

Śrī Brhad-bhāgavatāmṛta

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Volume - 2

Śrī-goloka-māhātmya

The Glories of Goloka

Part 7

Jagad-ānanda

The Bliss of the Worlds

Text 142

dhārayanty ati-kṛcchreṇa
prāyaḥ prāṇān kathañcana
pratyāgamana-sandేశair
ballavyo me mad-ātmikāḥ

“Simply because I have promised (sandేశaiḥ) to return to them (prati-āgamana), My (me) fully devoted (mad-ātmikāḥ) cowherd girlfriends (ballavyah) struggle (prāyaḥ ati-kṛcchreṇa) to somehow or other (kathañcana) maintain (dhārayanti) their lives (prāṇān).”

33
Just bcos I have
promised to give back
the @s we somehow (or)
other way maintaining their
lives.

In the previous verse, Kṛṣṇa described the condition of gokula-striyah, which can be taken to mean all the ladies of Vraja, old as well as young.

Now He focuses His attention on the vraja-gopīs who are most dear to Him—the young gopīs, such as Śrī Rādhikā.

As improbable as it seems to Kṛṣṇa, these dear gopī girlfriends, including Candrāvalī, even though on the constant verge of death from the pain of separation, manage somehow to survive.

Kṛṣṇa is ashamed to confess that He intends to lie to the gopīs,
yet He must explain the contents of the message He is asking
Uddhava to carry.

Uddhava must assure the gopīs that Kṛṣṇa will come back to
them very soon.

This should save the gopīs from the grips of death, just as
such a message saved them once before, when Akrūra had
taken Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma away from Gokula.

At that time Kṛṣṇa sent a messenger with the promise that He would return after only a few days, and since the simple gopīs had full faith in Kṛṣṇa's words, they found in this promise the strength to tolerate the disappointment of losing Him.

The anticipation of soon again enjoying the beauty of Kṛṣṇa gave them solace.

Aware of how daunting the task must appear, Kṛṣṇa explains to Uddhava that the gopīs, headed by Śrī Rādhikā, have dedicated themselves life and soul to Him alone.

Only by Kṛṣṇa's special efforts to keep them alive do their souls stay in their bodies.

The gopīs are burning in a fire of viraha-bhāva, but Kṛṣṇa is still struggling to save them.

As Kṛṣṇa indicates by the word prāyah, most of the gopīs have somehow managed to survive, but some of them have already died, and others, sad to say, will also be lost.

As the fire of separation grows in intensity, for the gopīs to stay alive becomes more and more difficult.

In truth, only by the shelter of Kṛṣṇa's personal power, provided secretly, are the gopīs surviving at all.

Kṛṣṇa doesn't want to admit this to Uddhava, who might rebuke Him for preserving the gopīs' lives.

Were Kṛṣṇa to allow the gopīs to leave their bodies, their suffering would end, but by keeping them alive He is only prolonging and intensifying their torment.

Yet there is something else for Uddhava to consider: Kṛṣṇa will share the gopīs' fate.

Kṛṣṇa needs to be saved as much as they do.

Therefore Uddhava should take most seriously his mission of bringing the gopīs a message of renewed hope.

For devotees too pained by the account of the gopīs' inner torment, this fourth verse of instruction to Uddhava can be interpreted in a different way, one that places more emphasis on how Kṛṣṇa plans to maintain the gopīs' lives.

Two verses before, Kṛṣṇa gave His assurance that He sustains the gopīs through all difficulties (tān bibharmy aham).

Kṛṣṇa thus promised to arrange, somehow or other, for the gopīs' happiness.

And now Kṛṣṇa tells just how Uddhava can help.

The way to keep the gopīs alive is to bring them Kṛṣṇa's message promising His return.

Although to save them is practically impossible, this message
may keep the breath of life barely flowing in the gopīs' throats.

Uddhava should visit the gopīs and convince them: “Śrī
Nanda-nandana is returning very soon. He is already on the
way. He is practically here already.”

Text 143

34
The V.V.s headed
by the Gs were always
completely attached to Me.
- when Akrura goes to take
us to Mathurā → they suffer
such extreme distress
& could not
find any other source of happiness.

rāmeṇa sārdham mathurām praṇīte
śvāphalkinā mayy anurakta-cittāḥ
vigāḍha-bhāvena na me viyoga-
tivrādhayo 'nyam dadṛśuḥ sukhāya

“The residents of Vṛndāvana, headed by the gopīs, were always completely attached (anurakta-cittāḥ) to Me (mayi) with deepest love (vigāḍha-bhāvena). Therefore, when My uncle Akrūra (śvāphalkinā) brought (praṇīte) My brother Balarāma and Me (rāmeṇa sārdham) to the city of Mathurā (mathurām), the residents of Vṛndāvana suffered extreme (tivra) mental distress (ādhayaḥ) in separation (viyoga) from Me (me) and could not (na) find (dadṛśuḥ) any other (anyam) source of happiness (sukhāya).

The next four verses recited by Parīkṣit Mahārāja to his mother (texts 143 through 146) come from Kṛṣṇa's discussion with Uddhava in the Eleventh Canto of Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (11.12.10–13).

When Kṛṣṇa and Uddhava were together in Dvārakā, Kṛṣṇa explained to Uddhava the great value of associating with saintly devotees of the Lord.

Discussing this topic reminded Kṛṣṇa of the most exalted of all
saintly Vaiṣṇavas, His own beloved gopīs, and this so
overwhelmed Kṛṣṇa's heart that He digressed to speak these four
verses.

King Kāṁsa engaged Akrūra, the son of Śvaphalka, to bring Kṛṣṇa
to Mathurā, whatever it took.

Kṛṣṇa was reluctant to make the trip, but Akrūra used His wits to
convince Vasudeva and Balarāma that going to Mathurā was
unavoidable.

By referring to Akrūra as the noble son of Śvaphalka (Śvaphalka being a worthy descendant of Yadu), Kṛṣṇa is telling Uddhava that the Vraja-vāsīs, including Kṛṣṇa Himself, have to excuse Akrūra.

After all, Akrūra was only doing what he thought necessary to protect his dynasty from the wrath of Kāṁsa.

Lord Balarāma, who was present when Akrūra came to Vṛndāvana, could have expertly pacified the Vraja-vāsīs, as He had done previously when Kṛṣṇa seemed imperiled in the grip of Kāliya; but this time, somehow, He made no such attempt.

And when Akrūra approached Balarāma to present the plight of Vasudeva, Devakī, and the other Yadus, who were living in fear and misery under the rule of Kāmsa, it was Balarāma who gave His consent for taking Kṛṣṇa from Vṛndāvana to Mathurā.

Had it not been for this, Kṛṣṇa might never have left
Vṛndāvana.

After Kṛṣṇa departed, the gopīs could find no other object of
delight for their eyes.

Whatever they saw reminded them that Kṛṣṇa was gone, and
this only made them more miserable.

With the supreme desirable object removed from their sight,
everything else appeared worthless.

Separation from Kṛṣṇa was like a persistent throbbing in the
head that made enjoying anything in life impossible.

Even before Kṛṣṇa left, the gopīs' attraction to Him had been
obsessive, but now it was utterly out of control, and it
tormented them like a raging fever in the brain.

They entered the rarest state of ecstasy, in which nothing around them seemed able to give any happiness.

Uddhava might wonder why the gopīs, whose wisdom is praised by the most learned sages, continued to be attracted to Kṛṣṇa even after He had caused them so much anguish.

Kṛṣṇa's answer is that the gopīs' love for Him was so extremely intense that nothing, not even His mistreatment of them, could impede it.

As the sage Parāśara describes,

sa tathā saha gopībhī
rarāma madhusūdanaḥ
yathābda-koṭi-pratimaḥ
kṣaṇas tena vinābhavat

“Madhusūdana (**sah madhusūdanaḥ**) gave so much delight to the gopīs (**rarāma saha gopībhīh**) that later (**tathā**), when He was absent (**tena vinā**), a moment (**kṣaṇah**) seemed to them (**abhavat**) like ten million years (**yathā abda-koṭi-pratimaḥ**).”
(Viṣṇu Purāṇa 5.13.58)

Parāśara was describing to Maitreya, some years after the fact,
the separation the gopīs felt, and thus he used the past tense.

The word gopī can here be understood to derive from gāh
pānti, “they protect their senses.”

The gopīs protected their senses by keeping them away from
material objects.

In truth the gopīs were the greatest of self-controlled yogīs.

But Kṛṣṇa's charms so entranced them that they became entangled in loving affairs with Him and therefore suffered.

Madhusūdana is the name of a particular bee well known for his rapacious nature of greedily collecting honey from many lotus flowers.

And another Madhusūdana, known as Kṛṣṇa, took from the gopīs and ruined (sūdayati) all their honey (madhu), all their attractive, enjoyable qualities.

He stole everything they had.

Kṛṣṇa here confesses to Uddhava that it is simply His nature to attract all sorts of people, exploit them for His own pleasure, enjoy them to His full, and then go away and leave them miserable.

In the message Kṛṣṇa was instructing Uddhava to carry, Kṛṣṇa might have said that He Himself endured as much torment in separation from the gopīs as they did in separation from Him.

But the facts prove otherwise.

The gopīs surrendered to Kṛṣṇa with absolute dedication, as He Himself will describe in the next two verses; Kṛṣṇa, however, as He confesses to Uddhava, is not nearly as surrendered to them.

Kṛṣṇa may have a high reputation as the most exalted of
saintly persons, but in His own opinion, expressed in these
verses, the gopīs are much more virtuous.

In them there is not a trace of cruelty or ingratitude, and pure
love for Him like theirs is not to be found anywhere else.

Text 144

tās tāḥ kṣapāḥ preṣṭha-tamena nītā
mayaiiva vṛndāvana-gocareṇa
kṣaṇārdha-vat tāḥ punar aṅga tāsām
hīnā mayā kalpa-samā babhūvuh

35
All the nights that
the Gs spent with Me
seemed like a moment
& in My absence they seemed
like a kalpa.

“Dear Uddhava (aṅga), all of those (tāḥ tāḥ) nights (kṣapāḥ) the gopīs spent (nītāḥ) with Me (mayā eva), their most dearly beloved (preṣṭha-tamena), when I was present in Vṛndāvana (vṛndāvana go-careṇa) seemed to them to pass in less than a moment (kṣaṇārdha-vat babhūvuh). But when bereft (hīnā) of My association (mayā), the gopīs felt (tāsām) those same nights drag on forever (tāḥ punar), as if each night were equal to a day of Brahmā (kalpa-samā).

Here Kṛṣṇa acknowledges the terrible agony the gopīs endure on His account.

He addresses Uddhava as aṅga to indicate that Uddhava is as dear to Him as His own body.

And He describes how the pleasure of the rāsa dance He shared with His beloved gopīs passed swiftly, as if in a single moment, even though the rāsa-līlā lasted several nights.

As certain smṛti-śāstras explain, the word “nights” can also mean “days and nights.”

By the Supreme Lord’s special energies, the rāsa dance did not end in a single night, but lasted many nights and days.

Although outsiders were unaware, Kṛṣṇa and the gopīs celebrated the rāsa-līlā for a long time, without interruption.

That such an extended festival seemed to the gopīs to last only a moment proves how happy Kṛṣṇa's pure devotees become in His intimate association.

The moonlit autumn nights when Kṛṣṇa danced with the gopīs passed quickly for the gopīs, but not other nights.

On other nights the suffering they underwent from Kṛṣṇa's absence seemed to last millions of years.

Or if we accept that Kṛṣṇa, almost every night, would find ways to sneak out of the house to meet the gopīs, then every night passed quickly, not just the nights of the rāsa-līlā season.

Only the daytimes were excruciatingly long.

Kṛṣṇa admits that the gopīs' great love for Him has cast them into utter misery.

This thought might prompt a friend to suggest that Kṛṣṇa bring the gopīs to Dvārakā and again make them happy.

But this idea, Kṛṣṇa answers, is not feasible.

The rāsa dance was a source of delight for Him and the gopīs because they enjoyed it together in Vṛndāvana.

Neither Kṛṣṇa nor the gopīs can feel the same ecstasy
anywhere else.

Only in Vṛndāvana does Kṛṣṇa wander among His cows and
dress Himself as a cowherd.

Only in the atmosphere of Vṛndāvana is the highest ecstasy
perceived.

Unfortunately, Kṛṣṇa confesses, He is no longer the same person as in Vṛndāvana.

He has become ungrateful and hardhearted.

Yet the original virtues of the gopīs have not degraded at all, and therefore Kṛṣṇa considers the gopīs much more exalted than Himself.

Text 145

tā nāvidan mayy anusāṅga-baddha-
dhiyaḥ svam ātmānam adas tathedaṁ

yathā samādhau munayo 'bdhi-toye (or) future lives.
nadyaḥ praviṣṭā iva nāma-rūpe

“My dear Uddhava, just as (yathā) great sages (munayaḥ) in yoga trance merge into self-realization (samādhau), like rivers (nadyaḥ iva) merging (praviṣṭāḥ) into the ocean (abdhi-toye), and are thus unaware of material names (nāma) and forms (rūpe), the gopīs of Vṛndāvana (tāḥ) were so completely attached to Me within their minds (anusāṅga) that they could not (na) think of (avidan) their own (svam) bodies (ātmānam), or of this world (idam), or of their future lives (tathā adāḥ). Their entire consciousness (dhiyaḥ) was simply bound up (baddha) in Me (mayi).

36
Just as the sages are merged in Me with no awareness of names & forms. The G.S. are so absorbed in Me that they could not think of their own bodies.

The gopīs are married women with husbands, children, and household responsibilities.

How can they be considered superior to renounced, self-contented sages who have given up all material attachments?

Here Kṛṣṇa answers this doubt.

~~After sages who follow the aṣṭāṅga-yoga system become advanced in the practice of yama, niyama, āsana, prānāyāma, pratyāhāra, dhyāna, and dhāraṇā, they realize the Absolute Truth as Lord Viṣṇu in their perfected trance, or samādhi.~~

In that perfect consciousness, they forget the temporary names and forms of the material world, including the names and forms of their own bodies.

The gopīs resemble such perfect sages, for the activities of the gopīs' minds are all fixed on Kṛṣṇa in a highly developed trance, achieved by virtue of their constant connection with Kṛṣṇa, their natural relationship with Him in pure love.

Like sages adept in astāṅga-yoga, the gopīs have forgotten everything of this world—their husbands and children, their own bodies (the normal objects of self-centered attachment), their individual identities as proprietors and enjoyers of the material body, and all their hopes for success in this life and the next.

As rivers abandon themselves to the waves of the ocean, the gopīs have merged their hearts in thought of Kṛṣṇa.

Thus, being fully dedicated to Kṛṣṇa, they should be recognized as even greater than munis perfect in the aṣṭāṅga-yoga system.

Even while standing in the midst of a blazing fire, the gopīs are not burned; rather, all their desires are fulfilled.

Furthermore, simply by remaining always in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, the gopīs have gained the spiritual strength to easily turn away from everything material.

Their hearts are irrevocably attracted to Kṛṣṇa in all circumstances, whereas munis have to struggle hard to progress through the successive methods of aṣṭāṅga-yoga.

The munis must deeply concentrate to bring their minds
under subjugation, and only after long endeavor can they
possibly reach the goal—samādhi, in which they can forget
material names and forms.

The gopīs are much greater because they easily achieve
samādhi.

But aren't self-contented sages like the four Kumāras
considered the most advanced of saintly persons?

In ordinary circles that opinion may prevail, but in truth the gopīs are more saintly than self-contented sages.

The gopīs differ from sages whose minds flow like rivers into the ocean of samādhi, oblivious of names and forms.

Though the gopīs forget everything material, including their own bodies, they never forget Kṛṣṇa's names, forms, and qualities.

The lives of the gopīs are practical and real, full of variety, and imbued with the spirit of devotion to Kṛṣṇa.

The gopīs, fixing their intelligence completely on Kṛṣṇa, never forget His names and forms.

Thus they excel all munis by easily realizing the highest limit of happiness in full love of God.

In the Ninth Canto of Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (9.4.64) Lord Nārāyaṇa tells the muni Durvāsā:

nāham ātmānam āśāse
mad-bhaktaiḥ sādhubhir vinā
śriyam ātyantikīm vāpi
yeṣām gatiḥ aham parā

O brāhmaṇa (brahman)! Without the devotees (mad-bhaktaiḥ sādhubhir vinā), who take shelter of only me (yeṣām gatiḥ aham parā), I do not desire to enjoy my own bliss (nāham ātmānam āśāse) by my six great qualities (śriyam ātyantikīm).

Here a doubt may arise:

The gopīs of Vṛndāvana are also said to be goddesses of fortune.

Doesn't that put them in the same category with Śrī?

How then can they be considered Kṛṣṇa's dearmost devotees?

Kṛṣṇa dispels this doubt here in His discussion with Uddhava in the Eleventh Canto by disclosing a confidential aspect of the gopīs' glories, an aspect that establishes the gopīs beyond all doubt as the greatest of saints, and greater even than the goddess Śrī.

Earlier, in the Tenth Canto, while giving Uddhava the message to convey to the gopīs, Kṛṣṇa glorified them.

But at that time Kṛṣṇa did not reveal that He Himself was distressed by being separated from them.

Had He done so, Uddhava might have told this to the gopīs,
and their condition would only have worsened.

But now, in the Eleventh Canto, Kṛṣṇa wishes to refute the
popular misconception that He is hard-hearted, and He wishes
to satisfy Uddhava, and so, revealing the greatness of His own
ecstasy, He discloses His feelings for the gopīs.

In so doing, He describes how it is that the gopīs are more
saintly than everyone else.

To understand the hidden meaning of what Kṛṣṇa is saying here, we have to read the word avidan as a present participle (“being unaware”) instead of a past-tense verb (“were unaware”).

The rules of Sanskrit grammar allow this.

As a participle, avidan is a masculine form in the subjective case, and so it must refer to the speaker, Kṛṣṇa Himself.

Avidan can therefore be translated as “if I am unaware.”

Kṛṣṇa’s being the subject of the previous verse, which includes the word mayā (“by Me”), further justifies such a reading.

The sages (munayaḥ) are another subject in the current verse, and thus, by extension, the participle can also refer to the sages.

Kṛṣṇa is saying, then,

“Sages are not really sages if in their samādhi they become like rivers flowing into the ocean and forget My names and forms.

Because the activities of their senses completely stop, such forgetful sages become as if dead, for they are devoid of the living soul’s defining quality of thought and unable to experience transcendental ecstasy.

In the same way, were I ever to forget My gopīs, were I ever to fail to think of them constantly, I would no longer be Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the Personality of Godhead.”

Or, understanding this idea in an even more radical sense: “Then My life would come to an end; I would no longer exist.”

Kṛṣṇa refrains from openly speaking this last thought, because He wants to spare Uddhava the pain of hearing something so distasteful.

Kṛṣṇa, divulging why He feels the way He does, says to Uddhava,

“I am obliged to the gopīs because their minds are absolutely fixed
on Me.

The gopīs always think exclusively of Me, and their attraction to
Me is most sublime.

Therefore, dear brother, for them I have the greatest love.

I must confess to not having the same kind of love for anything or anyone else—not for My parents, My brothers, My queens, My children, not for My own transcendental body, not for My Vaikunṭha abode with all its paraphernalia and associates, nor My special abodes here in Dvārakā and Mathurā.

All of them I could forget and still be Myself, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and not feel as much pain as if I were ever to forget the gopīs of Vraja.

I am always thinking of the gopīs with supreme love and attachment.”

In another verse, found in Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī’s Padyāvalī (135), Uddhava tells the gopīs:

viyoginīnām api paddhatim vo
no yogino gantum api kṣamante
yad dhyeya-rūpasya parasya puṁso
yūyaṁ gatā dhyeya-padam durāpam

“The path you women traverse (vah paddhatim) who feel separation from Kṛṣṇa (viyoginīnām api), even great yogīs (yoginah api) cannot approach (na gantum kṣamante). You have realized (yūyaṁ gatā) the goal of meditation (dhyeya-padam) that others can hardly achieve (durāpam)—the Supreme Personality of Godhead (parasya puṁsah), whose form is the most worthy object of meditation (yad dhyeya-rūpasya).”

Real yogīs, engaged in eternal devotional service to the Supreme Lord,
know only Kṛṣṇa as the object of their meditation.

But the gopīs have surpassed even such genuine yogīs because the
gopīs are the constant object of Kṛṣṇa's meditation.

Therefore they are greater than everyone else.