

Śrī Bṛhad-bhāgavatāmṛta

by Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī

- ① Vairāgye
- ② Jñāna
- ③ bhajane.
- ④ Vaikunthe.

Part 4

Vaikuntha- The Spiritual Kingdom

TEXTS 197–198

sac-cid-ānanda-sāndratvāc caṣām bhagavatā saha
sāmye 'pi bhajanānanda-mādhuryākarṣa-vidyayā

kayācid anayātarkya-nānā-madhurimārṇave
tasmin śrī-kṛṣṇa-pādābje ghaṭate dāsatā sadā

These devotees (**eṣām**) are equal (**sāmye**) to the Lord (**bhagavatā saha**) in being embodiments of eternity, knowledge, and bliss (**sac-cid-ānanda-sāndratvāt**), just like Him (**implied**). Yet Śrī Kṛṣṇa has (**anayā**) a certain (**kayācid**) inconceivable (**atarkya**) mystic potency (**vidyayā**) that attracts (**ākarṣa**) these devotees to the sweet ecstasy of worshiping Him (**bhajana ānanda-mādhurya**) and makes them always think (**tasmin sadā ghaṭate**) that they are servants (**dāsatā**) at His lotus feet (**śrī-kṛṣṇa-pādābje**).

Even though
the devotees are
equal to Him
Sac-cid-ānanda, being
they are certain
mystic potency that
attracts devotees
to worship Him
as servants

Kṛṣṇa's devotees are helplessly attracted to Him, like iron filings naturally drawn to a magnet.

The eternal associates of the Lord have never known another way of life, and the new residents of Vaikuṅṭha, perhaps for several lifetimes, practiced being attracted to Him before they were allowed to enter the spiritual world.

The attractive force of devotional service to Kṛṣṇa is inconceivable; it works in its own way, without having to be understood or even noticed.

Yet somehow it immerses pure devotees in the boundless ocean of Kṛṣṇa's sweetness and draws them irresistibly to His service.

Only in this way is the distinction of served and servant maintained forever.

TEXT 199

taiḥ sac-cid-ānanda-ghanair aśeṣaiḥ
śrī-kṛṣṇa-devasya yathāvatāraiḥ
khyāto 'vatāritvam ṛte 'pi sāmye
tais tair mahattvair madhurair viśeṣaḥ

The 2 incarnations
Even though they are
sac-cid-ānanda-ghanair
inferior to Kṛṣṇa, they are
a) (P) is sac-cid-ānanda-ghanair
b) He also has his own
higher, sweeter, purer

And so it is with His incarnations (**yathā**). They are also nondifferent from Śrī Kṛṣṇadeva (**śrī-kṛṣṇa-devasya**), for they are complete embodiments of eternity, knowledge, and bliss (**aśeṣaiḥ sac-cid-ānanda-ghanair**). But although Kṛṣṇa is considered (**khyātaḥ**) nondifferent from His plenary expansions (**avatāraiḥ sāmye api**), He is also distinct from them (**ṛte**), and not only because He is their source (**avatāritvam**) but also because He has His own sweet perfections (**tais tair mahattvair madhurair viśeṣaḥ**).

As implied here by the word *api*, it is only natural that Kṛṣṇa be the original Personality of Godhead and that all other forms of God emanate from Him.

But Kṛṣṇa is special not only as the *avatārī* but also as an *avatāra*.

He alone is the source of all incarnations of God, and only He displays such wonderful charming pastimes when He descends to the material world.

The Purāṇas give evidence of those pastimes, recounting many of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's unequalled exploits.

The jīvas allowed to associate with Lord Kṛṣṇa in His abode are surely aware that He, being the supreme controller of all existence, is much greater than they.

What most impresses Kṛṣṇa's devotees, however, is His infinitely variegated sweetness; by seeing His beauty and other glories, they are constantly assured that He is different from everyone else.

Only by this deep appreciation of Kṛṣṇa's supremacy can His most fortunate devotees sustain their exalted love for Him and share intimate exchanges with Him in the ecstatic tastes of transcendental rasa.

TEXT 200

Some persons say that the exclusive embodiment of the Supreme Brahman is Lord Kṛṣṇa. But His associates are also Brahman.

vadanti kecid bhagavān hi kṛṣṇaḥ
su-sac-cid-ānanda-ghanaika-mūrtiḥ
sa yat param brahma pare tu sarve
tat-pārṣadā brahma-mayā vimuktāḥ

Some persons say (**vadanti kecid**) that Lord Kṛṣṇa (**bhagavān kṛṣṇaḥ**) is the exclusive embodiment of perfect eternity, knowledge, and bliss (**su-sac-cid-ānanda-ghana eka-mūrtiḥ**). He is, after all, the Supreme Brahman (**sa yat param brahma pare**). But His associates are all (**sarve tat-pārṣadā**) liberated souls (**vimuktāḥ**) who are also embodiments of Brahman (**brahma-mayā**).

Some may propose that only Kṛṣṇa is absolute, because He is the Supreme Brahman.

Strictly speaking, this is true, but the absolute person Kṛṣṇa also includes all His energies.

So His pure devotees should certainly be recognized to be on the same absolute platform of spiritual perfection.

The Lord's servants, including Ananta Śeṣa, Garuḍa, and others in Vaikuṅṭha, are brahma-mayāḥ, one with Him in quality.

Jñānīs and yogīs may become mukta, elevated to impersonal oneness with the Supreme, but the devotees of Nārāyaṇa are vimukta, “super-liberated,” because they participate in the personal oneness of bhakti.

TEXT 201

**bhakty-ānanda-viśeṣāya
līlā-vigraha-dhāriṇaḥ
tayā bhagavataḥ śaktyā
cid-vilāsa-svarūpayā**

This equality is created by a special potency of the Lord (**tayā bhagavataḥ śaktyā**), a playful aspect of His pure spiritual self (**cid-vilāsa-svarūpayā**). As Kṛṣṇa assumes various forms for His pastimes (**līlā-vigraha-dhāriṇaḥ**), she creates varieties of ecstasy in devotional service (**bhakty-ānanda-viśeṣāya**).

This equality
between the Lord &
His external associates
is created by a special
potency of the Lord.
As Kṛṣṇa assumes various forms
for His pastimes, she creates varieties of
ecstasy in devotional service.

How do the Lord's devotees share His supremacy? By the power of bhakti.

Bhakti, the worship of the Supreme Person with love, gives a special ecstatic mellow taste.

And by the influence of bhakti, the Personality of Godhead displays special forms for particular pastimes.

Still, persons who regard Kṛṣṇa as the Supreme Brahman and yet are unclear about the position of His associates may have a question: Since the devotees who join in the Lord's pastimes have already attained liberation, oneness with Brahman, why should such devotees descend again into duality by assuming different bodies for those pastimes?

The answer has already been given: By even asking such a question, one acknowledges the distinction between served and servant.

Still, one might counter that since the liberated impersonalists and the devotees of the Personality of Godhead are both in the same liberated condition, that of sac-cid-ānanda, nothing less and nothing more, the devotees of the Personality of Godhead must enjoy no more happiness than liberated impersonalists.

But this has also been previously answered.

As the most confidential Vedic scriptures told Gopa-kumāra on Brahmaloaka:

jīva-svarūpa-bhūtasya
sac-cid-ānanda-vastunaḥ
sākṣād-anubhavenāpi
syāt tādr̥k sukham alpakam

The happiness (**tādr̥k sukham**) that arises from directly perceiving (**sākṣād-anubhavenāpi**) the true identity of the jīva soul (**jīva-svarūpa-bhūtasya**)—the entity composed of eternity, knowledge, and bliss (**sac-cid-ānanda-vastunaḥ**)—is actually meager (**alpakam syāt**). (Bṛhad-bhāgavatāmṛta 2.2.176)

The happiness of mere self-realization is limited, unlike the unimaginable happiness found in true liberation, in which one realizes one's loving relationship with the Supreme.

Thus everything Nārada has said stands unrefuted.

TEXT 202

śrī-gopa-kumāra uvāca

prṣṭam mayedaṁ bhagavan dharā-tale
tiṣṭhanti yāḥ śrī-pratimā mahā-prabhoḥ
tāḥ sac-cid-ānanda-ghanās tvayā matā
nīlādri-nāthaḥ puruṣottamo yathā

→ I then asked Nity
You told that the deity
for eye also sac-cid-ānanda
& Gopakumār then under other
a Vedaśāstrī

Śrī Gopa-kumāra said: I then asked (**prṣṭam mayā idam**), “My lord (**bhagavan**), divine Deity forms (**śrī-pratimā**) of the Supreme Godhead (**mahā-prabhoḥ**), like Lord Puruṣottama (**yathā puruṣottamah**), the master of Nīlādri (**nīlādri-nāthaḥ**), are present on earth (**dharā-tale tiṣṭhanti**), and you consider them (**tāḥ tvayā matā**) embodiments of eternity, knowledge, and bliss (**sac-cid-ānanda-ghanāḥ**).

Gopa-kumāra is very much attracted to arcana, the devotional process of Deity worship.

He has enjoyed the benefits of arcana in Jagannātha-purī and on several higher planets in the universe.

He has also heard about the glories of this process from various authoritative scriptures.

Nārada, however, has created a doubt in Gopa-kumāra by telling him that the Deities of the Supreme Lord are just another kind of incarnation, indistinguishable from other avatāras. Earlier in this chapter (texts 155 and 157), Nārada said:

TEXTS 155–157

yathā dharāmbana-ratna-bhūtā nārāyaṇo 'sau sa naro 'tha dattaḥ
śrī-jāmadagnyaḥ kapilādayo 'pi ye kautukāc ca pratimā-sarūpāḥ

ye svarga-lokādiṣu viṣṇu-yajñeś- varādayo 'mī bhavataiva dr̥ṣṭāḥ
matsyo 'tha kūrmaś ca mahā-varāhaḥ śrīman-nṛsimho nanu vāmanaś ca

anye 'vatārāś ca tathaiva teṣāṃ praty-ekam ihābhidhayā prabhedāḥ
te sac-cid-ānanda-ghanā hi sarve nānātva-bhājo 'pi sadaika-rūpāḥ

In the Lord's own appearances on earth, He shows similar varieties and equality. The Lord's own forms are the shelter and the treasure of the earth (**yathā dharāmbana-ratna-bhūtā**). Among them are Nara-Nārāyaṇa, and Dattātreya (**nārāyaṇo 'sau sa naro 'tha dattaḥ**), and Parāśara the son of Jamadagni, and Kapila (**śrī-jāmadagnyaḥ kapilādayo 'pi**). There are those who playfully assume the appearance of Deities (**ye kautukāc ca pratimā-sarūpāḥ**), and those, such as Viṣṇu and Yajñeśvara (**viṣṇu-yajñeś- varādayo amī**), whom you have seen on Svargaloka and other higher planets (**ye svarga-lokādiṣu bhavataiva dr̥ṣṭāḥ**). There are such various incarnations as Matsya, Kūrma, Mahā-varāha (**matsyo 'tha kūrmaś ca mahā-varāhaḥ**), Śrīman Nṛsimha, and Vāmana (**śrīman-nṛsimho nanu vāmanaś ca**). Each of these forms of the Lord (**anye 'vatārāś ca**) has its own activities and names (**tathaiva teṣāṃ praty-ekam ihābhidhayā prabhedāḥ**), yet all of them (**te sarve**) are full in eternity, knowledge, and bliss (**sac-cid-ānanda-ghanā hi**). Though manifesting variety (**nānātva-bhājo 'pi**), in substance they are eternally one (**sadā eka-rūpāḥ**).

TEXT 203

eko 'pi bhagavān sāndra-
sac-cid-ānanda-vigrahaḥ
kṛpayā tatra tatrāste
tat-tad-rūpeṇa līlayā

The one lord
mercifully
enacts deity forms to
various forms to
enact various pastimes

“The one Personality of Godhead (**ekah api bhagavān**), whose body is always sac-cid-ānanda (**sāndra-sac-cid-ānanda-vigrahaḥ**), mercifully enacts the pastime (**kṛpayā līlayā**) of being present in various places (**tatra tatra āste**) in various forms (**tat-tad-rūpeṇa**).

To increase His own pleasure and show kindness to His devotees, and to the whole world, Lord Kṛṣṇa appears in Purī and other places as Deities like Lord Jagannātha.

His Deity forms appear not only on earth but also on other planets of Bhūloka and in the higher and lower planetary systems.

TEXT 204

tat sarva-nairapekṣyeṇa
ko doṣaḥ syāt tad-arcane
kathañcit kriyamāṇe 'pi
mahā-lābho 'pi budhyate

What then could
be wrong if we just
worship the deities
while neglecting everything
else?

“What then could be wrong (**ko doṣaḥ syāt**) with worshiping those forms (**tad-arcane**), disregarding everything else (**sarva-nairapekṣyeṇa**)? I would think that (**budhyate**) no matter how this was done (**kathañcit kriyamāṇe api**) it would bring great benefit (**mahā-lābhah api**).

Why should the Lord's devotee be criticized for neglecting other spiritual disciplines—dharma, karma, yoga, and so on—to worship the Lord's arcā-vigraha?

It seems logical that he should gain greatly by such dedication, since all the other devotional practices are included in the worship of the Deity.

TEXT 205

tataḥ katham purāṇebhyaḥ
śrūyante tat-tad-uktayaḥ
apramāṇam ca tā na syur
mahan-mukha-viniḥsrtāḥ

Why then
do the śrīs
see to devalue the
value of deity worship?

“But why, therefore (**tataḥ katham**), do we hear (**śrūyante**) differing opinions about this (**tat-tad-uktayaḥ**) from the Purāṇas (**purāṇebhyaḥ**)? The Purāṇic statements (**tāḥ**), coming as they do from the mouths of exalted souls (**mahan-mukha-viniḥsrtāḥ**), cannot be less than authoritative (**na apramāṇam syuh**).”

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam and other Purāṇas make comments that apparently deprecate the value of Deity worship. For example:

arcāyām eva haraye
pūjām yaḥ śraddhayehate
na tad-bhakteṣu cānyeṣu
sa bhaktaḥ prākṛtaḥ smṛtaḥ

A devotee who faithfully engages in the worship (**yaḥ śraddhayā pūjām ihate**) of the deity in the temple (**haraye arcāyām eva**) but does not behave properly toward other devotees (**na tad-bhakteṣu**) or people in general (**ca anyeṣu**) is called an unrefined devotee (**sa bhaktaḥ prākṛtaḥ smṛtaḥ**).
(Bhāgavatam 11.2.47)

yo mām sarveṣu bhūteṣu
santam ātmānam īśvaram
hitvārcām bhajate maudhyād
bhasmany eva juhōti saḥ

He who worships the deity (**yaḥ arcām bhajate**) while rejecting me (**mām hitvā**), the Lord being present in all beings (**sarveṣu bhūteṣu santam ātmānam īśvaram**), out of ignorance (**maudhyād**), simply makes oblations into ashes (instead of fire) (**bhasmany eva juhōti saḥ**). (Bhāgavatam 3.29.22)

aham uccāvacair dravyaiḥ
kriyayotpannayānaghe
naiva tuṣye 'rcito 'rcāyām
bhūta-grāmāvamāninaḥ

O mother (**anaghe**)! I am not pleased (**aham na eva tuṣye**) with the person who criticizes other beings (**bhūta-grāma avamāninaḥ**) while worshipping my deity form (**arcito arcāyām**) with rites (**kriyayā utpannayā**) using various materials (**uccāvacair dravyaiḥ**). (Bhāgavatam 3.29.24)

These and other statements of śāstra, such as pratimā manda-buddhīnām (“The Deity is meant for persons who are less intelligent”), come from the mouths of great sages.

And the verses cited above are the Supreme Lord’s own words, retold from the mouth of Śrī Śukadeva.

As a matter of principle, the words of trustworthy authorities, such as the Lord and His pure devotees, should be accepted as true.

Therefore Gopa-kumāra is puzzled.

Any knowledgeable person would surely agree that the Deity forms of the Lord, like Śrī Saṅkarṣaṇa and others that appear on the various varṣas of Bhūloka, including the Deities of Śrī Raṅganātha and Jagannātha in Their transcendental cities on earth, are directly the Personality of Godhead and should be worshiped with faith.

But the words pratimā (“image”) and arcā (“worshiped Deity”) are often used in scripture to criticize the narrow vision of immature devotees, and these special incarnations of the Supreme Lord—Saṅkarṣaṇa, Raṅganātha, and Jagannātha—also present Themselves as pratimā and arcā.

Does this mean they are inferior forms? Gopa-kumāra hopes that Nārada will clear up this doubt.

TEXT 206

N.M, who is
the first S.M &
daily worship
Question. ↓ to hear his
he embraced me & started answering

tac chrutvoktam prabhoh pūjā-
mārgādi-guruṇāmunā
utthāya paramānandān
mām āśliṣyedam uttaram

Nārada Muni (**amunā**) is the first spiritual master (**ādi-guruṇā**) for the path of worshiping the Deity of the Lord (**prabhoh pūjā-mārga**). Upon hearing my question (**tac uktam śrutvā**), he stood up (**utthāya**), embraced me (**mām āśliṣya**) in extreme ecstasy (**parama ānandāt**), and answered in this way (**idam uttaram**).

By composing the Nārada Pañcarātra, Nārada long ago became the original teacher of the method of Deity worship as pure devotional service.

In this verse, the word mārga means “path,” and since it is derived from the verb mṛg (“to seek”) it can also be understood to mean “goal of endeavor.”