

Hitting Lifes Curve balls

Caru Das: Thanks to everyone for coming out this Sunday afternoon at Spanish Fork, Utah and thanks to those who download these talks as podcasts from iTunes. We invite your comments, correspondence and feedback by email at utahkrishnas@Gmail.com.

We also have a membership class at our website, utahkrishnas.org. I'd like to thank those who've become members. We couldn't do what we do without your help and support.

Everything is inspired by the teachings of his Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada who is the Founder-Acharya of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness.

Last night, we celebrated Diwali, the Festival of Lights, in our Salt Lake City Centre, had about 700 people in attendance. The occasion for the celebration goes back to the ancient epic, The Ramayana.

Lord Ramachandra was the son of the aged king Dasharatha in the great kingdom of Ayodhya. Dasharatha was about to retire and he announced that the coronation of Ram would take place on the following day. However, during the night, a palace intrigue took place. Ram, instead of being coronated as the king of Ayodhya, instead of having body guards and retainers, unimaginable sovereignty and sleeping in silken sheets, ended up being exiled to the forest for 14 years, where he had to wear barks of trees, locks of matted hair, sleep on hard ground and contend with all kinds of forces of darkness within the woods, including cannibalistic demons.

This was certainly an unexpected turn in the road for Lord Ramachandra. He got what you might call in modern vernacular a 'curveball' thrown at him. That's the way it is in life. One minute we're happy, we're full of calm of full and contentment. Our studies are going great. We're doing well at our work. We have a great family, great children. Then, we're hit by some turbulence.

A routine visit to the doctor turns up a problem. Someone has passed over us at work even though we're more qualified for that promotion. A relationship turns sour. One day there's a registered letter in the mail and someone's filed a law suit against you. You hear that your mother-in-law is going to move in for good.

[laughter]

Caru: The challenges in these times of upheaval are to look in and look ahead. We look in at who we really are. We are not impermanent like this body in this physical world, but we are made of the same stuff as God.

God is permanent. God is eternal and we're sparks from Him. Sparks from a fire contain the same qualities of fire. They contain light and heat. God is eternal, full of bliss and knowledge, and as emanations from Him we're eternal, full of bliss and knowledge.

Translated, that means that we existed before the universe, and we'll continue to exist after the dissolution of the universe. Therefore, no challenge, no critic, no backstabber, no upheaval in our physical circumstances should cause us to lose our joy.

We know that this law suit, this trouble at work, these difficulties in my relationship, this health problem...they have come only to pass. They will not come to stay. I'm permanent, but they're impermanent. If we look ahead, we'll see that if we stay joyful, if we stay in faith, stay in expectancy, that when the end of those problems come, God will bring us out better off than we were before we went into them.

When everyone else around you is panicking, you know that sooner or later calm will be restored.

I remember in the 1970's a photocopy of a London newspaper came to us when we were in Australia. It had to do with George Harrison, one of the Beatles, who was a Krishna devotee, being on a plane somewhere. The plane hit great turbulence and seemed as if the very fuselage was going to bust apart, that the rivets were going to pop.

Everywhere people were losing it totally, falling apart, screaming hysterically. In the midst of all of that, George Harrison sat calmly chanting, "Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare." In the tough times, you have to go to your faith. You have to trust that Krishna or God is piloting your plane. I saw an image recently it said, "If God is your co-pilot, you need to switch seats." Krishna is not surprised by the turbulence. You're in the hands of God. The turbulence may have taken you by surprise, but it did not take God by surprise. When it comes, don't panic. Go to that place of peace even in the midst of turbulence.

It is said 'Trouble is Inevitable. Misery is Optional.' Just because we're pious, God-fearing, righteous people doesn't mean that we get a pass from troubles. Troubles descend on all of us, the good, the bad, and the ugly from time to time, but it's up to us whether we fall apart or not.

It's one thing to know that you have a challenge coming up like that paper this week or final exams or maybe a sporting contest on the weekend. That's one thing, but what about the things that you don't expect, that come out of left field, that blindside you like tsunamis, earthquakes: maybe an unexpected illness, a sudden death, a divorce or some other such tragedies. Things that catch you off guard come out of nowhere and all of a sudden your life is topsy-turvy.

Christopher Reeves...he was so fit, so good looking, so physically powerful. He played Superman for many years. One day, he's out riding his horse and falls off of his horse, lands awkwardly, and, for the rest of his life, is paralyzed from the neck down. How did Christopher Reeve deal with this unexpected turn for the worst? He dealt with it in faith. He looked within. Christopher Reeve said, "The body is not who I am. The spirit transcends the body."

Rain falls on the just and the unjust. In a crisis, it's easy to panic and to give up your happiness, to fall apart. You have to realize that crisis did not take God by surprise. It

may have taken us by surprise but God knows the beginning from the end. He would have not allowed that difficulty unless He had a divine purpose for it. Sometimes it may seem like everything is spinning out of control, but we are, ourselves, in a controlled environment. He has us in the palm of His hand and nothing can happen to us without His permission. Our attitude should be, "Lord, this surprise may look like a setback but I know it's a setup to show your power in a greater way."

If you're familiar with the great epic Mahabharata, of which the Bhagavad Gita is a part, during the Kurukshetra War, Arjuna who was Krishna's eternal friend, lost his son. His own 16-year-old son, Abhimanyu, was ganged up upon by seven Maharatas and killed during the battle. That was unexpected.

If you're a friend of God, then, God personally descended, driving your chariot, protecting you on the battlefield, you would not expect that your son on a different part of the battlefield would be unfairly ganged up upon and killed by a bunch of adults. Yet it happened somehow or other in the very presence of God.

Arjuna took a vow that he would kill the offender, Jayadratha, before the end of the next day's hostilities. In those days, when the sun set, all hostilities would cease. The news came to Duryodhana through his spies that Arjuna had made this vow. Duryodhana thought, "Aha! All we have to do is keep Jayadratha alive till the end of tomorrow's fighting and Arjuna, according to his promise, will walk into fire. The great champion of the forces of righteousness will perish and then we'll just waltz on to victory."

On that day, Duryodhana spread his four million soldiers combined with the elephants, chariots, cavalry and infantry in what's called the "needle formation" -- 49 miles long with Jayadratha at the back. Krishna & Arjuna, in order to reach Jayadratha by sunset and fulfill Arjuna's promise, had to either defeat and go over just about each and every combatant or at least maneuver around them.

Krishna did not let His devotee down. He drove the chariot in such a way Arjuna fulfilled his promise. Even though it was unexpected, Krishna showed His power in a greater way. The whole story of how they accomplished this task, I'll reserve that for another lecture.

A skeptic might have said on the outset of this episode, "What good is your faith, Arjuna? What good is your friendship to God himself? You couldn't even protect your own son."

In the end, Krishna turned that test into a testimony. His message was, "If you mess with devotees, not even an army of four million soldiers arranged in a needle 49 miles long will save you." His purpose in unexpected crises like this is to show His power to others, to show what He can do.

Similarly, if we'll view adversity as an opportunity, Krishna will use us as an example to inspire others. Krishna wants your neighbors, your co-students, the people in your office to say, "How in the world did he or she get well?" The medical report said they were finished. The medical report said they only had six months to live and here it is, two, four, six years later, and they're in radiant good health. How was it, that although he got let go by the company, he got fired six months ago, now, he's bounced back, and he's got

a better job, with a better salary and better benefits? How in the world could that have happened?

We're never promised to because we're good people, challenges won't come. But, we are promised that those challenges will not get the best of us. Rather, we will get the best of them.

God will bring us out better than we were before. It's easy to believe that many difficulties arrive because of bad choices that we've made in the past. Every time you make a good choice or a bad choice, you plant a seed. Due course of time, that seed will produce a fruit. If it's a bad choice, the fruit will be bitter and sour. If it's a good choice, the fruit will be sweet. It's easy to think that when we're going through adversity, at the present moment, it's due to bad choices that we've made in the past.

When Job was suffering, his friends came to him and said, "You must have done something bad in the past, for which you're getting the bitter harvest now." Job said, "I have done nothing bad in the past." It is possible that challenges come to you, not because you've done something bad, but because you're doing something right, because you are making a difference. You're taking new ground for the Kingdom.

Maya, whose job it is to keep us in this material world, considers her job is done if you are stttled into mediocrity, if you're complacent where you are, if you are indifferent about others or even judgmental towards them. You may be religious, but no one wants to be like you. They don't want what you have. You're turning people off with your sourness. If you're bitter and discouraged, that will keep you from your destiny. Then Maya considers that her job is done. She doesn't have to present, or bring any challenges in your way.

But, if in spite of challenges, you keep being your best -- smiling, being good to people even if they are not good to you, taking the high road and doing the right thing, even though people may do wrong to you, over and over and over and over again. Take those troubles as a sure sign that amazing things are going to intersect with your path, into your future, that your happiness will be abundantly and fully restored, and that your tests will be testimonies to others.

It is said, "Your weeds will become wheat." I heard about a man, he was envious of his neighbor, who had planted a beautiful field, and had potent seeds in there. They had not yet come up, but the neighbor just hated the fact that his neighbor was going to have a great harvest. So, in the middle of the night, he went and planted weeds all throughout his neighbor's field. In a few days, when the weeds started coming up, everybody said, "What are you going to do about that? You should go over and set him right. You should file a case. You should make a complaint. You should have him arrested. At the very least, you should get in there, and start pulling up all those weeds because they're going to spoil your field."

He said, "They're not going to spoil my field because after the weeds, the wheat is going to come. I don't have to be distracted. I don't have to worry about the weeds, because the

wheat is planted, the wheat is tilled, the wheat is watered, and the wheat will come automatically, pushing through and above the weeds."

We don't have to get distracted by battles that don't matter. Life is too short. What we have to do is too important to worry about trying to get rid of the weeds. Our concern should be planting the wheat -- being good in all circumstances, planting good seeds.

Again, Diwali celebrates Rama's return. During his 14 years of exile, his wife was kidnapped by the evil tyrant Ravana, and taken to his island fortress in Sri Lanka. She was constantly harassed to succumb to him, to allow him to seduce her. This is another man's wife.

Rama allied Himself with the monkeys in the forest, they built the famous "Setu Bandha," the bridge over to Lanka. There was a 10-day battle for Sri Lanka. At the end of which, all of Ravana's soldiers were killed, his city was destroyed, and Ravana came to face Rama on the battlefield. Rama at that point, still wanted to plant a good seed.

He had every reason just to annihilate Ravana, to cut him down, and show him no mercy at all. Ravana was certainly not deserving of mercy. But Rama, even holding all the cards, having a full advantage, even at that 11th hour, he held out the olive branch to Ravana.

He said, "Ravana, even now, after all of your offences, if you return my wife and apologize...I'm not saying we're going to be bosom buddies, but I won't kill you, anyway." His focus was always being good, not worrying about uprooting the weeds, not getting distracted, constantly planting good seeds, one after another. He thought "Krishna didn't bring me this far, 14 years exile and across the ocean, in order to fail."

That unexpected setback, was a set up for a comeback. When your enemies think they have you where they want you, outnumbered, out tricked, outgunned, out manned, Krishna will always be two inches ahead of them. Krishna, or God, Himself, is only captured by the quality and the love that you can tender towards Him. If you are still alive and breathing, if you got up this morning out of bed, it doesn't matter what bad choices you've made, it doesn't matter what challenges, it doesn't matter what seems to be holding you back. You can still accomplish everything that God created you for.

That is, beyond the reach of your furthest dreams, and your furthest imagination. The trick is, don't let any temporary crisis steal your joy or, stall you from pressing forward. All things are meant to work together for your good. All things separately may not make sense. But, when it all comes together, one day, it will make perfect sense.

Nothing in life is wasted. Bad things DO happen to good people, but it's also true that Krishna-conscious or God-conscious people overcome the bad things and come out better than they were before. Krishna says in the Bhagavad Gita, "Declare it boldly, oh Arjuna, my devotee never perishes. One who does good, is never overcome by evil in this world." Krishna will turn your test into a testimony. Get ready. Your unexpected difficulties are a sure sign that Krishna has something amazing plan for your future in this life, and then the next life to go back home, back to God.

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