

The Highest Summits of Prema

Excerpt of a lecture on Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī's
Śrī Bṛhad-Bhāgavatāmṛtam

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Spoken for All People

Do not think Śrīla Śukadeva Gosvāmī recited *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* to benefit Mahārāja Parīkṣit. He spoke it to uplift the whole universe. Similarly, it may appear that the *Bhagavad-gītā* was sung only for Arjuna, but this vision is wrong. Arjuna is a very high-class devotee. He is a personal associate of Kṛṣṇa; so the *Gītā* is not for him. When Arjuna hears the *Gītā* he laments to himself, “Why is Kṛṣṇa giving me all these irrelevant teachings?”

Therefore, the *Gītā-māhātmya* (6) states*:

*sarvopaniṣado gāvo
dogdhā gopāla-nandanah
pārtho vatsah su-dhīr bhoktā
dugdham gītāmṛtam mahat*

The *Bhagavad-gītā* is like a cow, and her udder contains great quantities of milk. Her calf is also with her, but all that milk is not for the calf. The milkman shows the calf to the cow only so that she will give milk. Similarly, Arjuna was standing with Kṛṣṇa only so that He would recite *Bhagavad-gītā*, which is really for the benefit of humankind. Meanwhile, Arjuna was quietly lamenting, “Why has Kṛṣṇa said, ‘You should surrender to Me’? I am already surrendered. What is more, I am His intimate associate, His friend. I cannot say how many lives ago I surrendered to Him.”

Similarly, there was also no need for Śrīla Śukadeva Gosvāmī to narrate *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* to Mahārāja Parīkṣit. Indeed, in some respects Mahārāja Parīkṣit was far superior to Śrīla Śukadeva Gosvāmī, for he had played in Kṛṣṇa’s lap as a child. But Mahārāja Parīkṣit was also very humble.

* Translation: “This *Bhagavad-gītā*, the essence of all the *upaniṣads*, is just like a cow, and Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who is famous as a cowherd boy, is milking this cow. Arjuna is just like a calf, and learned scholars and pure devotees are to drink the nectarean milk of *Bhagavad-gītā*.”

The Pinnacle of Perfection

Śrīla Śukadeva Gosvāmī said to Mahārāja Parīkṣit:

*labdhvā sudurlabham idaṁ bahu-sambhavānte
mānuṣyam arthadam anityam apīha dhīraḥ
tūrṇaṁ yateta na pated anumṛtyu yāvan
niḥśreyasāya viśayaḥ khalu sarvataḥ syāt*

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (11.29.9)

After countless births and deaths one finally gets this rare human life, which affords one the opportunity to achieve the highest perfection. Thus, without wasting a single moment, one should immediately strive for the ultimate perfection of life, because at any time one’s body may collapse and die. This very rare chance to attain the highest good comes only to a human being, whereas the possibility for sense gratification is readily available in all species of life.

We should realize the teachings of this verse and quickly give up all sense gratification. We should truly become Kṛṣṇa-conscious. *Tūrṇaṁ* means “at once, without delay”. Delay is dangerous. Begin today – not today, but right now.

What is *niḥśreyasāya*? This is our aim. Our goal is not Kṛṣṇa but *kṛṣṇa-prema*. What kind of *kṛṣṇa-prema* do we want? Not the *prema* of Hanumān or the Pāṇḍavas or even of Uddhava. We will not reject their *prema*; we will offer *praṇāma* to it. But we do not want it. What do we want? Do we want to serve Kṛṣṇa as Śrīmatī Rādhikā is serving Him? No. We also offer so many *praṇāmas* to that *prema*. Our goal is to serve that *prema*, but we do not desire it ourselves.

We want to serve the Divine Couple in the way Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī and Śrī Rūpa Mañjarī serve Them. By this one will be perfect, and that perfection is called *niḥśreyasāya*. It is the topmost status for the *jīva*. You should realize this and not waste a single moment in sense gratification. Try to maintain your life, but make this status the single aim and object of your life.

Arjuna Laments

We have discussed the various stages of devotees up to the Pāṇḍavas, whom we have been glorifying. They are Kṛṣṇa’s bosom friends, and Kṛṣṇa is their servant. What to speak of serving them, Kṛṣṇa even grooms and massages their horses. Kuntī is like Kṛṣṇa’s mother, Yudhiṣṭhira His father and elder brother, and Bhīma His brother and friend. Arjuna has more intimate a friendship with Kṛṣṇa than does Bhīma, and Draupadī has even more intimacy with Kṛṣṇa than do any of the Pāṇḍavas, although she sometimes also has a mood of reverence towards Him. She is a *sakhī* of Kṛṣṇa. Try to know all these facts.

Speaking to Nārada Ṛṣi, Arjuna explained that he and the other Pāṇḍavas are actually bereft of good fortune. “Kṛṣṇa teaches us the *Gītā*,” he said. “He tells us to be *saraṇāgata*, surrendered souls, and therefore we are very unfortunate. Also, when Kṛṣṇa performs any service for us we become quite ashamed. One time, against our wishes, He became my charioteer and was even washing and massaging my horses. Why did He do this? It was not in fact for me. It was simply part of His overall plan to kill the demons.

“I did not want to slay Bhīṣma-pitāmaha, Droṇācārya and my other worshipable superiors, but I had to do so. I told Kṛṣṇa that I could not fight with Droṇa and Bhīṣma-pitāmaha because they are my *gurus*; nonetheless Kṛṣṇa obliged me to kill them. How painful it was. Bhīṣma was an exalted *bhakta*, and to kill him was very sinful.

“I further told Kṛṣṇa, ‘You are known as Madhusūdana, killer of the Madhu demon, and not as “killer of your *guru*”.’ No one is to kill his *guru*, who should be regarded as superior to one’s own father. Nonetheless Kṛṣṇa repeatedly urged me to shoot my *gurus*. He has not actually served us, nor are we near and dear to Him. Why has Kṛṣṇa come to this world? To protect the entire universe, to assist the demigods and vanquish the demons. This is His sole purpose.”

Arjuna continued, “If you really want to see an exalted reservoir of love and affection for Kṛṣṇa, you should at once fly to Dvārakā and seek out Uddhava.”

The Speciality of Uddhava

Who is Uddhava?

śrī-śuka uvāca
vṛṣṇīnām pravaro mantri
kṛṣṇasya dayitaḥ sakhā
śiṣyo bṛhaspateḥ sākṣād
uddhavo buddhi-sattamaḥ

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (10.46.1)

Śukadeva Gosvāmī said: The supremely intelligent Uddhava was the best counselor of the Vṛṣṇi dynasty, a beloved friend of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and a direct disciple of Bṛhaspati.

Kṛṣṇa Himself told Uddhava:

*na tathā me priyatama
ātma-yonir na śaṅkaraḥ
na ca saṅkarṣaṇo na śrīr
naivātmā ca yathā bhavān*

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (11.14.15)

Kṛṣṇa said, “Uddhava, you are most dear to Me. Brahmā, who is My son; Śaṅkara, who is non-different from Me; My brother Saṅkarṣaṇa; the goddess of fortune Śrī Lakṣmī; and even My very own life, are not as dear to Me as you are. You are so close to Me.” Kṛṣṇa has also declared, “Do not think that Uddhava is even slightly inferior to Me. He is as good as I am, and sometimes he may even be greater.” How exalted Uddhava is.

Nārada thus left Arjuna and traveled to Dvarakā to meet Uddhava. He glorified Uddhava and the Yādavas, to which Uddhava replied, “Don’t speak like this. I know that I am a high-class devotee of Kṛṣṇa and that Kṛṣṇa’s queens are also very dear to Him. Kṛṣṇa once gave a *pārijāta* flower to Rukmiṇī, and He also stole an entire *pārijāta* tree from heaven and planted it in Satyabhāmā’s courtyard.”

The Story of the Pārijāta Flower

One day Kṛṣṇa was sitting among His wives in Dvarakā – all 16,108 queens were present, including Rukmiṇī and Satyabhāmā. Nārada arrived there with a *pārijāta* flower plucked from heaven and told Kṛṣṇa, “Please take this flower and give it to Your favourite queen.” Kṛṣṇa thought, “Nārada is very tricky; he wants to throw Me in a dilemma. If I give this flower to Rukmiṇī, then Satyabhāmā and the other queens will be angry, and it will take great effort to pacify them. And if I hand it to Satyabhāmā, then Rukmiṇī will be jealous.”

Nārada interrupted His thoughts, “Don’t delay. I have pressing business to complete. Please give the flower to one of Your queens now, in my presence, before I leave.” Kṛṣṇa wondered what to do. Nārada kept insisting, so He took the flower, closed His eyes, and gave it to Rukmiṇī. He thought that by closing His eyes, the other queens would be unable to tell that He was intentionally selecting her. At once, breathing heavily like a serpent, Satyabhāmā ran to her palace. She threw off all her garments and ornaments, put on some old, ragged and dirty clothes and, weeping, entered her *kop-bhavan*, “anger-room”.

Kings used to build “anger-rooms” for their queens. If a queen took shelter there, the king knew he would have to pacify her. Now Satyabhāmā went into her *kop-bhavan* and began to weep loudly. Her many maidservants were pacifying her, in a way that Kṛṣṇa would know He had committed a great wrong. Kṛṣṇa approached Satyabhāmā and gently put His hand on her, but she immediately pushed Him

away. “Go away at once,” she said bitterly. “Return to Your dearest queen. You are a liar. You ridiculed and insulted me in front of the entire assembly.”

Kṛṣṇa said, “Listen, I gave a single *pārijāta* flower to Rukmiṇī, and you have become so upset. I will bring an entire *pārijāta* tree from the heavenly planets and plant it in your courtyard.”

Satyabhāmā replied, “You could not give me even a single flower, and now You say You will bring me a whole tree.”

“Come with me,” Kṛṣṇa said. At once he called Garuḍa and, sitting on his back, they traveled to the heavenly planets together. There, Kṛṣṇa fought against Indra and the demigods and defeated them. He uprooted a *pārijāta* tree and planted it in Satyabhāmā’s courtyard.

The Glorious Yādavas

Uddhava continued speaking to Nārada Ṛṣi: “After defeating the demigods, Kṛṣṇa also forcibly took away Sudharma-sabhā, their famed heavenly assembly house, and brought it back with Him. Why? He knew the demigods had the false ego of being masters of the universe; so to crush their false pride He stole away Sudharma-sabhā and brought it to Dvarakā. Just see how Kṛṣṇa is serving the Yādavas in Dvarakā.

“Also, you should know that Kṛṣṇa established Ugrasena, Kāmsa’s father, as emperor and said to him, ‘I am your servant. Please order Me and I will collect taxes for you from across the universe. Don’t be concerned.’ Kṛṣṇa thus became his subordinate.

“Saṅkarṣaṇa, the son of Vasudeva Mahārāja and Rohiṇī, is Kṛṣṇa’s own brother. Kṛṣṇa also has ten sons and one daughter from each of His queens – that is, 11 x 16,108 children in all. Through them He has so many grandchildren. These are all Kṛṣṇa’s blood-relatives, His *svajana*. Although the Pāṇḍavas are like Kṛṣṇa’s brothers, they have no blood relation with Him; they are His friends. So how glorious are the residents of Dvarakā, the Yādavas.”

Uddhava admitted to Nārada, “We are very high-class devotees and most dear to Kṛṣṇa. I accept everything Kṛṣṇa has said to me – that I am His advisor, friend, servant, and so on. Nonetheless, I still lament.”

“Why do you lament?” asked Nārada.

“I was proud that I was serving Kṛṣṇa in so many ways, but my false ego was crushed when I went to Vṛndāvana and witnessed the glories of the *gopīs*. Their love is as high as Mount Everest and as deep as the Pacific Ocean. It has no limits. I could not measure it. If you want to see how glorious the Vrajavāsīs are, go to Vraja.”

The Blessed Land of Vraja

Lord Brahmā declares:

*aho bhāgyam aho bhāgyam
nanda-gopa-vrajaukasām
yan-mitraṁ paramānandaṁ
pūrṇaṁ brahma sanātanam*

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (10.14.32)

Kṛṣṇa is the supreme authority, the Lord of lords. He is unrivalled and all-powerful, and yet He is very sweet. He can destroy an entire universe in a moment, and create millions of universes in another. Nevertheless, that same Kṛṣṇa wants to serve the *gopīs*. He is the dear friend and son of everyone in Vraja-Nandagram.

Uddhava himself has prayed:

*etāḥ paraṁ tanu-bhṛto bhuvi gopa-vadhvo
govinda eva nikhilātmani rūdha-bhāvāḥ
vāñchanti yad bhava-bhiyo munayo vayaṁ ca
kiṁ brahma-janmabhir ananta-kathā-rasasya*

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (10.47.58)

In this world the land of Gokula is most blessed. Why? Because the *gopīs*, who alone have perfected their lives through their spotless love for Śrī Govinda, reside there; without them it would not be as glorious. Śrī Govinda, who sustains all universes, is especially the very life and soul of the Vrajavāsīs, such as the *gopas*, *gopīs*, calves and cows.

Although Śrī Govinda lives in Goloka-Vṛndāvana, He also sustains and nourishes all beings in all parts of His creation. Therefore Uddhava has prayed, “Those who fear material existence, as well as others such as myself and so many *ṛṣis* and *munis*, hanker to serve that Kṛṣṇa, especially when He is in the company of the *gopīs*. We have no desire to take birth in a *brāhmaṇa* dynasty, or even to become Brahmā himself.”

Uddhava Weeps

*āsām aho caraṇa-reṇu-juṣām ahaṁ syām
vṛndāvane kim api gulma-latauśadhīnām
yā dustyajam sva-janam ārya-patham ca hitvā
bhejur mukunda-padaviṁ śrutibhir vimṛgyām*

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (10.47.61)

Uddhava desired to become grass in Vṛndāvana. He prayed, “When Kṛṣṇa associates with the *gopīs* or when the *gopīs* go to meet Kṛṣṇa, they will place their feet on that grass and my life will be successful.” What is the status of the *gopīs* and their love and affection for Kṛṣṇa, and how does it compare with the love of Uddhava?

*yā vai śrīyārcitam ajādibhir āpta-kāmair
yogeśvarair api yad ātmani rāsa-goṣṭhyām
kṛṣṇasya tad bhagavataḥ caraṇāravindam
nyastam staneṣu vijahuḥ parirabhya tāpam*

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (10.47.62)

Brahmā, Śaṅkara and all other demigods perform *arcana* of the feet of Lakṣmī, and that very Lakṣmī performed austerities to serve Kṛṣṇa in Vṛndāvana, but was unable to attain His service. She wanted to enter the *rāsa-līlā*, but Kṛṣṇa did not accept her.

Uddhava began to weep as he continued:

*vande nanda-vraja-strīṇām
pāda-reṇum abhikṣṇaśaḥ
yāsām hari-kathodgītām
punāti bhuvana-trayam*

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (10.47.63)

We are gradually approaching the aim and object of our *sādhana*. You should have some greed to collect this jewel. Uddhava is saying here, “O *gopīs*, I want to be the dust of your lotus feet; not many dust particles, but only a single one, as I cannot digest good fortune greater than this.” There are countless *gopīs*, but in his mind Uddhava has selected one particular *gopī*, namely, Śrīmatī Rādhikā. He desired just one particle of Her foot-dust.

Uddhava prayed to the *gopīs*:

*sarvātma-bhāvo ’dhikṛto
bhavatīnām adhokṣaje
viraheṇa mahā-bhāgā
mahān me ’nugrahaḥ kṛtaḥ*

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (10.47.27)

He is saying, “O *gopīs*, you have conquered Kṛṣṇa and controlled Him in all respects. He is now totally yours. I am unable to convey to Him what you have said

out of separation from Him. He may even die upon hearing it. I do not have your mood of separation. You are *mahā-bhāgā*, most fortunate. You are superior to Yudhiṣṭhira, me and even Girirāja-Govardhana. You have bestowed so much mercy upon me, but I am very unfortunate, being unqualified to receive it.” And thus Uddhava wept.

The Height of Selfless Service

Hearing the glories of the Vrajavāsīs, the old and senile Padmavatī, mother of wicked Kāṁsa, shook her head and said, “Alas! Those merciless cowherd men are very cruel. They made Kṛṣṇa take their cows out to graze all day, from His early childhood. They never gave Him any shoes or an umbrella to shield Him from the blazing sun. They never even fed Him. And when, tortured by hunger, He ate a little butter, the cowherd women tied Him up!”

To this, Rohiṇī replied sharply: “Padmavatī, you are shameless and have no heart. You are the one who is very cruel. You have spoken as you have because you know nothing of love and affection.

“Vraja was beset by great calamities. Many demons, like Pūtanā, Aghāsura, Bakāsura and Keśī, came to create a huge disturbance and torment the Vrajavāsīs. Nonetheless, the Vrajavāsīs never blamed Kṛṣṇa for this. Everything they do is out of love for Him and is only to please Him. They are unequalled in their love and affection; they are indeed unique in this world.

“Indra also wanted to destroy Vraja, and for this he sent torrential rain and thunderbolts to Vraja. Then the *yamala-arjuna* trees almost crushed Kṛṣṇa. In every such incident, the *gopīs* only desired Kṛṣṇa’s welfare. They uttered *mantras* like ‘*maṅgalam bhavatu*’ and ‘*kalyānam bhavatu*’ – ‘May auspiciousness be upon You.’ In whatever they do, whether it is the worship of Girirāja-Govardhana, Nārāyaṇa or any other deity, they pray, ‘O Nārāyaṇa, please let me behold Kṛṣṇa.’ Just see the glory of the *gopīs*.”

Kṛṣṇa Himself has told the *gopīs*, “*na pāraye ’ham niravadya-samyujām* – I can never repay you. I am unable to abandon any of My devotees, not even a *sādhaka* in this world, whereas you have left your very own fathers, mothers, sisters, wealth, reputation and worldly *dharma*. I cannot do this, and so I am unable to repay you. I therefore pray that you will be merciful to Me and be satisfied by your own good activities. Only in this way can I be freed from my debt to you.”

Śrī Rādhā's Victory

And who is the most glorious of all?

*venum karān nipatitam skhalitam śikhaṇḍam
bhraṣṭam ca pīta-vasanam vrajārāja-sūnoḥ
yasyāḥ kaṭākṣa-śara-ghāta-vimūrcchitasya
tām rādhikām paricarāmi kadā rasena*

Śrī Rādhā-rasa-sudhā-nidhi (39)

Śrī Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī has established that among all *gopas* and *gopīs*, Śrīmatī Rādhikā is the most prominent. He explains here: “As Kṛṣṇa was on his way to go cow-herding, Rādhikā threw a sidelong glance at Him, which pierced Him like an arrow. It went straight into His heart, and at once His *vamśī* fell from His hands.

“Brahmā, and indeed all living creatures, are attracted by Kṛṣṇa’s *vamśī*. Upon hearing its sweet sound, the *gopīs* immediately abandoned the service of their husbands and the cooking in their homes. Their *chapatis* were burning on the fire and their milk was boiling over, but they left all their duties. That same *vamśī*, which controls all the *gopīs*, now dropped out of Kṛṣṇa’s hands, due to the sidelong, arrow-like glance of Śrīmatī Rādhikā.

“Day and night, Kṛṣṇa carries His *vamśī*, and His peacock feather always rests on His head. But having been shot by Śrīmatī Rādhikā’s side-long glance, Kṛṣṇa began to reel and lose consciousness – His peacock feather fell at Śrī Rādhā’s feet, and His yellow *cādara* slid down from His shoulders. When will Rādhikā sprinkle Her mercy on me so that I may serve Her with *rasa*? What *rasa*? *Prema, sneha, māna, rāga, anurāga* and so on.”

The Unrivalled Status of the Mañjarī

What to speak of Rādhikā, Kṛṣṇa falls at the feet of even Her maidservants:

*yat-kiṅkarīṣu bahuśaḥ khalu kāku-vāṇī
nityam parasya puruṣasya śikhaṇḍa-mauleḥ
tasyāḥ kadā rasa-nidher vṛṣabhānu-jāyās
tat-keli-kuñja-bhavanāṅgana-marjanī syām*

Śrī Rādhā-rasa-sudhā-nidhi (8)

Once Rādhikā was in a sulky mood in a forest grove, and She ordered Rūpa Mañjarī and others to guard Her. She said, “Go to the entrance of this *kuñja*, and when that black cheater comes you should stop Him. Don’t let him enter My grove.”

Thus, when black Kṛṣṇa arrived, Rūpa Mañjarī and Rati Mañjarī, standing guard at the entrance, checked Him: “You may enter only if Rādhā orders us to let You in. But now She is angry with You, so return to Candrāvalī. Don’t come here.” Placing His head on the lotus feet of those *kiṅkarīs* (maidservants), Kṛṣṇa begged for forgiveness. Śrī Prabhodhānanda Sarasvatī is praying to become one stick in the broom used for sweeping *kuñjas*. How glorious are those *kiṅkarīs*.

*tāmbūlārpaṇa-pāda-mardana-payo-dānābhisārādibhir
vṛndāraṇya-maheśvarīm priyatayā yās toṣayanti priyāḥ
prāṇa-preṣṭha-sakhī-kulād api kilāsaṅkocitā bhūmikāḥ
kelī-bhūmiṣu rūpa-mañjarī-mukhās tā dāsikāḥ samśraye*

Stavāvalī, Vraja-vilāsa-stava (38)

These *kiṅkarīs* serve Śrī Rādhā alone or the Divine Couple together in all Their pastimes. They offer Them betel nuts (*tambula*), massage Them, fetch water, serve Rādhā when She goes out to meet Kṛṣṇa, and engage in many other duties. Here Śrīla Raghunātha-dāsa Gosvāmī prays, “I take shelter at the lotus feet of those *kiṅkarīs*, who have Śrī Rūpa Mañjarī as their leader, because they and no one else can perform all these services.”

I too bow down at the lotus feet of the *mañjarīs* headed by Śrī Rūpa Mañjarī, and I pray that they will sprinkle their mercy on me. Beyond this, I don’t know anything.

Gaura-premānande.