

Who is Most Dear to Kṛṣṇa?

Part One

While describing the supremacy of Śrīmatī Rādhikā in his *Upadeśāmṛta* (10), Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmīpāda writes:

*karmibhyaḥ parito hareḥ priyatayā vyaktim yayur jñāninas
tebhyo jñāna-vimukta-bhakti-paramāḥ premaika-niṣṭhās tataḥ
tebhyas tāḥ paśu-pāla-paṅkaja-drśas tābhyo 'pi sā rādhikā
preṣṭhā tadvad iyaṁ tadīya-sarasī tām nāśrayet kaḥ kṛtī*

In the *sāstra* it is said that of all types of fruitive workers, he who is advanced in knowledge of the higher values of life is favored by the Supreme Lord Hari. Out of many such people who are advanced in knowledge [*jñānīs*], one who is practically liberated by virtue of his knowledge may take to devotional service. He is superior to the others. However, one who has actually attained *prema*, pure love of Kṛṣṇa, is superior to him. The *gopīs* are exalted above all the advanced devotees because they are always totally dependent upon Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the transcendental cowherd boy. Among the *gopīs*, Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī is the most dear to Kṛṣṇa. Her *kuṇḍa* [lake] is as profoundly dear to Lord Kṛṣṇa as this most beloved of the *gopīs*. Who, then, will not reside at Rādhā-kuṇḍa and, in a spiritual body surcharged with ecstatic devotional feelings [*aprākṛtabhāva*], render loving service to the divine couple Śrī Śrī Rādhā-Govinda, who perform Their *aṣṭakāliya-līlā*, Their eternal eightfold daily pastimes? Indeed, those who execute devotional service on the banks of Rādhā-kuṇḍa are the most fortunate people in the universe.

Pious workers are better than sinful workers, nonworkers, and foolish workers:

Pious workers, who are not interested simply in their own sense gratification but who engage in activities like giving charity, meditating, visiting holy places, and so on, are superior to those who do things that harm others, or who steal, lie, commit adultery, and eat prohibited foods. Due to an excess of sinful activities, it is impossible for human beings to live peacefully in this world. Still, the ideals of pious *karmīs* are not of ultimate concern. Pious workers are better than sinful workers. The system of performing pious activities is meant to protect people from the clutches of waywardness and to diminish their propensity to indulge in sin. But all *karmīs* want material enjoyment, and are busy trying for material advancement in this life and to assure their happiness in the next. Those *karmīs* who think themselves selfless are still covered by material desire, but they hide the desires for sense pleasure that live in the core of their hearts by practicing piety - patriotism, giving food and cloth to the poor, constructing hospitals, digging ponds, giving water, and honoring guests.

Jñānīs who search after spirit are better than the karmīs who are absorbed in matter:

Karmīs cannot see their own duplicity, *jñānīs*, who want liberation, are superior to *karmīs*, who want sense gratification, but even though *jñānīs* are philosophical, and

despite their understanding of the foolishness of *karmīs*, they themselves may end up becoming attached to sinful activity if they try to stop *karmīs* from pursuing fruitive activities. *Jñānīs* should remember the statement in *Bhagavad-gītā, na buddhi-bhedam janayed ajñānām karma-saṅginām*: "So as not to disrupt the minds of ignorant men attached to the fruitive results of prescribed duties, a learned person should not induce them to stop work." In other words, it is difficult to change the mentality of foolish persons attached out of ignorance to fruitive activities. *If the jñānīs* try to stop them, they themselves will also become attached to temporary, fruitive activities. *Karmīs* are foolish. The wiser *jñānīs* think,

***te taṁ bhuktvā svarga-lokaṁ viśālaṁ
kṣīṇe puṇye martya-lokaṁ viśanti***

When they have thus enjoyed vast heavenly sense pleasure and the results of their pious activities are exhausted, they return to this mortal planet again.

— Bg 9.21

As a result of their pious actions, *karmīs* enjoy heavenly pleasure according to the strength of their piety. Later, after enjoying immense pleasures in heaven and when their piety is exhausted, they again return to this mortal world. So considering all this foolishness on the *karmīs*' part, *the jñānīs*, in their wisdom, try for a more perpetual happiness and become interested in liberation. Thinking that since life is miserable, they decide it's better to merge into the Brahman, which is free of spiritual variegatedness and all material dualities. These people are called *jñānīs*, and they are those who seek the impersonal Brahman, the Māyāvādīs, and the covered Buddhists. But how insignificant is their ambition! While competing with the foolish *karmīs* and trying to pose as wise men, they actually end up becoming foolish. They destroy themselves. They cannot attain that complete eternal happiness for which they pretended to act as renunciants and envied the materialists.

***jñānī jīvan-mukta-daśā pāinu kari' māne
vastutaḥ buddhi 'suddha' nahe kṛṣṇa-bhakti vine***

There are many philosophical speculators [*jñānīs*] belonging to the Māyāvāda school who consider themselves liberated and call themselves Nārāyaṇa. But their intelligence is not purified unless they engage in Kṛṣṇa's devotional service.

— CC Madhya 22.29

The servants of the transcendental Supreme Lord are topmost:

This is why the pure devotees are superior to all the kinds of *jñānīs*. A devotee's position is the highest. The foolish sense enjoyers, or *karmīs*, think the devotees work just like them - devotees ring the *ārati* bell like the *karmīs* do, they worship the Lord like they do, they show compassion toward other living beings like they do, they visit holy places and serve the saints like they do. But it's not actually like that. *Karmīs* determine what is good or bad by examining things with their material senses. But a devotee's service is fully transcendental and cannot be perceived by the

senses. Devotees have no desire to gratify their senses; their only desire is to gratify Kṛṣṇa's senses.

The abominal mentality of those who reject the fruits of *karma*:

The *jñānīs* think that the devotees, like them, worship with blind faith a temporary object that won't exist later; that is, that the seer, the seeing process, and the object of worship don't ultimately exist, and after liberation, the *triputi*[threefold experience] will be destroyed. The *jñānīs* cut off the transcendental hands, legs, mouth, eyes, nose, and lips of the inconceivably powerful Supreme Lord and try to make Him formless and without variety by binding His hands and feet with iron shackles and severing His limbs. "The Supreme Lord, who is the only enjoyer," they say, "may He not be able to enjoy! May He have no hands and feet!"

Yet all the temporary material enjoyers have hands and feet. They live in the fresh Himalayan air or in beautiful, lonely forests, or on the charming banks of the Ganges, and they enjoy in the name of renunciation.

The devotees are not covered enjoyers like these persons. The same liberation for which the *jñānīs* hanker is so insignificant it's worth spitting on. In his *Śrī Kṛṣṇa-karṇāmṛta* (107), Śrīla Bilvamaṅgala Ṭhākura explains that liberation is *bhakti's* maidservant:

*bhaktis tvayi sthitararā bhagavān yadi syād
daivena naḥ phalati divya-kiśora-mūrtiḥ
muktiḥ svayaṁ mukulitāñjali sevate 'smān
dharmārtha-kāma-gatayaḥ samaya-pratikṣāḥ*

For one who has developed pure devotional service to Kṛṣṇa, liberation stands before him with folded hands. Yet the pure devotees do not even look at her. Religiosity, economic development, and sense gratification wait patiently, hoping that someday they too will receive an opportunity to serve the pure devotees.

Therefore the religiosity, economic development, and sense gratification the *karmīs* desire, and the liberation desired by the *jñānīs* are like nothing to the devotees.

Liberation is an insignificant desire:

Śrīla Prabodhānanda Sarasvatīpāda said (*Caitanya-candrāmṛta* 5),

*kaivalyaṁ narakāyate tri-daśa-pūr ākāśa-puṣpāyate
durdāntendriya-kāla-sarpa-paṭalī protkhāta-damṣṭrāyate |
viśvaṁ pūrṇa-sukhāyate vidhi-mahendrādiś ca kiṭāyate
yat-kāruṇya-kaṭākṣa-vaibhavavatām taṁ gauram eva stumhaḥ*

For a devotee who has developed love for Śrī Gaurasundara, the pleasure of merging into the existence of Brahman is considered hellish. Similarly, he considers promotion to heavenly planets just another "kind of phantasmagoria". The *yogīs* meditate for sense control, but for the devotee the senses appear like serpents with broken teeth. The whole material world appears joyful for a devotee, and even great personalities

like Lord Brahmā and Lord Indra are considered no better than insects. Such is the position of a devotee who has received but a small glance of the mercy of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. Unto this most magnanimous personality I offer my respectful obeisances.

Part Two

What follows are excerpts from a Vraja-maṇḍala Parikramā lecture given by Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura at Śrī Rādhā-kuṇḍa on the 16th October, 1932.

In his tenth instruction Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī has ascertained who among the devotees is best:

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Śāstra states that of all types of fruitive workers, one advanced in knowledge of the higher values of life is favored by Hari. Out of many such people advanced in knowledge (*jñānīs*), one who is practically liberated by virtue of his knowledge may take to devotional service; he is superior to the others. But one who has actually attained *prema* is better still. The *gopīs* are exalted above all other advanced devotees because they are always totally dependent upon Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the transcendental cowherd boy. Among the *gopīs*, Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī is dearest to Kṛṣṇa. Her *kuṇḍa* is as profoundly dear to Lord Kṛṣṇa as is this most beloved of the *gopīs*. Who then will not take shelter of Śrī Rādhā-kuṇḍa? Those who do so are the most fortunate persons in the universe. (*Upadeśāmṛta* 10)

Only the most fortunate live with pure hearts in the most sanctified place, Śrī Rādhā-kuṇḍa, and worship Kṛṣṇa twenty-four hours a day. Śrī Rādhā-kuṇḍa is the highest section of Goloka, the most confidential place in the spiritual sky, and the only shelter for devotees on the platform of *mādhurya-rasa*.

The planetary systems Bhū, Bhuvar, and Svar are meant for pious householders. Above them are the planetary systems Mahar, Jana, Tapa, and Satya, meant for the celibates. *Upakurvāṇabrahmacārīs* live in Maharloka, *naiṣṭhika-brahmacārīs* attain Janaloka, *vānaprasthas* attain Tapaloka, and sannyasis enjoy in Satyaloka. The *Bhagavad-gītā* states:

*ā-brahma-bhuvanāl lokāḥ punar āvartino 'rjuna
mām upetya tu kaunteya punar janma na vidyate*

From the highest planet in the material world to the lowest, all are places of misery wherein repeated birth and death take place. But one who attains to My abode, O son of Kuntī, never takes birth again. (Bg 8.16)

The ecstatic spiritual abode of Vaikuṅṭha is rarely attained even by liberated souls. Immediately after leaving their corporal tabernacles, the Lord's devotees who are free from material desire attain that abode. Mathurā is superior to Vaikuṅṭha; Vṛndāvana, the abode of the *rāsa-līlā*, is superior to Mathurā; Govardhana is superior to Vṛndāvana; and Rādhā-kuṅḍa is the best of all.

Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī Prabhu's explanation that the Lord's abode is three-fourths of the creation is most scientific.ⁱ The impersonal Brahman is situated beyond the Causal Ocean. Impersonalists think that ultimately there is nothing there. They suppose that all the “imaginary” gods as well as the “imaginary” form of Brahman will be merged, having become one. *Hayaśīrṣa-paścaraṭra* states:

*yā yā śrutir jalpati nirviśeṣam
sā sābhidhatte sa-viśeṣam eva
vicāra-yoge sati hanta tāsām
prāyo balīyaḥ sa-viśeṣam eva*

Whatever Vedic *mantras* describe the Absolute Truth as impersonal, ultimately prove only that the Absolute Truth is a person. The Supreme Lord is understood in two features, impersonal and personal. If one considers the Supreme Personality of Godhead in both features, he can actually understand the Absolute Truth. He knows that the personal understanding is stronger, because he can see that everything is full of variety. Everything has its own unique characteristics.

Śrīman Mahāprabhu says:

*‘nirviśeṣa’ tānre kahe yei śruti-gaṇa
‘prākṛta’ niṣedhi kare ‘aprākṛta’ sthāpana*

Impersonal descriptions in the *Vedas* are meant to establish that everything in spiritual existence is transcendental and free of mundane characteristics.

— CC Madhya 6.141

Impersonalists think they have overcome material variety and that spiritual variety must similarly be rejected. The abode of the impersonal Brahman lies on the other side of the Causal Ocean. The concept of the Brahman effulgence arises after washing off the three modes of material nature. But, *jyotir-abhyantare rūpam atulaṁ śyāmasundaram*: “Within the effulgence is the beautiful and incomparable form of Lord Śyāmasundara”.ⁱⁱ

Vaikuṅṭha possesses spiritual variety. There are two and a half *rasas* found there. The Supreme Lord is omnipotent; both matter and spirit are under His control. This is the philosophy taught by Śrī Rāmānuja. The Lord is the proprietor of the material and spiritual energies.

[Question:] Sometimes we become confused about *prayojana-tattva* when speaking with persons who do not know the difference between mundane and spiritual *rasas*. Would you please help us?

[Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura's reply:] Nondevotees want to enjoy this material world, but devotees have a different mentality; they want neither to enjoy nor renounce the world. There are many sense enjoyers but only one Supreme Lord. *Lakṣmī-sahasra-śata-sambhrama-sevyamānam*: “The Lord is served by hundreds of thousands of *lakṣmīs* or *gopīs*”ⁱⁱⁱ. There is a difference between worship with awe and reverence and service with love and devotion.

After achieving perfection, when we give up the body awarded by our parents we will attain uninterrupted devotional service to Bhagavān. Bhagavān is supremely independent; everyone must respect His supreme will. Rules are prescribed for those whose propensity to serve the Lord has not yet been awakened, who are entangled with their gross and subtle bodies. Do not make a pretense. There is no value in pretending to act in one's constitutional position while still conditioned by the gross and subtle body. That is the behavior of a *prākṛta-sahajiyā*.

The subject matter of ornamental literature like *Kāvya-prakāśa* or *Sāhitya-darpaṇa* is mundane. Such books describe affairs between man and woman, or a number of men and women together. If the two and a half types of *rasas* are applied to the Lord, and the rest are applied to the abominable natures lived out by forgetful living entities, the consideration of *rasa* remains truncated. Five *rasas* are fully manifest in the complete kingdom of God, Goloka. The transcendental *gopīs* are not concerned with superiority or inferiority, or whether they are mature or immature girls. They serve Kṛṣṇa with all their limbs and senses. Those sages who could not attain perfection in their worship of the Supreme tried to do so by seeing Śrī Rāmacandra's beauty, but since Lord Rāma vowed to accept only one wife it was impossible for them to achieve their goal. Therefore, as described in *Padma Purāṇa*, they took birth as *gopīs* in Vraja. Among them, a few attained perfection at the beginning of the *rāsa-līlā*, as confirmed by *Bṛhad-Vāmana Purāṇa*. When the personified *Upaniṣads* were struck with wonder upon seeing the *gopīs*' good fortune, then as a result of the *Upaniṣads*' own intense worship they too appeared in Vraja as *gopīs*. If one ponders from a neutral viewpoint, he will find that the *gopīs*' love in *mādhurya-rasa* is far superior to and more wonderful than the love of *śānta*, *dāsyā*, and *sakhyā-rasas*.

Among the *gopīs* Śrī Rādhikā is supreme. She is principal among the group leaders headed by Lalitā and Viśākhā. By great good fortune one gets entry into Lalitā's group. That is why today those who desire to circumambulate Śrī Rādhā-kuṇḍa try to live on the banks of Lalitā-kuṇḍa. Some people adjudge Candrāvalī as the leading *gopī*, but the highest achievement is to gain an opportunity to surrender as a maidservant to Śrī Rādhā, the personification of *mahābhāva*. Śrī Rādhā's name is mentioned only covertly in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, because the author feared that this literature would fall into the hands of materialists. Yet the most magnanimous Śrī Gaurasundara, and my spiritual master Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī Prabhu, have revealed information about Śrī Rādhā without hiding it from qualified devotees. *Padma Purāṇa* states:

*yathā rādhā priyā viṣṇos tasyāḥ kuṇḍam priyam tathā
sarva-gopīṣu saivaikā viṣṇor atyanta-vallabhā*

Just as Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī is dearest to Kṛṣṇa, Her *kuṇḍa* is similarly dear. Of all the *gopīs*, She is the most beloved of the Lord.

ⁱ See Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī's *Dig-darśinī-ṭīkā* on *Bṛhad-bhāgavatāmṛta* 2.1.10.

ⁱⁱ *Nārada Pañcarātra*

ⁱⁱⁱ *Brahma-saṁhitā* 5.29