

Tridandiswami Sri Srimad Bhaktivedanta Narayana Maharaja

RAMA NAVAMI

Mathura, India: April 12, 2000 (evening)

Rama-katha is endless. Sankarsana himself continuously sings the glories of Sri Rama, but even with unlimited mouths he is unable to touch the end in any way. We can just relish, and pray that these infinite pastimes may appear in our heart. Tulasi dasa has written Rama-caritra-manasa, which is based on Sri Valmiki's Ramayana. All the pastimes written by Tulasi dasa come from the Ramayana and other Puranas; but the principles of bhakti that he gave there have been taken from Srimad Bhagavatam. He presented important selected verses, especially from the eleventh canto, and translated them into Hindi poetry.

Some people consider Tulasi dasa to be a mayavadi, but this is not correct. If we study Rama-caritra-manasa carefully, we can see that Tulasi dasa has written down the same principles that are in Srimad Bhagavatam. God is personal, the living entities are His parts and parcels, and our eternal constitutional position is to serve Him with love and affection. Another important point is that Tulasi dasa could not have written Rama-caritra-manasa unless he truly saw all these pastimes of Rama. Just as Valmiki received the mercy of Narada Muni, similarly, when Tulasi dasa sat down in trance, all the pastimes came into his heart. He has certainly received the mercy of Vyasadeva. Only by his mercy could he have written these pastimes.

The main topic of this class is 'anyavilasita sunyam,' freedom from desires other than the desire to please Krsna. Bharata and Satrugna had gone to their maternal uncle's place, and upon returning to Ayodhya, they noticed that all was silent. Usually the city was cheerful and so many activities were joyfully taking place, but now it was like a lady whose husband is dead and who wears no decorations or ornaments. Seeing these and other inauspicious omens, Bharata and Satrugna became fearful. When they entered the royal palace and went to Kaikeyi's chamber, they were stunned to hear how Rama had gone to the forest for fourteen years and, because of that, their father had died of a broken heart. When Bharata heard this news and the reason for it, he became completely inimical towards his mother. From his heart he disconnected his relationship with her, and because of his pain and shock, he spoke harshly and abandoned her.

Bharata later assembled the citizens of Ayodhya, including Kausalya and Vasistha Rsi, and went to the forest to try to bring Lord Rama back. Because he was now the eldest member of the family, he was responsible for making the decision as to what to do. Maharaja Janaka would be holding a sabha, an assembly meeting, on the next day. To prepare for this, Bharata first went to Mother Kausalya and requested her, "O mother, Rama loves you and always obeys your orders. You miss Him so much; and we all want him back. Please ask him to return and happily rule here in Ayodhya." When Kausalya heard these words she said gravely, "Yes, you are right. I also want this, but I cannot do what you ask. Your suggestion is not against dharma, but you should look at Rama's position. According to religious principles, He is also trying to execute the order of your

father. From your respective positions you are both trying to act righteously. I'm sorry, but I know He will never change His decision, so I cannot do anything."

Disappointed, Bharata now went to his Gurudeva, Vasistha Muni, and made the same request. He said, "If you order Rama, He will come back and you will be the cause of everyone's happiness." Vasistha Muni's answer was similar to that of Kausalya, but he presented an alternative. He said, "Instead of Rama, if you yourself agree to go to the forest, perhaps I can make him return to Ayodhya. Someone must go, so you can do it." Bharata very enthusiastically agreed, but when Vasistha presented the proposal to Rama, he could not change His decision. Again, Bharata was disappointed.

Bharata thought his only remaining shelter was Sunaina devi, the wife of Maharaja Janaka. He visited her on the evening before the sabha, and very politely pleaded at her feet, "Mother, are you not worrying about your daughter? She is so gentle and tender, and she is going to the forest for fourteen years where she must perform severe austerities. I know your heart is so soft, and you cannot bear this pain. You must do something to help them." Sunaina replied, "What you are saying is what I also want. But my husband is very strict and he will never change his mind or hear my words. He will consider both sides as per the principles of religion, and then he will give his decision. He is a liberated soul, and nobody can influence him." Because Janaka Maharaja was a jnani-bhakti, a devotee with some aisvarya-jnana, he knew well that there would never be a problem for Rama – anywhere He would be. Bharata was again disappointed, but there was nothing else he could do.

The next morning Guru Vasistha convened the assembly. On one side Lord Rama was sitting with Sita devi, on the other side Bharata was sitting with all the citizens of Ayodhya; and Maharaja Janaka was on the asana in the middle, to hear the case and give the decision. The evening before, all had agreed to abide by the order of Maharaja Janaka because he knew religion and was impartial. He first inquired from Bharata, "What is your proposal? Please speak." With folded hands, Bharata said, "All I want is that Lord Rama shall come back to the kingdom. His father has given his order, but under unfortunate circumstances. Maharani Kaikeyi also became influenced, and she participated in this decision. This should not be considered as the ultimate decision, because now we can see that there is no real purpose for them to go to the forest. I am not going to accept the position of the king. By all pramana, evidence, it belongs to Rama. This is what all the citizens want, and I also want it. It will be a great injustice if we send Him to the forest and don't give Him this position."

Maharaja Janaka was silent. He then turned to Lord Rama and asked Him to speak. Rama then said, "Yes, you have heard what Bharata said. My father agreed with the order to send Me to the forest and to give the position of king to Bharata. Mother Kaikeyi jointly participated, and my father kept silent. 'Maunam sammithi laksanam.' Silence is the symptom of agreement or consent. Now Kaikeyi wants to retract her statement, but that cannot be accepted. Why? Because my father is here no more. If he would be here and just remain silent, then I could agree. 'Maunam sammithi laksanam.' But that situation is not here. That is what I have to say."

Maharaja Janaka closed his eyes and went into silent meditation upon his Gurudeva, Lord Sankara. After coming out of his meditation he very gravely began to speak, "Yes, what Bharata has said is true and is according to religious principles. He is speaking with a pure feeling of love. His prema for Rama is very deep, like an ocean, and Rama's maryada, His adherence to dharma and strictness in following the principles of religion, is like a mountain. Bharata's ocean of love is so deep that the mountain will sink into that ocean. Bharata has won, and whatever is his decision shall be done." When everyone heard that Rama would now come back, they all began jumping in ecstasy, and Bharata was also so happy.

Maharaja Janaka had something else to say, however. All could see that he was still very grave, and they waited to see what would come from his mouth. He then said, "Though the ocean of Bharata's love is so deep that Rama's mountain of maryada has sunk into it, at the same time this mountain is so strong that it will not deviate even an inch, even if it is drowned in water. It will stay in its position. Rama may be overcome by the love of Bharata, but he will not move."

Then he looked to everyone and said, "Now Bharata should consider this point. It is true that his love has won, and there is no comparison to his love, but he should know the principle of love. The current of love does not consider any obstacles on the way. It crosses all the general rules and regulations, and there is no principle of religion which controls it. It has its own law and tradition. The heart and theme of love is that one who loves will always be very careful about the desires of his lover. He will not impose his desires upon his lover, but will instead minutely observe what his worshipable deity wants. That is what must be seen and understood. So my question to Bharata is this: Did you try to understand what Rama wants, or did you become overwhelmed with your own desires? Did you think, "If I am unsuccessful in bringing Rama back, then all the citizens will criticize me. Perhaps for my own reputation I may be doing this." To be only thinking of what is pleasing to Rama is the principle of real love."

When everyone heard this, especially Bharata, it was as if the earth had slipped from under their feet. For some moments Bharata's breathing stopped, and it was as though he was deaf and dumb. Maharaja Janaka continued, "Now you must decide what to do. Your case is strong and you have won, you must tell Rama what you want Him to do." Bharata had now gotten the biggest shock of his life. His whole nervous system had broken due to this lesson about love, and his heart and thinking were completely changed. When he approached Rama, who understood the mood and gravity of his feelings, Rama said, "Yes, you have won. You want me to rule the kingdom, so I accept your request. I will now act as the King of Ayodhya. Since I am the king, you must now follow my directions. What should you do? You should let me go to the forest and fulfill the orders of our father. On my behalf, while I am in the forest, you should become My representative and do the needful duties for the kingdom."

Bharata accepted this, and we cannot understand what kind of happiness he was feeling. So many opposite sentiments were coming in his heart and jumping, but he accepted Rama's order because now he understood the meaning of love. Even if one has to drink poison to please his lover, he should do this. This is the evidence of pure love. Similarly, when Kaikeyi was requested by Rama as a child to later banish him and give the kingdom to Bharata, her heart was broken and she cried out, "No, Rama. I cannot do that." Why not? She loves Rama more than Bharata.

How could she do that? But Rama compelled her; He forced her, "You must drink this poison, Mother, because it is for the welfare of the whole world. This is My purpose for coming here, so you must do this."

Bharata thus took Rama's crown, His wooden sandals, and His rajai. Rajai is a Hindi word. Most people, those who are not dedicated to the personal form of Lord Rama, think that rajai means only 'quilt.' They say, "Just see how Bharata is so cruel. Rama had to go to the forest, and Bharata even took his sandals and his quilt." But rajai here does not mean quilt. It comes from the word raji, meaning 'to agree.' Bharata took the orders of Rama, to act as His representative and manage the kingdom in His absence.

Here is a very important lesson for all who are practicing bhakti. We hear the sloka 'anyavilasita sunyam,' and we can very critically look into our hearts and consider, "What am I doing? Am I trying to serve Krsna in the way my mind likes to serve Him?" It is a subtle difference, because the mind is very tricky. If we fail to distinguish between these feelings, then anyavilasita, material desires, will cover our bhakti, and there will be no way we can advance. Today, about ninety-nine percent of the devotees are like this. Some do it willfully, and some fail to distinguish the difference. If Gurudeva asks them to do something which is not pleasing to their own mind, they get angry or annoyed with him. That is prevailing in the majority of cases. We have to very carefully observe this and try to kick out this anyavilasita. Bhakti is not so cheap. We are trying to attain that love which controls both Srimati Radhika and Krsna, but we must understand what price we have to pay for this. We have to give up everything we consider to belong to us. We do not have any separate existence of our own. The feeling of unconditional, unalloyed surrender is so deep that we become one with the mood of Gurudeva. Then, within our hearts, all the aspirations are no longer our aspirations. They are Gurudeva's aspirations, or those of Hari, Guru, and Vaisnava. This is the state we want to achieve, and unless we attain it, there is no way to advance in bhakti.

Whatever position we want to achieve in eternal Vraja, we have to start practicing that here with Gurudeva. We have to apply this verse, anyavilasita-sunyam. Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura has written: "I have happily mixed all my desires in Your desires. My desires follow Your desires. There is no difference. They do not go even a small degree in a different direction. They are completely in line with Your desires." This is what we want.

Maharaja Bharata then returned to Ayodhya with all his citizens, and he brought the sandals of Lord Rama. There was so much pain and grief on his return that he did not enter the kingdom. He acted like a representative and stayed in a village near the city, called Nandigram. There he made a small hut, like Rama's hut in the forest, and took the dress of a renunciate, like Rama. He did not cut his hair, and he lived only on fruits or whatever was available in the forest. He placed those wooden sandals on an altar and began worshipping them, just as if he was worshipping Rama. He performed arati, offered food, and made all the decisions based on consultation with those wooden sandals. All his ministers also came there to discuss the ruling of the kingdom.

Once Mother Kaikeyi approached him. Now she suffered still more, because she was feeling the separation of two sons. If Bharata was there with her, there would be some consolation, but she

had lost two. No one can understand her feeling of misfortune. She arrived in a palanquin and called the guards who were there, because Bharata rarely came out. He was always absorbed in separation of Rama. When he was informed that Mother Kaikeyi had come, he said, "All right, please call Queen Kaikeyi inside." He never called her 'mother.' He only considered her as Raja Mata, not as his mother. When she came before him she began crying in great pain and sorrow, "Please forgive me. I have really committed such a big mistake. My intelligence was covered with ignorance. I failed to use my intelligence. Please come back to Ayodhya and stay there with me." Bharata said, "O Queen Kaikeyi. This is what you deserve. You should taste this more and more. This is the price you must pay."

She said, "Bharata, you don't know my position. I have to stay in this palace, and this palace is biting me like scorpions. It is so painful; I cannot tolerate it any more." Bharata was so strong and dedicated to dharma that he would not agree. Then she said, "At least, please address me as mother. That will give me some solace." Bharata replied, "I cannot utter that word for you any more. It is not possible."

'Jinike priye na rama videhi.' This verse from Rama-caritra-manasa is a translation from a verse in the Bhagavatam, which means that one should abandon that wife who is not favorable to bhakti, one should abandon that husband who is acting as an obstruction on the path of devotion, one should abandon that father, that son, that brother and so on. Any relationship that obstructs bhakti should be given up. Vibhisana gave up his brother Ravana, because he had no love for Rama, Prahlada gave up his father Hiranyakasipu, and Bali Maharaja gave up his guru.

Mirabhai wrote a letter to Tulasi dasa about her circumstances regarding her performance of devotional activities for Krsna. Her family, and especially her husband, the Rana of Mewar, were unfavorable. He would always suspect that she had some illicit connection with a man, but she was absorbed in the love of Giridhari. She wrote, "I cannot tolerate it any more. They are torturing me. They have given me poison, they have tried to have me bitten by a snake, and they insult me. Please guide me." Tulasi dasa wrote this verse to her, and though he did not instruct her specifically, she understood his message.

One day she was deeply absorbed, dancing and singing in kirtana behind closed doors, with Giridhari there. The King heard her singing in great jubilation, and he also heard someone playing a flute. With great anger, his sword in hand, he tried to enter the room, but she did not hear him. Krsna was playing the flute, so how was it possible for her to have any external consciousness? When the king entered, he saw that no one else was there with her, and Mirabai had fainted. He looked everywhere for the man who was playing the flute. Somehow or other he revived Mirabai, and he asked her with harsh words, "Where is that man you have hidden here?" Mirabai said, "You cannot see Him? He is standing right there." "I cannot see him," he said. Then Mirabai mercifully placed her hand on his eyes and, by the touch of her fingers, the Rana was able to see the three-fold bending form of Krsna playing the flute. Now taking darsana, he was humbled, and he also fainted. In the meantime, Krsna disappeared, and when the Rana returned to consciousness, he so much repented. Lamenting, he fell at the feet of Mirabai and again and again begged for forgiveness. He said, "I was so offensive and foolish."

Because she had suffered so much, she had no reaction to his words. She had made up her mind that she must go to Vrndavana. She explained that what had happened had happened, and nothing could stop her now. Chanting, "Giridhari Gopal," she left for Vrndavana. There she met Srila Jiva Gosvami and he took gopal-mantra from him. Was she a real disciple of Jiva Gosvami? No, she was a half disciple, because she ended up in Dvaraka. She said, "I only see Krsna. I don't see anyone else." Her vision was not so broad that she could see the gopis. She failed to accept the guidance of the gopis, and for that reason she could not get any position in Vraja. She went to Dvaraka, and there she entered into the Deity of Dvarakadisa and never came out.

This is a very important point for those who want the service of the Divine Couple in Vraja, but who think they can achieve it by following all the principles of vaidhi-bhakti. They are meditating on Dvaraka-lila, and yet they want the service of Radha-Krsna in Vraja. Because they have such meditation, they will not get a position in Vraja.

If a husband is somewhat following bhakti, he will be very happy if someone else's wife takes to spiritual life and, becoming completely surrendered, gives up her home. However, if it comes to his wife, he cannot tolerate it. And it is the same with a wife. If someone else's husband becomes so absorbed that he gives up family life, she says, "Oh, this is good. You are so fortunate. You have become a pure devotee and your whole family will be delivered." But when it comes to her own husband, it cannot be tolerated. And it is the same with a son and father. This consideration is very bad and should not be done. No one is going to stay here in this body. We should try to use our power of discrimination to understand the purpose of life.

Translator: Pundarika dasa Brahmachari

Transcriber and editor: Mula Prakrti dasi

Assistant editor: Syamarani dasi

Typist: Premavati dasi