, just like the two sides of a coin.*
- 8) The **Brahma-mohana-līlā**, the illusory enchantment of Lord Brahmā, represents the skepticism that may arise because of attachment to the paths of *jñāna* and *karma* and it further represents disregard for the superior sweetness of Kṛṣṇa from over-attachment to the Lord's majestic aspect. Dissipated only by Kṛṣṇa, this offence is to be avoided. *If one intensely absorbs his mind in various arguments, opinions, and their respective literatures, then all realizations attained are practically lost. This is called illusion based on the flowery words of the Vedas. Being overwhelmed by this illusion, Brahmā doubted the supremacy of Kṛṣṇa.*
- 9) **Dhenukāsura**, the demon who assumed the form of an ass and was killed by Balarāma, represents gross intellect and complete ignorance of *śuddha-jñāna*, *bhakti-tattva* and *svarūpa-jñāna*. All of these originate from material intelligence, lack of spiritual intuition and idiotic foolishness. This condition, which must be destroyed, is completely contrary to spiritual knowledge. *Subtle discrimination is extremely important for Vaiṣṇavas. Those who invent social distinctions and preach the unbreakable principles of Vaiṣṇavism while breaking them to suit their needs are said to possess gross discrimination. This gross discrimination takes the form of the ass Dhenuka. The ass cannot eat the sweet palm tree fruits, and he opposes others' attempts to eat them. The purport is that the previous ācāryas of the authorized sampradāyas have written many spiritual literatures, which people with gross discrimination neither understand nor allow others to see. Ass-like devotees who are simply interested in the regulative principles and under the control of gross discrimination are unable to attain a higher platform. Vaiṣṇava principles are so unlimitedly exalted that those who simply remain entangled in the regulative process without endeavoring to understand the*

science of attachment are comparable to ordinary fruitive workers. Therefore, until the ass *Dhenukāsura* is killed, one cannot advance in the science of Vaiṣṇavism.

- 10) **Kāliya**, the huge multi-headed serpent, represents pride, deceit, harm towards others, unkind crookedness and malicious cruelty, all of which the devotee must definitely give up. *Kāliya's malice always pollutes the water of the Yamunā, which is the spiritual rasa of the Vaiṣṇavas. It is everyone's duty to give up this tenth obstacle.*
- 11) The **Dāvāgni-vināśa-lilā**, the pastime of destroying the forest fire, represents subduing any type of useless conflict, such as pointless argument, malicious disagreement with other *sampradāyas* and *maṭhas*, disrespect of the *devatās*, and angry fighting against another's opinion. *This eleventh obstacle for the Vaiṣṇavas is sectarianism, which takes the shape of the forest fire. Due to sectarianism a person cannot accept anyone outside of his own group as a Vaiṣṇava, and as a result he faces many obstacles in finding a guru and associating with advanced devotees. Therefore, extinguishing this forest fire is most important.*
- 12) **Pralambāsura**, who appeared as a *gopa*, represents a sham of devotion while secretly maintaining a greedy lust for women, money, worship and position. Killed only by Balarāma, this hypocrisy must be given up. *The impersonalists desire to merge the soul in the impersonal Brahman. In other words, searching for the liberation of complete merging is the defect of "stealing the self", because there is no happiness in this state. Neither the living entity nor the Lord gain anything from this. If one believes the impersonalists' philosophy, then he must accept this material world as false. One then denounces Brahman as non-different and gradually develops doubts about the basis of Brahman. If one becomes deeply absorbed in this topic, he is compelled to accept meaningless nescience and the nonexistence of the living entities. Thus all of mankind's endeavors and considerations become meaningless. Sometimes this philosophy enters amongst Vaiṣṇavas in the form of Pralambāsura to spread serious anarthas, in the form of "stealing the self" (i.e. denying one's identity as an eternal servant of Kṛṣṇa). This is a serious obstacle for Vaiṣṇavas' on the bhakti path.*
- 13) The **Dāvānala-pāna-lilā**, Kṛṣṇa's pastime of swallowing the forest fire, represents the obstacles that atheists create against *dharma* and preachers of *dharma*. Kṛṣṇa personally removes these obstacles to the propagation of true *dharma*.
- 14) The **Yājñika-vipra-lilā**, the *brāhmaṇas* performing *yajña* represent indifference to *kṛṣṇa-bhakti* caused by over-identification with the duties of *varṇāśrama-dharma* or absorption in the activities of *karma-kāṇḍa*.
- 15) The **Indra-puja-vāraṇa-lilā**, the prohibition of the worship of Indra by Kṛṣṇa, signifies subduing the *anartha* that is the worship of many *devatās*, or worship of the individual self as the Supreme, thus considering within oneself, "I am Brahman."

Another obstacle for the Vaiṣṇavas is the worship of minor demigods such as Indra with a desire for fruitive results even after becoming situated in the process of devotional service.

- 16 a) The **Varuṇa-līlā**, the pastime of Kṛṣṇa releasing Nanda Mahārāja from the clutches of Varuṇa, symbolizes the misuse of intoxicants. Some people mistakenly think that imbibing liquor and other intoxicants will increase one's spiritual bliss and improve one's *bhajana*. Such misunderstanding must be abandoned. *The transcendental happiness of the living entities in Vraja is known as nanda. In order to enhance that happiness, some deluded people drink wine, and as a result they create the great anartha of forgetting themselves. Kidnapping Nanda and taking him to the abode of Varuṇa presents this obstacle for the Vaiṣṇavas. People who are absorbed in the mood of Vraja never drink wine.*
- 16 b) The snake that attempted to swallow Nanda Mahārāja represents impersonalistic *māyāvāda* philosophy and other such philosophies that try to swallow up the real nature of *bhakti*. Thus, the association of adherents to *māyāvāda* philosophy must be avoided. *As the Vaiṣṇavas' happiness continually increases in the process of worship, they sometimes lose consciousness. At that time the feeling of merging overcomes them. This feeling of merging with the Lord is the snake that swallowed Nanda Mahārāja. A practitioner who remains free from this snake will become a qualified Vaiṣṇava.*
- 17) The **Śaṅkhacūḍa-vināśa-līlā**, the killing by Kṛṣṇa of the demon Śaṅkhacūḍa and snatching away his crest jewel, symbolizes destroying the desire for name and fame and the morbid desire for women (the opposite sex). *The desire for gaining fame and sense gratification through bhakti is called Śaṅkhacūḍa. Those whose actions are motivated by a desire for fame are also proud, therefore, Vaiṣṇavas should always be careful of such persons.*
- 18) The **Ariṣṭāsura-vadha-līlā**, the killing by Kṛṣṇa of the demon that had assumed the form of a bull, symbolizes destroying the attraction for cheating religion with its external show of pomp and splendor and the concomitant disregard for *śuddha-bhakti*. *Many weak-hearted people give up the path of regulative principles and enter the path of attachment. When they are unable to realize the souls' spiritual attachment, they behave like Ariṣṭāsura by cultivating perverted material attachment. They will be killed by the prowess of Kṛṣṇa. The example of this obstacle is regularly found among the selfish dharma-dvājīs, the show-bottle devotees.*
- 19) The **Keśī-vadha-līlā**, Kṛṣṇa's pastime of killing the demon who had assumed the form of a huge horse, represents freeing the sincere devotee from the illusion of considering oneself a great devotee or *ācārya*. Such illusion produces material pride and the tendency to lord offensively over others. This illusion must be carefully given up. *Keśī, a demon in the form of a horse, personifies the practitioner's conception of*

being more expert than others in devotional service. When he comes to Vraja, he creates a great disturbance. As a Vaiṣṇava gradually begins proclaiming his own superiority, a mentality of disrespect for the Lord arises and the devotee falls from his position. Therefore it is most important to prevent this evil mentality from entering the heart. Even if one is expert in devotional service, a Vaiṣṇava will never give up the quality of humility. If one does so, then there is a need for killing Keśī.

20) The **Vyomāsura-vadha-lilā**, Kṛṣṇa killing the demon who flies in the sky, represents leaving the dishonest company of thieves and fake, deceitful devotees. *Another obstacle in developing love for Kṛṣṇa is stealing others' property and speaking lies. These create disturbances in Vraja in the form of Vyomāsura.*

These are the twenty obstacles, which are unfavorable for *vraja-bhajana*. **The serious chanter of *harināma* should first petition Śrī Kṛṣṇa for the strength to overcome all these unfavorable tendencies – and he should pray like this on a daily basis. By doing this regularly and sincerely, by Kṛṣṇa's mercy, the devotee's heart will eventually become purified.**

If the devotee humbly prays in this way to Kṛṣṇa to remove all the obstacles in the heart that are represented by the demons that Kṛṣṇa personally killed, Kṛṣṇa will certainly do so. However, all the obstacles represented by the demons that Balarāma personally killed must be driven out by the determined efforts of the devotees themselves. This is a secret of *vraja-bhajana*. Pralambāsura represents superficially performing *bhakti* while actually entertaining lust for women, money, worship and high position. Dhenukāśura indicates ignorance of one's *svarūpa*, the identity of *harināma*, and the identity of Kṛṣṇa, and immersion in *avidyā* (false knowledge, ignorance). With great sincere endeavor, the devotees themselves must strive to remove these obstacles. Understanding these proclivities to be very detrimental to spiritual progress, **the devotees should make great disciplined efforts to remove them. If their humility is very sincere, certainly Kṛṣṇa will be merciful. Then Baladeva will make His appearance, and all the obstacles will be destroyed in a second.**

– Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's:

a) *Śrī Caitanya-Śikṣāmṛta*, Sixth Rainfall

b) *Śrī Kṛṣṇa-saṁhitā*, Ch.8 (in italics)

*Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare
Hare Rāma Hare Rāma Rāma Rāma Hare Hare*