Introspection

Life in the Shadow of Time



Bhakti Gauravani Goswami

Introspection

Life in the Shadow of Time

18 Songs by Vaiṣṇava Poets
Adapted into English with Commentary

Bhakti Gauravani Goswami

mandir media

All quotes from Śrīla Prabhupāda's books, lectures,
or any other extracts from BBT publications are:
Copyright © The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust International

All other texts and all art work are:
Copyright © 2025 Christian B. Jansen
(aka Bhakti Gauravani Goswami)
(fka Vedavyas Das)

1. Edition: 2025

E-books and audio files
can be downloaded at:



www.spiritualsoundspace.com

Table of Contents

Introduction xi

Song 1 1
Wake-up Call
(An adaptation of Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's *Aruṇadoya kīrtana I+II*)

Commentary 13
A Call to Spiritual Awakening 13
The Vanity of Material Pursuits 14
Lost in the Cycle of Birth and Death 14
The Role of the Devotee and Compassion 15
The Antidote to Materialism 16
The Essence of Bhakti 17
The Original Songs 17

Song 2 22
My Tale of Misery
(An adaptation of Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's *Śuno mora duḥkhera kāhinī)*

Commentary 28
Worldly Enjoyment: Poison in Disguise 28
The Sunset of Life 29
Old age and Disease as Catalysts 30
A Typical Life's Journey 31
Overcoming Fear 31
The Mystic Power of the Lord's Lotus Feet 33
The Original Song 33

Song 3 36
Burning Hot Sand
(An adaptation of Vidyapati's *Tātala Saikate*)

Commentary 48
The Illusion of Worldly Happiness 48
The Forest of Enjoyment 49
Māyā's Alluring Power 50
The Various Stages of Life 51
The Big Picture 52
Facing Death 52
Vidyāpati's Timeless Message 53
The Original Song 53

Song 4 56
A Wasted Birth
(An adaptation of Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura's *Hari hari! biphale*)

Commentary 63
The Fleeting Nature of Material Pleasures 63
Faith, Regret, and the Hope of Devotion 64
Spiritual Suicide: The Poison of Worldliness 65
The Treasure of the Holy Name 65
The Remedy: Chanting the Holy Name 65
Deliverance Through the Holy Name 66
Conclusion: Surrendering to Kṛṣṇa 67
The Original Song 68

Song 5 70
Cry for Help
(An adaptation of Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura's *Ṭhākura vaiṣṇava-gaṇa*)

Commentary 77
The Urgency of Rescue from Saṁsāra 77
The Inescapable Power of Karma 78
The Blind Wanderer 79
You are the Company You Keep 79

The Original Song..... 80

Song 6..... 82
Magic Lantern Dream
(An adaptation of Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's *Durlabha mānava-janma*)

Commentary..... 102
A Deeper Perspective: Understanding Transience.....102
The Endless Cycle of Saṁsāra 103
The Shadow Theater 104
Confronting Death 105
The Greatest Wonder 106
The Struggles of Family Life 107
Letting Go of Illusions 107
The Original Song..... 107

Song 7..... 111
The Ocean of Nescience
(An adaptation of Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's *Anādi karama phale*)

Commentary..... 116
Self-Imposed Suffering.....116
The Six Enemies and Fear 117
The Deception of Karma and Jñāna 118
The Lord's Lotus Feet as the Ultimate Shelter 119
The Original Song..... 120

Song 8..... 123
Forgotten
(An adaptation of Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's *Bhuliyā tomāre*)

Commentary..... 133
Kṛṣṇa as the Deliverer 133
Understanding the Jīva's Position 133
The Forgotten Promise 134

Humility vs. Pride 135
The Typical Life Journey 135
The Illusions of the World 136
A Timeless Message 137
The Original Song 138

Song 9 141
My Life
(An adaptation of Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's *Āmara jīvana*)
Commentary 149
The Way of Worldly Life 149
Envy and Schadenfreude 149
The Gates to Degradation 150
The Turning Point 151
An Opportunity for Spiritual Reflection 151
The Original Song 152

Song 10 155
The Learned Ass
(An adaptation of Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's *Vidyāra vilāse*)
Commentary 162
Clarifying the Role of Knowledge 162
The Limitations of Material Knowledge 163
The Power of Old Age 163
The Only Treasure Worth Seeking 164
The Original Song 165

Song 11 168
Your Merciful Glance
(An adaptation of Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura's *Gaurāṅga karuṇa koro*)
Commentary 174
The Sign of Humility 174

A Challenge to the Lord's Title 175
The Ocean of Material Existence 175
A Repeated Prayer 176
The Original Song 177

Song 12 179
Jewels on Rags
(An adaptation of Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura's *Hari! hari! ki mor karam abhaga)*
Commentary 187
A Sense of Profound Loss 187
Illusion of Pious Deeds 187
Consequences of Bad Company 188
Regret for Missed Opportunities 188
Essence of Devotional Surrender 188
The Original Song 189

Song 13 192
O Mind, Listen to Me 192
(An adaptation of Locana dāsa Ṭhākura's *Avatāra-sāra*) 192
Commentary 201
Thirsty Although Surrounded by Water 201
Foolish Pursuits of Happiness 202
The Deceptive Beauty of the Palāśa Flower 203
The Futility of "Chewing the Chewed" 203
The Snake of Death as a Garland 204
The Illusory Power of Māyā 205
The Folly of Ignoring Danger 205
Entering Fire in Search of Coolness 205
The Original Song 206

Song 14 209
Bird of My Heart
(An adaptation of Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's *Kena Hare Kṛṣṇa*)

Commentary 216
The Soul's Reluctance to Chant 216
Devotees Developing *Kṛṣṇa-prema* 217
The Reality of Today's Devotional Practice 217
The Role of Offenses 218
A Hard Heart as a Result of Offenses 219
Inattentiveness as the Main Culprit 220
The Importance of Niṣṭhā 221
The Holy Name as a Gift 221
An Invitation to the Spiritual World 221
The Urgency of Chanting Before Death 222
The Original Song 224

Song 15 226
Free From Fear
(An adaptation of Govinda dāsa Kavirāja's *Bhajahū re mana*)

Commentary 234
The Universal Principle of Fear 234
How to Overcome Fear 234
Kṛṣṇa's Lotus Feet 235
Sādhu-Saṅga and Spiritual Progress 237
The Common Worker's Struggle 238
The Pursuit of Happiness Amid Life's Hardships 239
The Illusion of Security in Family and Comforts 239
A Drop of Water on a Lotus 240
Overcoming Life's Dangers 240

The Mind as Friend or Enemy 241
The Original Song 242

Song 16 244
Treasure of Love
(An adaptation of Narottama Dāsa Ṭhākura's *Gorā Pahū*)
Commentary 249
The Consequences of Material Attachment 249
The Root Cause of Misfortune 250
The Futility of a Life Without Spiritual Content 251
The Original Song 252

Song 17 254
Mind, Body and Home
(An adaptation of Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's *Manasa, deha, geha*)
Commentary 259
Ātma-nivedana (Dedication of the Self) 259
Expressions of Unreserved Surrender 260
Praying for a Humble Birth Among Devotees 260
The Power of Sādhu-saṅga 261
Kṛṣṇa as the Source of All Relationships 261
The Fruit of Surrender 262
The Original Song 263

Song 18 265
The Ocean of Bliss
(An adaptation of Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's *Ātma-nivedana*)
Commentary 272
Service Beyond Material Servitude 272
Scriptural Affirmations of Devotional Bliss 273
The Unique Nectar of Kṛṣṇa's Lotus Feet 273

Unalloyed Devotional Service 274
Seeing Calamities as Blessings 275
Embracing Both Joy and Sorrow 277
The Intimacy of Mutual Possessiveness 277
Conclusion 278
The Original Song 278

Epilogue 281
Glossary 283
The Founder-Ācārya 289
Pronunciation Guide 291
The Author 292
Acknowledgements 294

Introduction

Poems and songs have been integral to human culture for thousands of years, with early examples emerging from ancient India, Egypt, China, Greece, and Rome. While most poems and songs focus on worldly affairs, there are also examples of profound philosophical and religious expression, especially notable in the *bhakti* tradition of India. Among the most renowned philosophical song-poems are the *Bhagavad-gītā* (The Song of Bhagavān), the *Brahma-saṁhitā* (The Hymn of Brahmā), the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (The Beautiful Story of Bhagavān), and the *Sāma Veda* (a collection of hymns and chants).

When Śrīla Prabhupāda visited England in 1969, he met with John Lennon and George Harrison of The Beatles, one of the most influential music groups of their time. George Harrison had met Prabhupāda's disciples earlier that year and had produced a record with them, featuring various Vaiṣṇava songs and, most notably, the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra. The album, titled *The Radha Krishna Temple,* was well received by Western audiences, and the track *Hare Krishna Mantra* reached number one in many countries. Consequently, Prabhupāda encouraged John and George to spread the message of Kṛṣṇa consciousness through their music, saying, "You have got a very good talent—music. *Na vidyā saṅgīta uttamam* (there is no knowledge higher than music). The Vedic *mantras* were all through music. The *Sāma Veda* is full of music."

He then quoted a verse from the Twelfth Canto of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (12.13.1), where the sage Sūta Gosvāmī says:

> Unto that personality whom Brahmā, Varuṇa, Indra, Rudra and the Maruts praise by chanting transcendental hymns and reciting the *Vedas* with all their corollaries, *pada-kramas* and *Upaniṣads*, to whom the chanters of the *Sāma Veda* always sing, whom the perfected *yogīs* see within their minds after

> fixing themselves in trance and absorbing themselves within Him, and whose limit can never be found by any demigod or demon — unto that Supreme Personality of Godhead I offer my humble obeisances.

He explained, "*Sāma-gāḥ* means the followers of the *Sāma Veda*. *Gāyanti* means they are always absorbed in music. Through musical vibration, they are approaching the Supreme. Vedic *mantras* are sung. The *Bhagavad-gītā* and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* can be sung very nicely. And it is Vedic *mantra* chanting. Just by hearing the vibration, people will benefit, even if they do not understand."

According to Vedic teachings, transcendental sound is so potent that its vibration impacts listeners even if they are unaware of its meaning—what to speak of its effects if they understand the message. The effect on a person's consciousness can be truly transformative. For this reason, many spiritual teachers composed songs in regional languages, making them accessible to common people who did not know Sanskrit, the language of the *Vedas*.

The poems of the Vaiṣṇava *ācāryas* differ from ordinary poetry, which often deals with mundane, ephemeral subjects. Vaiṣṇava songs carry a deep philosophical message; they are not meant for mere fleeting entertainment but aim to uplift both singers and listeners to the spiritual dimension of life, which is eternal.

Since many of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu's followers were born in Bengal, most Vaiṣṇava songs are composed in Bengali. As Śrīla Prabhupāda noted regarding Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura's compositions, the language is simple enough for even uneducated people to understand, yet sublime and fully aligned with the conclusions of the Vedic scriptures.

Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura, a prominent *ācārya* of the late 16th and early 17th centuries, played a crucial role in spreading Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava philosophy to the masses through his captivating poetry and songs. He presented Vaiṣṇava teachings through devotional

songs and lyric poems set to familiar melodies and rhythms, making them easy to learn and sing for both the young and the old. His compositions skillfully integrated stories and historical narratives, enhancing their cultural relevance and accessibility. Because his works transcended social barriers, they gained immense popularity among all classes of society, from villagers to kings.

Narottama's songs were preserved and passed down orally through generations, facilitating the spread of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava philosophy. His major works, *Prāthanā* (Prayer) and *Prema-bhakti-candrikā* (Rays of the Moonlight of Loving Devotional Service), form the basis of five songs in the collection presented in this book. Notably, the majority of these songs are short, consisting typically of only four to six verses, making them easy to memorize and sing. Despite their brevity, their content is powerful enough to inspire spiritual awakening in listeners.

Another prominent *ācārya* of the 16th century was Locana dāsa Ṭhākura. He also composed numerous devotional songs that emphasize the chanting of the holy name, surrender to the Lord, and the importance of associating with devotees. His songs are deeply imbued with emotional longing *(viraha-bhāva)* and are often sung in Vaiṣṇava communities.

In the 19th century, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, a prolific writer and translator of *bhakti* literature, wrote over 300 songs which he presented in different songbooks. The collection *Introspection* features ten of his reflective songs.

Introspection may be best described as a song cycle, a term derived from the German word *Liederkreis*, popularized in the 19th century, where composers would present a series of poems connected by a similar theme. Beethoven and Schubert, for example, wrote music for poems by Goethe and Schiller.

The songs in *Introspection* are based on poems by prominent saints and devotees. A recurring theme in their poetry is the nature

of conditioned life in the material world and the aspiration to overcome detrimental character traits and attachments in the pursuit of spiritual perfection. In many songs, the author adopts the perspective of an ordinary conditioned soul, depicting the struggle with adversaries such as lust, anger, and greed, and lamenting the inability to resist the illusory allure of temporary relationships and material objects. To the unacquainted reader, these reflections may seem like expressions of negative thinking, but they should be understood as catalysts for character improvement, urging recognition of the true nature of life in the material world. As Devahūti beseeched Kapiladeva: "My dear Lord, please describe in detail, both for me and for people in general, the continual process of birth and death, for by hearing of such calamities, we may become detached from the activities of this material world."

Śrīla Prabhupāda favored songs of this nature, among them *Bhajahū re mana*, *Hari! Hari! biphale*, *Amāra jīvana*, and *Anādi karama phale*, which he sang, recorded, and explained to his followers on various occasions.

When I compiled and published the songbook *Sacred Song Symphony*, I included over 100 of the most popular Vaiṣṇava songs, most of which were written in Bengali. Since Prabhupāda introduced these songs in early 1969, many devotees have learned to sing them in their original Bengali language. However, because many do not speak Bengali, they often struggle to remember the meaning while singing, even for daily prayers like the *Gurvāṣṭaka,* or *Guru-vandana*. To address this, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura suggested that devotees outside Bengal translate his songs into their native languages and accompany them with traditional instruments.

Similarly, since most Bengalis do not speak English, Prabhupāda created an English translation of the *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is* and adapted it into a Bengali poetic edition called *Gītār Gān*. In a 1976 conversation with his disciples, it was suggested that *Gītār Gān* could

be translated into many languages, and Prabhupāda added that it could also be chanted or sung. Nearly 20 years later, his disciple Bhakti Charu Swami produced a musical presentation of *Gītār Gān* for the Śrīla Prabhupāda Centennial Celebration. In the Introduction, Bhakti Charu Mahārāja noted, "His Divine Grace was very emphatic about popularizing his *Gītār Gān* among the Bengali-speaking people. I realized what an impact this musical rendition would have on the music-loving Bengalis if it were professionally produced. It will undoubtedly go a long way toward turning them on to the message of *Bhagavad-gītā*."

This principle reaches beyond the Bengali-speaking community to resonate with people across the globe, as music has the extraordinary power to transcend cultural, national, and linguistic boundaries, connecting people through shared emotional and spiritual experiences. Even infants show a preference for consonant sounds and rhythmic patterns, which are elements common to all musical traditions. Thus, melody and rhythm form the foundation of the universal language of music.

When I first conceived of the project, another consideration was the recognition that reading poems is not a widely practiced activity in society, whereas listening to songs, which are essentially poetry set to music, is far more prevalent. Our *ācāryas* recognized the profound impact of combining music with philosophy, composing many poems and prayers that could easily be set to music and sung.

From the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam,* we learn that this practice is not confined to the material world but is an everyday occurrence in the spiritual realm. For instance, at the beginning of the *damodara-līlā* (SB 10.9.1-2), it is described that Kṛṣṇa's mother, while churning butter, remembered her son's childish activities and, in her own way, composed and sang songs to herself about all those activities. In the purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda elaborates:

> While churning butter, Mother Yaśodā was singing about the childhood activities of Kṛṣṇa. It was formerly a custom that if one wanted to remember something constantly, he would transform it into poetry or have this done by a professional poet. It appears that Mother Yaśodā did not want to forget Kṛṣṇa's activities at any time. Therefore she poeticized all of Kṛṣṇa's childhood activities, such as the killing of Pūtanā, Aghāsura, Śakaṭāsura and Tṛṇāvarta, and while churning the butter, she sang about these activities in poetical form. This should be the practice of persons eager to remain Kṛṣṇa conscious twenty-four hours a day. This incident shows how Kṛṣṇa conscious Mother Yaśodā was. To stay in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, we should follow such persons.

Throughout the history of the *bhakti* tradition, many great devotees have composed poetry about Kṛṣṇa's pastimes, among them Vidyāpati, Jayadeva, and Caṇḍīdāsa. Prabhupāda describes their contributions in his purport to *Cc. Ādi-līlā* 13.42:

> Vidyāpati was a famous composer of songs about the pastimes of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. He was an inhabitant of Mithilā, born in a *brāhmaṇa* family. It is calculated that he composed his songs during the reign of King Śivasiṁha and Queen Lachimādevī, in the beginning of the fourteenth century of the Śaka Era, almost one hundred years before the appearance of Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu. The twelfth generation of Vidyāpati's descendants is still living. Vidyāpati's songs about the pastimes of Lord Kṛṣṇa express intense feelings of separation from Kṛṣṇa, and Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu relished all those songs in His ecstasy of separation from Kṛṣṇa.
>
> Jayadeva was born during the reign of Mahārāja Lakṣmaṇa Sena of Bengal, in the eleventh or twelfth century of the Śaka Era. His father was Bhojadeva, and his mother was Vāmādevī.

For many years he lived in Navadvīpa, then the capital of Bengal. His birthplace was in the Birbhum district, in the village Kendubilva. In the opinion of some authorities, however, he was born in Orissa, and still others say that he was born in southern India. He passed the last days of his life in Jagannātha Purī. One of his famous books is *Gīta-govinda*, which is full of transcendental mellow feelings of separation from Kṛṣṇa. The *gopīs* felt separation from Kṛṣṇa before the *rāsa* dance, as mentioned in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, and the *Gīta-govinda* expresses such feelings. There are many commentaries on the *Gīta-govinda* by many Vaiṣṇavas.

Caṇḍīdāsa was born in the village of Nānnura, which is also in the Birbhum district of Bengal. He was born of a *brāhmaṇa* family, and it is said that he also took birth in the beginning of the fourteenth century, Śakābda Era. It has been suggested that Caṇḍīdāsa and Vidyāpati were great friends because the writings of both express the transcendental feelings of separation profusely. The feelings of ecstasy described by Caṇḍīdāsa and Vidyāpati were actually exhibited by Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. He relished all those feelings in the role of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī, and His appropriate associates for this purpose were Śrī Rāmānanda Rāya and Śrī Svarūpa Dāmodara Gosvāmī. These intimate associates of Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu helped the Lord very much in the pastimes in which He felt like Rādhārāṇī.

Recognizing the enduring appeal of music, I have taken the initiative to render some Vaiṣṇava songs into English poetry and accompany them with contemporary musical arrangements. I took utmost care to faithfully preserve the original intention of the *ācāryas*. Translating poetry is a complex task that involves balancing the song's essence, rhythm, and style while making it accessible and pleasing in another

language. To enhance the appeal, I also wanted to include a visual experience, so I illustrated each verse. Thus this book includes 140 unique color images that accompany the 18 songs. As it is said, “A picture is worth a thousand words,” an adage based on the Chinese expression “Hearing something a hundred times isn’t better than seeing it once,” indicating that a single still image can effectively convey complex or multiple ideas, often more powerfully than a verbal description. In this audiovisual project, I have therefore combined three elements—words, music, and images—to convey age-old messages in an engaging way. If this presentation helps deepen the understanding of the spiritual truths for even one soul, I consider my efforts successful.

Bhakti Gauravani Goswami
Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura’s Appearance Day
16 September 2024

Introspection

Life in the Shadow of Time

18 songs by vaiṣṇavas poets



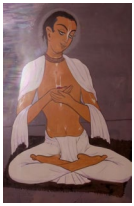
Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura



Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura



Govinda dāsa Kavirāja



Locana dāsa Ṭhākura



Vidyāpati Ṭhākura

Song 1

Wake-up Call

(An adaptation of Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's *Aruṇadoya kīrtana I+II*)



Song 1



1

When the rising Sun appeared in the East,
Gaurāṅga, jewel of the twice-born priests,
wandered with devotees from far and near,
through towns and villages, for all to hear…



2

…the clay drums' beat, the cymbals' chime,
as Gaura danced with grace in time.
His golden form shimmered, pure and bright,
with His ankle bells jingling in the morning light.



3

To those still asleep, they would proclaim,
“Chant Mukunda’s and Mādhava’s holy name!
Let ‘Yādava’ and ‘Hari’ fill your waking breath,
idle sleep will only bring you closer to death.



4

“You decorate your bodies every day,
while precious time slips fast away.
This rare human life, a matchless gift indeed,
adore Yaśodā’s son, and from death be freed.



(Chorus)
“Wake up, sleeping soul! Wake up, sleeping soul!
The Golden Moon is calling.
You’re sleeping on a witch’s lap,
how long will you go on dreaming?



5

“With every rising and setting of the Sun,
a day passes and is gone.
Then why remain indifferent and idle
and not serve the Lord of the heart?”



6

Lost in the cycle of birth and death,
we are covered by dense illusion.
Not knowing our real self-interest,
we are living in turmoil and confusion.



7

A medicine is flowing from the Golden Moon,
our only true friend in this world.
A *mantra* composed of the Lord's holy names,
offering all souls hope and cure.



8

The holy name has risen like the brilliant Sun
to penetrate the darkness of oblivion,
and bless the heart and soul of everyone,
awarding true nectar and elation.



9

The pure nectar of the holy name
has filled the soul of Bhaktivinoda.
Nothing is more precious in the fourteen worlds,
hari-nāma will take us to the Lord's abode.

"Wake up, sleeping soul! Wake up, sleeping soul!
The Golden Moon is calling.
You're sleeping on a witch's lap,
how long will you go on dreaming?



“Wake up, sleeping soul! Wake up, sleeping soul!
The Golden Moon is calling.

10

‘Mukunda’, ‘Mādhava’, ‘Yādava‘ and ‘Hari’,
chant these names and be forever free.
‘Mukunda’, ‘Mādhava’, ‘Yādava‘ and ‘Hari’,
chant these names and be forever happy.

Commentary

Wake-up Call is a combination of a two-part song originally titled *Aruṇadoya-kīrtana* (Congregational Chanting at Sunrise). The two parts, *Udila aruṇa* and *Jīv jāgo*, are among the more well-known songs by Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, who describes how Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu and His associates would go from village to village, just after sunrise, performing *hari-nāma-saṅkīrtana*, congregational chanting of the holy name. The title chosen for this song *(Wake-up Call)* reflects the mood of their chanting, which was intended to wake people up—not only physically but also spiritually. Unless a person awakens spiritually and becomes inquisitive about the meaning of life and thoughtful regarding the true nature of material existence, the full potential of a human birth is not utilized, and self-realization remains out of reach.

A Call to Spiritual Awakening

In this song, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura describes how Gauracandra (lit. Golden Moon) calls on everyone to wake up from their spiritual slumber. He addresses the sleeping soul, explaining that life in the material world resembles dreaming, including both daydreams and nightdreams. He highlights the danger of this situation, as the soul rests in the lap of material nature, described in the Vedic scriptures as *māyā-piśācī*, the witch known as Māyā (illusion). This seductive and binding force keeps the living entity in a state of forgetfulness and confusion by luring it into identifying with the temporary material body and surroundings. Under her influence, the *jīva* hallucinates, thinking, "I am a man, I am a woman, I belong to this family, I belong to that nation, I am this, I am that," along with countless other identifications. All of these are unreal because they

refer only to the impermanent material body-covering, which the eternal soul will eventually have to relinquish.

The Vanity of Material Pursuits

The second stanza elaborates on this point. People all over the world spend significant time and energy on activities that go beyond basic bodily maintenance, completely ignoring that such endeavors yield no real benefit. For example, consumed by bodily identification, the inhabitants of this planet spend billions of dollars every year on beauty and personal care products—not including the fashion industry, which was worth an astounding US$ 1,800,000,000,000 (1.8 trillion) in 2024. All such grand arrangements fall under the category of "decorating our short-lived bodies," which, from a higher point of view, are a colossal waste of time, energy, and money. No amount of skincare lotions, Botox injections, or plastic surgery can prevent a beautiful face from withering away in time. The laws of nature are stringent and dictate that nothing will remain and no one will stay. This does not mean, however, that spiritualists ignore or neglect bodily necessities. They do not deny the need for healthcare and basic bodily maintenance, such as sufficient nutrition, necessary rest, and personal hygiene. But the conditioned soul has a strong tendency to exceed essential needs and become absorbed in bodily identifications, leading to indifference to the spiritual side of life. If this was true for 16th-century Bengal, then what to speak of today. As a result, the increasingly artificial lifestyle that human civilization has created over the last few hundred years has only added more and more layers to the covering of the our true self.

Lost in the Cycle of Birth and Death

As described in the fourth stanza, the *jīva* in material existence is lost and confused, rotating in the continuous cycle of birth and death.

That is the actual problem, and finding a solution is our real self-interest. However, covered by illusion, the conditioned soul becomes interested in many superfluous pursuits while remaining oblivious to its real mission in life.

As Ṛṣabhadeva instructs his sons in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (5.5.16):

> Due to ignorance, the materialistic person does not know anything about his real self-interest, the auspicious path in life. He is simply bound to material enjoyment by lusty desires, and all his plans are made for this purpose. For temporary sense gratification, such a person creates a society of envy, and due to this mentality, he plunges into the ocean of suffering. Such a foolish person does not even know about this.

The Role of the Devotee and Compassion

In the following verse, Ṛṣabhadeva tells his sons that anyone with genuine spiritual knowledge will be compassionate and strive to awaken the sleeping souls and elevate them to a higher, purposeful life:

> If someone is ignorant and addicted to the path of *saṁsāra*, how can one who is actually learned, merciful, and advanced in spiritual knowledge engage him in fruitive activity and thus further entangle him in material existence? If a blind man is walking down the wrong path, how can a gentleman allow him to continue on his way to danger? How can he approve this method? No wise or kind man can allow this.

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura and many other teachers in the line of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu are such gentle and wise souls who care for the spiritual upliftment of humankind.

The Antidote to Materialism

Consequently, in the next stanza, the golden-hued, moon-like Gauracandra is depicted as the only true friend who distributes a potent antidote to the pandemic of materialism that has a firm grip on the world's population. In the original Bengali poetry, it says: *enechi auṣadhi māyā nāśibāra lāgi'*. "I have brought a potent medicinal herb that can destroy the illusion caused by *māyā*." The Lord then says that we need only ask for it, and He will freely give it. This medicine is Kṛṣṇa's holy name arranged in *mantra* form: *hari-nāma mahā-mantra lao tumi māgi'*.

The holy name is compared to the brilliant Sun, powerful enough to dissipate even the densest darkness. The *Padma Purāṇa* describes the wonderful qualities of the holy name as follows:

> The holy name of Kṛṣṇa is transcendentally blissful. It bestows all spiritual benedictions, for it is Kṛṣṇa Himself, the reservoir of all pleasure. Kṛṣṇa's name is complete, and it is the form of all transcendental mellows. It is not a material name under any condition, and it is no less powerful than Kṛṣṇa Himself. Since Kṛṣṇa's name is not contaminated by material qualities, there is no question of its being involved with *māyā*. Kṛṣṇa's name is always liberated and spiritual; it is never conditioned by the laws of material nature. This is because the name of Kṛṣṇa and Kṛṣṇa Himself are identical.

The unique quality that makes the holy name special is *abhinnatvān nāma-nāminoḥ*: there is no difference between Kṛṣṇa and His name; they are one and the same. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura has elaborated on this verse in his work *Harināma-cintāmaṇi* which deals with important topics such as the nature and glories of the holy name and how to identify and overcome obstacles to pure chanting.

The Essence of Bhakti

In the last stanza, the author recommends *nāmāśraya kari,* to take shelter of the holy name. Taking shelter of Kṛṣṇa, His lotus feet, His name and His devotees are the essence of *bhakti*. The song *Wake-up Call* concludes with the declaration: *nāma vinā kichu nāhika āra, caudda-bhuvana-mājhe.* "Except for the name there is nothing in the fourteen worlds." The meaning is that, while the material world is a temporary manifestation, appearing and disappearing like foam on ocean waves, the spiritual entities within it are the only permanent reality. Consequently, the *jīvas*, as parts and parcels of Kṛṣṇa, and Kṛṣṇa Himself in the form of His name, can be said to be the only entities of true substance in *māyā's* shadow domain.

The Original Songs

Udila aruṇa

(Aruṇodaya-kīrtana I)

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura

1

udila aruṇa pūraba-bhāge,
dvija-maṇi gorā amani jāge,
bhakata-samūha loiyā sāthe,
gelā nagara-vrāje

udila—the rising; *aruṇa*—redness; *pūraba*—eastern; *bhāge*—the horizon; *dvija-maṇi*—the jewel of the twice-born; *gorā*—Gaura; *amani jāge*—immediately awakens; *bhakata-samūha*—all the devotees; *loiyā sāthe*—taking them along; *gelā*—went; *nagara-vrāje*—wandering throughout the towns and villages.

When the rising Sun appeared in the East, the jewel of the twice-born, Gaurasundara, awakened. Taking His devotees with Him, He went all over the countryside's towns and villages.

2

'tāthaī tāthaī' bājala khol,
ghana ghana tāhe jhājera rol,
preme ḍhala ḍhala soṇāra aṅga,
caraṇe nūpura bāje

'tāthaī tāthaī'—making the sound *tāthaī tāthaī*; *bājala khola*—the *mṛdaṅga* (clay drums) resounded; *ghana ghana*—played in time; *tāhe*—in that *kīrtana*; *jhājera*—of the large metal cymbals; *rola*—the tumult; *preme*—in ecstatic love; *ḍhala ḍhala*—slightly trembled; *soṇāra aṅga*—the golden form of Gaurāṅga; *caraṇe*—upon His feet; *nūpura bāje*—the anklebells jingled.

While the devotees played the *mṛdaṅga,* and the cymbals chimed in time, Gaurāṅga's shimmering golden features danced, and His anklebells jingled.

3

mukunda mādhava yādava hari,
balena bala re vadana bhari',
miche nida-vaśe gela re rāti,
divasa śarīra-sāje

mukunda mādhava yādava hari—with the holy names, "Mukunda!" "Mādhava!" "Yādava!" and "Hari!"; *balena*—chanting; *bala re*—oh sing!; *vadana bhari*'—filling your mouths; *miche*—uselessly; *nida-vaśe*—under the control of sleep; *gela*—have spent; *re*—O!; *rāti*—the nights; *divasa*—the days; *śarīra-sāje*—in decorating your bodies.

They would announce to the still sleeping people, "Chant the holy names "Mukunda," "Mādhava," "Yadava" and "Hari," and fill your mouths with these vibrations. You spend your nights uselessly sleeping and your days decorating your bodies!"

4

emana durlabha mānava-deha,
pāiyā ki kara bhāva nā keha,
ebe nā bhajile yaśodā-suta,
carame paribe lāje

emana—this; *durlabha*—rare; *mānava-deha*—human body; *pāiyā*—having achieved; *ki* kara—what are you doing?; *bhava nā keha*—you have not thought about it at all; *ebe*—now; *nā bhajile*—you do not worship; *yaśodā-suta*—the darling of mother Yaśodā; *carame*—ultimately; *paribe*—you will fall (die); *lāje*—in shame.

"You have achieved such a rare human body, but you do not care for this gift. You do not worship the darling of Yaśodā, and slowly fall through your last moments to death."

5

udita tapana hoile asta,
dina gela bali' hoibe byasta,
tabe kena ebe alasa haya,
nā bhaja hṛdaya-rāje

udita—arisen; *tapana*—the Sun; *hoile asta*—having set; *dina gela*—the day passes; *bali'*—saying; *hoibe byasta*—will be lost; *tabe kena*—then why; *ebe*—now; *alasa haya*—you remain idle; *nā bhaja*—you do not worship; *hṛdaya-rāje*—the Lord of the heart.

"With every rising and setting of the Sun, a day passes and is lost. Then, why do you remain idle and not serve the Lord of the heart?"

6

jīvana anitya jānaha sāra,
tāhe nānā-vidha vipada-bhāra,
nāmāśraya kari' yatane tumi,
thākaha āpana kāje

jīvana—life; *anitya*—is temporary; *jānaha sāra*—please understand this essential fact; *tāhe*—in that; *nānā-vidha*—various kinds; *vipada-bhāra*—filled with miseries; *nāmāśraya kari'*—taking shelter of the holy name; *yatane*—carefully; *tumi*—you; *thākaha*—remain always engaged; *āpana kāje*—in His service as your own eternal occupation.

"This temporary life is full of various miseries. Take shelter of the holy name as your only occupation."

7

jīvera kalyāna-sādhana-kāma,
jagate āsi' e madhura nāma,
avidyā-timira-tapana-rūpe,
hṛd-gagane virāje

jīvera—of all living entities; *kalyāṇa-sādhana-kāma*—desiring to bless; *jagate asi'*—in the material universe; *e*—this; *madhura nāma*—sweet name of Kṛṣṇa; *avidyā-timira*—the darkness of ignorance; *tapana-rūpe*—like the Sun; *hṛd-gagane*—in the sky of the heart; *virāje*—shines.

To penetrate the darkness of ignorance and bless everyone's heart, the holy name has risen like the shining Sun.

8

kṛṣṇa-nāma-sudhā kariyā pāna,
jurāo bhakativinoda-prāṇa,
nāma vinā kichu nāhika āra,
caudda-bhuvana-mājhe

kṛṣṇa-nāma-sudhā—the pure nectar of the holy name of Kṛṣṇa; *kariyā pāna*—drinking; *jurāo*—thus satisfy; *bhakativinoda-prāṇa*—the soul of Bhaktivinoda; *nāma vinā*—except for the holy name; *kichu nāhika āra*—there is nothing else; *caudda-bhuvana-mājhe*—within the fourteen worlds.

Drink the pure nectar of the holy name. There is nothing but the name to be had in the fourteen worlds. It has filled the soul of Bhaktivinoda.

Jīv jāgo

(Aruṇodaya-kīrtana II)

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura

1

jīv jāgo jīv jāgo, gauracānda bole
kata nidrā yāo māyā-piśācīra kole

jīv jāgo—wake up, sleeping soul!; *jīv jāgo*—wake up, sleeping soul!; *gauracānda bole*—Gauracandra (the Golden Moon) calls; *kata nidrā yāo*—how long are you sleeping?; *māyā-pīśācīra*—of the witch *Māyā*; *kole*—in the lap.

Gauracandra is calling, "Wake up, sleeping soul! Wake up, sleeping soul! How long will you sleep in the lap of the witch called Māyā?"

2

bhajiba baliyā ese saṁsāra-bhitare
bhuliyā rahile tumi avidyāra bhare

bhajiba—I will certainly worship the Lord; *baliyā*—saying; *ese*—having come; *saṁsāra-bhitare*—into the material world; *bhuliyā*—having forgotten; *rahile tumi*—you have remained; *avidyāra bhare*—in the darkness of ignorance.

"When you came to this world you promised to worship the Lord. But now You have forgotten the way of devotional service and are lost in the world of birth and death."

3

tomāre laite āmi hoinu avatāra
āmi vinā bandhu āra ke āche tomāra

tomāre laite—to reclaim you; *āmi*—I; *hoinu avatāra*—have descended as an incarnation; *āmi vinā*—except for Myself; *bandhu āra*—another friend; *ke āche*—who is?; *tomāra*—yours.

"I have descended just to save you. Except for Myself, who is your friend in this world?"

4

enechi auṣadhi māyā nāśibāra lāgi'
hari-nāma mahā-mantra lao tumi māgi'

enechi—I have brought; *auṣadhi*—the medicine; *māyā*—illusion of *Māyā*; *nāśibāra lāgi'*—for destroying; *hari-nāma mahā-mantra*—the great chant of the names of Hari; *lao*—please take it; *tumi*—you; *māgi'*—begging.

"I have brought the medicine that will cure the disease of illusion from which you are suffering. Take this mahā-mantra of the holy names of Hari! Just ask for it!"

5

bhakativinoda prabhu-caraṇe pariyā
sei hari-nāma-mantra loila māgiyā

bhakativinoda—Bhaktivinoda; *prabhu-caraṇe*—at the lotus feet of Lord Gaurāṅga; *pariyā*—falling; *sei hari-nāma-mantra*—that Hari-*nāma-mantra*; *loila*—he received; *māgiyā*—after begging.

After falling at the feet of the Lord and begging for it, Bhaktivinoda received the mahā-mantra.

Song 2

My Tale of Misery

(An adaptation of Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's *Śuno mora duḥkhera kāhinī)*





1

O Lord, hear the tale of my miserable life, a sad and sorrowful story:
I drank the poison of worldliness, mistaking it for nectar’s glory.
The Sun is setting on my life's horizon, casting its fading glow;
in this misery, I seek Your shelter, O Lord, save me from gloom and woe.



2

My childhood spent in play, my youth in fruitless study,
no sense of right or wrong, my aim—only vain glory.
Under household's spell material joys were the goal,
children and friends multiplied—attachment overshadowed my soul.



3

Soon old age arrived and joy departed, sensual pleasures flee,
tormented by illness, I'm troubled and weak, O Lord, hear my plea.
Senses feeble, body worn out, my strength of mind in decline,
all prospects gone, my spirits downcast, my only hope the divine.



4

I have no knowledge, no sense, no love or devotion in my heart.
What help is there for me now? Will darkness ever depart?
Only You, Patita-bandhu, friend of the fallen and lowest,
can raise me to Your lotus feet and bathe me in Your foot dust.



5

If You judge me now, a wretched soul, no goodness will You find;
judge me not, be merciful to this lowly servant, be kind.
Let me drink the honey of Your fragrant lotus feet,
and thereby deliver this Bhaktivinoda by Your grace, divine and sweet.

Commentary

This is one of Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's "confessional songs," where he reflects deeply on the frailties of the human condition and his own perceived shortcomings. Other notable examples are the songs *Āmara jīvana* (My Life) and *Gopīnātha* (Lord of the Cowherd Girls), which exemplify his humility and deep devotion.

In *My Tale of Misery*, he comes before the Lord and recounts what he considers his "miserable life." He compares worldly enjoyment to drinking poison, a metaphor also found in his song *Anādi karama-phale* and in Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura's song *Hari! Hari! biphale*, which are included in this collection under the titles *The Ocean of Nescience* and *A Wasted Birth,* respectively.

Worldly Enjoyment: Poison in Disguise

The conditioned soul, driven by passionate desires, seeks to gratify the senses by coming into contact with various enjoyable objects: the eyes with beautiful forms, the ears with melodious sounds, the nose with delightful fragrances, the tongue with delicious tastes, and the skin with pleasant textures, especially another person's soft skin. In the beginning, such contact produces pleasurable feelings that, according to the *Bhagavad-gītā* (18.38), seem like *amṛta* (sweet nectar). However, in the end, such pleasures often turn into bitter poison. This happens because these pleasures are short-lived, and repeated indulgence leads to saturation, transforming joy into disgust or even pain. This is especially true for pleasures derived from eating, drinking, or sexual indulgence.

There is another aspect to consider. In his *Prema-bhakti-candrikā*, Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura compares the paths of fruitive activities *(karma)* and philosophical speculation *(jñāna)* to pots of poison *(karma-kāṇḍa, jñāna-kāṇḍa, kevala viṣera bhāṇḍa)*. He warns that

anyone who mistakes this poison for nectar and drinks it will experience spiritual death, continuing to transmigrate from one material body to another and eating all kinds of abominable things (*amṛta baliyā yebā khāya, nānā yoni sadā phire*). To be born and die repeatedly is not a happy experience. Therefore, a sane person is advised to avoid the temptation of nectar-like poison, as it will keep them trapped in the cycle of repeated births and deaths.

The Sunset of Life

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura reflects on the arrival of old age, lamenting that his life is now in its twilight years: "The Sun is setting on my life's horizon, casting its fading glow." This imagery emphasizes the inevitable decline that comes with time, reminding us that youth and vitality are fleeting. When one is young, this gloomy scenario seems far off, but time is implacable. Sooner or later, everyone's life-sun will set. The daily movements of the Sun in the sky mirror the greater cycle of the life-sun. Early morning can be compared to infancy, late morning to youth, noon to adulthood, afternoon to maturity, and late afternoon to old age. Finally, when the sun of one's life disappears behind the horizon and night falls, the time of death has arrived. In the Second Canto of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (2.3.17), we find the following verse:

> Both by rising and by setting, the Sun decreases the duration of life of everyone, except one who utilizes the time by discussing topics of the all-good Personality of Godhead.

This rising and setting of the Sun refers to the Sun's small, daily cycle which occurs around 30,000 times in an average human life. In his purport to this verse, Śrīla Prabhupāda emphasizes the crucial importance of using human life for self-realization which breaks the cycle of perpetual births in the material world and leads to eternal life by rekindling our relationship with the Supreme Lord through

devotional service. Time passes quickly and relentlessly and should therefore be used wisely for spiritual pursuits, as even a moment wasted cannot be redeemed for any amount of gold. If used wisely, however, the time allotted to a human life can open the path of *bhakti-yoga*, allowing us to connect with the permanent source of happiness: Kṛṣṇa, the reservoir of all pleasure. Hearing from a pure devotee about topics of the all-good Personality of Godhead is the key to that connection. Any *jīva* who takes to the path of *bhakti* and fully engages in devotional service to the Lord, will be able to conquer death.

Old age and Disease as Catalysts

Receiving the transcendental sound of *kṛṣṇa-kathā* through the ears is compared to receiving an injection of a highly potent drug that affects the entire body. As Śrīla Prabhupāda says in the purport to the verse quoted above:

> Aural realization of the transcendental messages implies total realization, just as fructification of one part of a tree implies fructification of all other parts. This realization for a moment in the association of pure devotees like Śukadeva Gosvāmī prepares one's complete life for eternity. And thus the Sun fails to rob the pure devotee of his duration of life, inasmuch as he is constantly busy in the devotional service of the Lord, purifying his existence. Death is a symptom of the material infection of the eternal living being; only due to material infection is the eternal living entity subjected to the law of birth, death, old age and disease.

In other words, death affects only bodies made from matter, but we can become free from such bodies and thus deathless by hearing and chanting the transcendental messages of the Lord. If our consciousness is purified by being in touch with the Supreme Spirit,

after leaving the present body, we will not need to accept another material body but will be assured a spiritual body suitable for eternal life in association with the Lord. When viewed spiritually, even old age and disease can serve as catalysts for seeking eternal life, pushing us to focus on the path of self-realization.

A Typical Life's Journey

The next two stanzas describe the typical life journey of an average human being. As a child, most of the time is spent in play. As one grows older, the focus shifts to education, and later the main interest becomes enjoying family life surrounded by spouse, children, relatives, and friends. During all these stages of life, little thought, if any, is given to the real purpose of human life—self-realization. Oblivious to the passage of time, the conditioned soul dreams of living forever, imagining a fountain of eternal youth. A modern example is seen among the most successful entrepreneurs in Silicon Valley. Encouraged by advances in biotechnology, genetics, and artificial intelligence, tech billionaires began investing heavily in anti-aging and longevity research in the early 2000s, with total investments reaching US$ 10 billion annually by 2021. Yet, inevitably, Kālakanyā—the daughter of Time, also known as Jarā (Old Age)—continues to knock at everyone's door, proposing union, and no one, regardless of wealth or health, can refuse her advances.

Overcoming Fear

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura presents himself as someone targeted by Jarā, who seeks him as a suitable spouse. He laments that old age diminishes his ability to enjoy sensual pleasures, as the senses grow feeble, the body wears out, and even the mind may deteriorate due to diseases like Alzheimer's or dementia.

In the Fourth Canto of the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, in connection with the story of King Purañjana, Prabhupāda states that the daughter of Time cannot overcome a Vaiṣṇava. However, this does not imply that a Vaiṣṇava*'s* body does not grow old. He gives the example of Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī, who wrote *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* when he was very old, as well as Rūpa Gosvāmī and Sanātana Gosvāmī who began their spiritual lives at an advanced age, after retiring from their occupations and family responsibilities. The prime example for us, of course, is Śrīla Prabhupāda himself. He founded ISKCON at the age of 70 and then traveled and preached continuously for eleven years while simultaneously translating volume after volume of Vaiṣṇava literature. Old age and disease could not stop him; thus we see him dictating purports to the Tenth Canto of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* in an almost inaudible voice while lying on his deathbed. From an external point of view, his situation may have resembled that of any old and diseased man, but there is a gulf of difference, as Prabhupāda explains in connection with King Purañjana being attacked by old age (SB 4.27.24):

> Because a devotee rigidly follows the instructions of Nārada Muni, he has no fear of old age, disease or death. Apparently a devotee may grow old, but he is not subjected to the symptoms of defeat experienced by a common man in old age. Consequently, old age does not make a devotee fearful of death, as a common man is fearful of death. When *jarā*, or old age, takes shelter of a devotee, Kālakanyā diminishes the devotee's fear. A devotee knows that after death he is going back home, back to Godhead; therefore he has no fear of death. Thus instead of depressing a devotee, advanced age helps him become fearless and thus happy.

The Mystic Power of the Lord's Lotus Feet

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura ends his song with a heartfelt plea, humbly asking the Lord to grant him shelter at His lotus feet. The significance of seeking refuge at the Lord's feet is a recurring theme in the writings of the previous *ācāryas*. We will elaborate on this topic in more detail in the commentary on the song *Free From Fear*.

In conclusion, here is a beautiful quote from the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (2.8.6) about the mystic power of the Lord's lotus feet.

> A pure devotee of the Lord whose heart has once been cleansed by the process of devotional service never relinquishes the lotus feet of Lord Kṛṣṇa, for they fully satisfy him, as a traveler is satisfied at home after a troubled journey.

The Original Song

Śuna mora duḥkhera kāhinī

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura

1

(prabhu he!) śuna mora duḥkhera kāhinī
viṣaya-halāhala, sudhā-bhāne piyaluṅ,
āva avasāna dina-maṇi

(prabhu he!)—O Lord; *śuna*—please hear; *mora*—my; *duḥkhera*—of misery; *kāhinī*—tale; *viṣaya-halāhala*—the poison of worldliness; *sudhā-bhāne*—thinking it to be nectar; *piyaluṅ*—I drank; *āva*—going down; *avasāna*—the end (of my life); *dina-maṇi*—the Sun.

O Lord! Please hear the tale of my miserable life. I drank the deadly poison of worldliness, pretending it was nectar, and now the Sun is setting on the horizon of my life.

2

khelā-rase śaiśava, poḍhaite kaiśora,
gowāoluṅ, nā bhela viveka
bhoga-baśe yauvane, ghara pāti' basiluṅ,
suta-mita bāḍhala aneka

khelā-rase—enjoying to play; *śaiśava*—in childhood; *porhaite*—academic pursuits; *kaiśora*—youth; *gowāoluṅ*—arose; *nā*—not; *bhela*—sense of discrimination; *viveka*—the intelligence; *bhoga-baśe*—settled down for enjoyment; *yauvane*—young manhood; *ghara*—a household; *pāti'*—maintaining; *basiluṅ*—quickly; *suta-mita*—children and friends; *bāḍhala*—multiplied; *aneka*—many.

I spent my childhood in play, my youth in academic pursuit, and in me there arose no sense of discrimination. In young manhood I set up a household and settled down to the spell of material enjoyment while my children and friends quickly multiplied.

3

vṛddha-kāla āola, saba sukha bhāgala,
pīrā-baśe hoinu kātara
sarvendriya durbala, kṣīna kalevara,
bhogā-bhāve duḥkhita antara

vṛddha-kāla—old age; *āola*—arrived; *saba*—all; *sukha*—happiness; *bhāgala*—departed; *pīrā-baśe*—subjected to the torments of disease; *hainu*—became; *kātara*—troubled and weak; *sarvendriya*—all my senses; *durbala*—feeble; *kṣīna*—exhausted; *kalevara*—my body; *bhogā-bhāve*—the spirit of enjoyment; *duḥkhita*—unhappy; *antara*—within.

Old age soon arrived, and all joys consequently departed. Subjected to the torments of disease, I am troubled and weak. All my senses are feeble now, my body is racked and exhausted, and my spirits are downcast in the absence of former sense pleasures.

4

jñāna-lava-hīna, bhakti-rase vañchita,
āra mora ki habe upāya
patita-bandhu, tuhuṅ, patitādhama hāma,
kṛpāya uṭhāo tava pāya

jñāna—knowledge; *lava*—a particle; *hīna*—without; *bhakti-rase*—the mellow of devotion; *vañchita*—desired object; *āra*—other; *mora*—my; *ki*—what; *habe*—there will be; *upāya*—way; *patita-bandhu*—friend of the fallen; *tuhuṅ*—You; *patita-*

adhama—fallen and the lowest; *hāma*—I; *kṛpāya*—by Your mercy; *uṭhāo*—please lift me to; *tava*—Your; *pāya*—obtain.

Devoid of even a particle of enlightenment, cheated of the mellows of devotion—what help is there for me now? O Lord, You are the friend of the fallen. I am certainly fallen, the lowest of men. Please, therefore, by Your mercy, lift me to Your lotus feet.

5

vicārite ābahi, guna nāhi pāobi,
kṛpā kara, chorata vicāra
tava pada-paṅkaja-sīdhu pibāoto,
bhakativinoda kara pāra

vicārite—while judging; *ābahi*—You will find; *guna*—qualities; *nāhi*—no; *pāobi*—You will find; *kṛpā kara*—have mercy; *chorata*—do not make; *vicāra*—judgement; *tava*—Your; *pada-paṅkaja*—lotus feet; *sīdhu*—the honey; *pibāoto*—cause me to drink; *bhakativinoda*—Bhaktivinoda; *kara*—make; *pāra*—deliverance.

Were You to judge me now, You would find no good qualities. Have mercy and judge me not. Cause me to drink the honey of Your lotus feet and thereby deliver this Bhaktivinoda.

Song 3

Burning Hot Sand

(An adaptation of Vidyapati's *Tātala Saikate*)





1a

In a world where souls lose their way,
I forgot you, O Lord, adrift in dismay.



1b

Lovers, children and friends on my mind.
Their allure, though fleeting, made me blind.



2a
Like a drop of water on burning hot sand,
worldly delights quickly came to an end.



2b

In this misery, I turn to You in despair,
O Mādhava, I don’t find relief anywhere.



3

You’re the three worlds‘ savior true,
with mercy You embrace the souls askew.
In You alone my hope shall reside,
my well-wishing friend and trusted guide.



4

In a half-alive state, I wandered astray,
living in disgrace, day after day.
As a frivolous child, I wasted my time,
as a useless old man, I lived in decline.

Like a drop of water on burning hot sand,
worldly delights quickly come to an end.



5

Romantic adventures, young love's sweet kiss,
enchanted my heart with delusory bliss.
When will I find the path to embrace
and worship You, O Lord, face to face?



6

Brahmās come and go in endless succession,
yet You are eternal, no beginning or cessation.
From You they arise, to You they return,
like ocean waves in cycles churn.

Like a drop of water on burning hot sand,
worldly delights quickly come to an end.



7

Vidyāpati admits his fear of death,
who’s awaiting him with its ice-cold breath.
No shelter but You, O Lord Supreme,
I surrender my soul for You to redeem.



8

The burden to free me from worldly strife
rests now with You, O bestower of life.
In Your lotus hands lies my deliverance
from this transient world to transcendence.



9

Like a drop of water on burning hot sand,
worldly delights quickly come to an end.
In this misery, I turn to You in despair,
O Mādhava, I don't find relief anywhere.

In this misery, I turn to You in despair,
O Mādhava, there is no other relief anywhere.
O Mādhava, I surrender myself to Your care.

Commentary

While Vidyāpati is especially revered for composing songs about the pastimes of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, it is noteworthy that Śrīla Prabhupāda did not comment on any of Vidyāpati's songs depicting Kṛṣṇa's pastimes. Instead, he emphasized that such songs are intended for liberated souls, those free from material desires. However, he frequently spoke about *Tatala saikate*, as this song explores the conditioned soul's frustrating experience—symbolized by the search for water in the desert-like material world, where one continually hopes but fails to find happiness. This song, therefore, provides valuable lessons to be learned.

The Illusion of Worldly Happiness

Vidyāpati begins his song by depicting how the *jīva*, allured by the promise of quenching its thirst for love and joy in the company of partners, family members, and friends, wanders from body to body, from planet to planet, and even from universe to universe. Throughout this journey, the *jīva* remains in complete forgetfulness of its true nature and its loving relationship with the Supreme Lord.

Reflecting on this deplorable condition, Vidyāpati concludes that worldly delights dissipate swiftly, much like a drop of water on hot sand. Śrīla Prabhupāda comments on this theme in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (4.25.12) in connection with the story of King Purañjana, who symbolizes the *jīva* trapped in the material world:

> Śrīla Vidyāpati, a great Vaiṣṇava poet, has sung:
>
> *tātala saikate, vāri-bindu-sama,*
> *suta-mita-ramaṇī-samāje*
>
> Material sense gratification, with society, friendship and love, is herein compared to a drop of water falling on a desert. A

> desert requires oceans of water to satisfy it, and if only a drop of water is supplied, what is its use? Similarly, the living entity is part and parcel of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, who, as stated in the *Vedānta-sūtra,* is *ānanda-mayo 'bhyāsāt*, full of enjoyment. Being part and parcel of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, the living entity is also seeking complete enjoyment. However, complete enjoyment cannot be achieved separate from the Supreme Personality of Godhead. In his wanderings in the different species of life, the living entity may taste some type of enjoyment in one body or another, but full enjoyment of the senses cannot be obtained in any material body. Thus Purañjana, the living entity, wanders in different types of bodies, but everywhere meets frustration in his attempt to enjoy. In other words, the spiritual spark covered by matter cannot fully enjoy the senses in any circumstance in material life.

The Forest of Enjoyment

In the Fifth Canto of the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam,* there is a description of the "Forest of Enjoyment" which symbolizes the material world where the living entities search for different pleasurable objects. Prabhupāda comments on this metaphor (SB 5.13.7):

> In the material forest, the conditioned soul sometimes contemplates great castles and skyscrapers, and he wastes his energy on such things, hoping to live in them very peacefully with his family forever. However, the laws of nature do not allow this. When he enters such castles, he temporarily thinks that he is very happy, even though his happiness is impermanent. His happiness may last for a few years, but because the owner of the castle has to leave the castle at the time of death, everything is eventually lost.

This is the way of worldly transactions. Such happiness is described by Vidyāpati as the happiness one derives upon getting a drop of water in the desert. The desert is heated by scorching sunshine, and if we want to reduce the desert temperature, we need huge amounts of water—millions and millions of gallons. What effect will one drop have? Water certainly has value, but one drop of water cannot reduce the heat of the desert. In this material world everyone is ambitious, but the heat is very scorching. What will an imaginary castle in the air do to help? Śrīla Vidyāpati has therefore sung: *tāṭala saikate, vāri-bindu-sama, suta-mita-ramaṇi-samāje*. The happiness of family life, friends and society is compared to a drop of water in the scorching desert. The entire material world is busy trying to attain happiness because happiness is the prerogative of the living being. Unfortunately, due to falling in contact with the material world, the living entity simply struggles for existence. Even if one becomes happy for a while, a very powerful enemy may plunder everything. There are many instances in which big businessmen suddenly become paupers in the street. Yet the nature of material existence is such that foolish people are attracted to these transactions and they forget the real business of self-realization.

Māyā's Alluring Power

Piercing through the glamorous veil of illusion is not an easy task because *māyā*'s covering potency, *āvaraṇātmikā-śakti*, is so strong that the living entity is satisfied even in abominable conditions. This can be observed in the case of hogs and worms who live in a repulsive condition, surrounded by filth and stool, but feel satisfied. Human beings have the discriminatory power to understand that they are suffering, and this realization may prompt them to look for a solution.

Gradually, after numerous failed attempts, the may finally come to realize the truth of Kṛṣṇa's words in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (7.14):

> This divine energy of Mine, consisting of the three modes of material nature, is difficult to overcome. But those who have surrendered unto Me can easily cross beyond it.

Vidyāpati has reached this crucial point and therefore says: "In this misery, I turn to You in despair, O Mādhava, I don't find relief anywhere." Kṛṣṇa is known as Jagatāraṇa, the savior of the universe, and Dīnadayāmaya, the merciful benefactor of the helpless. As soon as the *jīva* turns to Him, He is ready to offer all support.

Next, Vidyāpati describes the life of a common man, as we also see Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura do in some of his songs. He begins by referring to himself as "half-alive," a term that conveys a sense of incompleteness, a feeling of emptiness, and a lack of purpose or joy. Actually, if it were not for the presence of the spirit soul, which is the living force, our body—being a lump of dead matter—would not move. In that sense, a person who is not conscious of their true identity as a spiritual entity is not fully alive.

The Various Stages of Life

Vidyāpati then gives a brief description of the three main stages of human life: childhood and youth, adulthood, and old age. From a spiritual point of view, each period is wasted in activities that do not aim at developing higher consciousness, which would ultimately lead to liberation from the cycle of repeated birth and death. When one is young, the focus is on having a good time through play or other diversions. Later comes the time of romance, courtship, marriage and family life. Finally, in the twilight of life, one is left with only nostalgia and trivial pastimes like playing golf or cards, and watching TV, as old age strips a person of vitality, leaving them practically incapable of even ordinary tasks.

The Big Picture

In the fourth stanza, Vidyāpati looks at the "big picture," the supra-cosmic cycle of life wherein countless universes with their respective Brahmās are generated by Mahā-Viṣṇu and again absorbed by Him. He compares this process to the endless churning of ocean waves. In the *Bhagavad-gītā* (8.19), Kṛṣṇa describes a smaller cycle of one day in Brahmā's life which corresponds to 1,000 yuga cycles, or 4,320,000,000 years:

> Again and again, when Brahmā's day arrives, all living entities come into being, and with the arrival of Brahmā's night they are helplessly annihilated.

This partial cosmic annihilation happens 36,500 times during Brahmā's life of 100 years. At the end of his life, Brahmā himself dies, unless he is a pure devotee who enters the spiritual sky.

Facing Death

Śeṣa śamana-bhaya, when the end of life is near, there is fear of death for the ordinary conditioned soul. Nobody wants to die, yet nobody will live. That is the bleak reality and true nature of the material world which is known as *martya-loka*, the realm of death. Only a devotee who has taken complete shelter of the lotus feet of the Supreme Lord is not at all afraid of death. The shining example is Mahārāja Parīkṣit who was cursed to die within seven days but became free from all fear by surrendering to the lotus feet of the Lord upon hearing the following instruction from his spiritual master, Śukadeva Gosvāmī:

> At the last stage of one's life, one should be bold enough not to be afraid of death. But one must cut off all attachment to the material body and everything pertaining to it and all desires thereof.

In the conclusion of his song, Vidyāpati conveys the realization that true relief lies in fully surrendering to the Lord, trusting His shelter as the only salvation from this transient world.

Vidyāpati's Timeless Message

Vidyāpati's *Tatala Saikate* offers a profound message that resonates even today: the futility of seeking happiness in the material world and the ultimate need to surrender to the Lord for true fulfillment.

Though Śrīla Prabhupāda recorded *Tatala Saikate* only once, partially, he referenced this song more than 50 times in his books and lectures. Vidyāpati's words are important and meaningful, because they remind us of our precarious position in this world—an essential realization for progress in spiritual life.

The Original Song

Tātala saikate

Vidyāpati Ṭhākura

1

tātala saikate, vāri-bindu-sama,
suta-mita-ramaṇī-samāje
tohe visari mana, tāhe samarpala,
aba majhu haba kona kāje

tātala—burned; *saikate*—on the sandy beach; *vāri-bindu-sama*—like a drop of water; *suta-mita-ramaṇī*—children, friends, and women; *samāje*—in the association; *tohe visari*—forgetting You; *mana*—my mind; *tāhe*—unto them; *samarpala*—I have offered; *aba*—now; *majhu*—my; *haba*—will be; *kona kāje*—by what action (to remedy the situation).

O Lord, completely forgetting You, I have offered my mind unto the society of women, children, and friends—but this experience has been just like offering a

drop of water unto the burning hot sands of the beach. How can I possibly be relieved of this great misery?

2

mādhava he! hāma pariṇām nirāśā
tuhuṅ jaga-tāraṇa, dīna dayā-maya,
ataye tohāri viśoyāsā

mādhava—O Lord Mādhava!; *hāma*—I; *pariṇām*—in consequence; *nirāśā*—despondent; *tuhuṅ*—You; *jaga-tāraṇa*—savior of the universe; *dīna dayā-maya*—merciful to the helpless; *ataye*—therefore; *tohāri*—in You; *viśoyāsā*—my only hope.

O Mādhava! As a consequence, I am rendered totally despondent. You are the savior of the universe, and are merciful to the helpless souls. Therefore I place my hope only in You.

3

ādha janama hāma, ninde goṅāyaluṅ,
jarā śiśu koto-dina gelā
nidhuvane ramaṇī, rasa-raṅge mātala,
tohe bhajabo kona belā

ādha janama—half alive; *hāma*—I; *ninde*—in disrepute; *goṅāyaluṅ*—I have spent; *jarā*—in old age; *śiśu*—as a child; *koto dina*—so many days; *gelā*—have passed; *nidhuvane*—in romantic adventures; *ramaṇī rasa-raṅge*—in the pleasure of sporting with women; *mātala*—I have been intoxicated; *tohe bhajabo*—I will worship You; *kona belā*—at what opportunity.

Wandering about in a half-alive condition, I spent my life in utter disgrace. Uncountable days passed as a frivolous child and a useless old man. I have been intoxicated by the pleasure of sharing romantic adventures with beautiful young women. When will I ever get a chance to worship You?

4

koto caturānana, mari mari jāota,
na tuyā ādi avasānā
tohe janami puna, tohe samāota,
sāgara-laharī samānā

koto—how many; *catura-ānana*—four-faced Brahmās; *mari mari jāota*—have died one after another; *na*—not; *tuyā*—Your; *ādi avasānā*—beginning or end; *tohe*—in You; *janami*—they take birth; *puna*—and then; *tohe*—in You; *samāota*—they are absorbed; *sāgara-laharī*—the waves of the ocean; *samānā*—like.

Numberless Brahmās have died one after another, whereas You are without beginning or end. All of them take birth from You and are again absorbed into You, just like waves in the ocean.

5

bhaṇaye vidyāpati, śeṣa śamana-bhaya,
tuyā vinā gati nāhi ārā
ādi-anādika, nātha kahāyasi,
bhava-tāraṇa bhāra tohārā

bhaṇaye vidyāpati—Vidyāpati narrates; *śeṣa*—at the end of his life; *śamana-bhaya*—fear of Yamarāja; *tuyā vinā*—other than You; *gati*—shelter; *nāhi ārā*—there is no other; *ādi-anādika*—beginning and beginningless; *nātha*—Lord; *kahāyasi*—You are called; *bhava-tāraṇa bhāra*—the responsibility of deliverance from the material world; *tohārā*—is Yours.

Vidyāpati confesses that now, at the end of his life, he is fearful of death. O Lord! There is no shelter other than You. You will always remain celebrated as being the Lord of both the beginning and the beginningless. Now the responsibility for my deliverance from the material world is entirely Yours.

Song 4

A Wasted Birth

(An adaptation of Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura's *Hari hari! biphale*)





1

Hari! Hari! I've wasted my human birth,
missed a rare chance, blinded by worldly mirth.
Hari! Hari! I've squandered a precious life,
quibbling over petty trifles, always immersed in strife.

To worship Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa never came to my feeble mind,
thus knowingly drinking poison, only misery did I find.

Hari! Hari! I've wasted my human birth,
I squandered a precious life.



2

Divine love’s treasure has descended from Goloka above,
as the chanting of Hari's names imbued with devotional love.
Yet why does my heart feel no attraction,
when devotees chant in blissful absorption?



3

Day and night, the poison of worldliness
burns my heart, causing endless distress.
Still, I do not embrace the means to find
the nectar to soothe my troubled mind.



Hari! Hari! I've wasted my human birth,
missed a rare chance, blinded by worldly mirth.
Hari! Hari! I've squandered a precious life,
O Lord, let my love for You in my heart revive.

4

Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma, the king of Vraja's pride,
became the son of Śacī, with Nitāi by His side.
The holy name saved all souls, even the wretched and low,
Jagāi and Mādhāi are witnesses, being relieved of all sorrow.



5

Alas, O my Lord, son of Nanda so dear,
with Vṛṣabhānu's daughter, Rādhā, standing near.
Have mercy on this destitute soul, I pray,
hold me close to You, don’t push me away.

Hari! Hari! I’ve wasted my human birth,
missed a rare chance, blinded by worldly mirth.
Hari! Hari! I’ve squandered a precious life,
quibbling over petty trifles, always immersed in strife.



To worship Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa never came to my feeble mind,
thus knowingly drinking poison, only misery did I find.

Hari! Hari! I've wasted my human birth,
I squandered a precious life.

6

Narottama dāsa pleads, O Lord, it is true,
who is my beloved now except for You?
At Your reddish lotus feet my refuge I will find,
You alone, O Kṛṣṇa, dwell forever in my mind.

Commentary

Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura expresses in this song the sentiments of a devotee who looks back at their life and realizes that they have not taken advantage of the great gift of being born as a human being. Human life is rare. There are 8,400,000 species, and only 400,000 are human. Among these, only a few are interested in self-realization. Nevertheless, the human form of life offers the opportunity to attain the highest level of consciousness. Therefore, letting this opportunity pass is considered a tremendous loss. To come to the human level of existence, the soul must transmigrate through the other 8,000,000 species. During that journey, there is no possibility for self-realization because other life forms do not offer this opportunity due to their restricted consciousness. Consciousness is compared to a flower that gradually opens in the evolutionary process and reaches full bloom in the human form of life. If we let this opportunity pass, it may take many lifetimes before we attain another human body and with it the chance to understand who we are, why we are in this world, and what the purpose of life is.

The Fleeting Nature of Material Pleasures

The main reason why human beings miss the opportunity for self-realization is their attraction to and absorption in material objects that have nothing to do with the real self but provide some pleasure to the external covering of the self—the gross and subtle material body. However, the joy that comes from the contact of the senses with their objects—particularly in the form of food, drink, and touching soft skin—is ephemeral. Therefore, Kṛṣṇa advises in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (5.22):

> An intelligent person does not take part in the sources of misery, which arise from contact with the material senses. O

> son of Kuntī, such pleasures have a beginning and an end, and so the wise man does not delight in them.

Although one may accept this statement as true, putting it into practice is not easy.

Faith, Regret, and the Hope of Devotion

Over the course of hundreds or even thousands of lives, the conditioned soul has developed the deeply ingrained habit of enjoying the senses in myriad ways. Kṛṣṇa acknowledges this fact when He instructs Uddhava in devotional service. In Chapter 20 of the 11th Canto, Verses 27-29, He says that a devotee who has developed some faith is aware that all sense gratification leads to misery, but may still be unable to renounce all sense enjoyment. Kṛṣṇa knows our situation very well, and it is encouraging to see that He does not condemn us but simply asks us to continue with our spiritual practice. He tells Uddhava:

> My devotee should remain happy and worship Me with great faith and conviction. Even though he is sometimes engaged in sense enjoyment, My devotee knows that all sense gratification leads to a miserable result, and he sincerely repents such activities. When an intelligent person constantly engages in worshiping Me through loving devotional service as described by Me, his heart becomes firmly situated in Me. Thus all material desires within the heart are destroyed.

There is hope, undoubtedly, but as we see from these verses, one important ingredient is regret. This sentiment is found in this song and in other songs by Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura, particularly in the song *Akṣepa* (Regret), commonly known as *Gorā Pahū*, which is included in this collection under the title *Treasure of Love*.

Spiritual Suicide: The Poison of Worldliness

In the first stanza of the present song, the author regrets that he has wasted his precious human life, comparing his precarious situation to drinking poison. Drinking poison voluntarily means committing suicide. In Vaiṣṇava philosophy, we speak of suicide in the sense of spiritual suicide, which means that the soul doesn't actually die, being immortal, but may descend to species below the human level and thereby lose the opportunity for attaining spiritual perfection and liberation from the cycle of birth and death. Because such a loss is a tragedy, it is compared to drinking poison.

The Treasure of the Holy Name

The second stanza describes the glories of the holy name, which offers the treasure of divine love, *prema-dhana*. Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu said, *prema pumārtha mahān: Prema*, pure love of God, is the highest goal a human being can attain. But then the author considers his position, which represents the conditioned soul's lamentable situation: The heart feels no attraction for the sweet sound of the holy name. On the contrary, the poison of worldliness is causing a burning sensation. Rūpa Gosvāmī compares this state to the affliction caused by jaundice, which makes sweet things taste bitter. By *māyā's* influence, bitter things often taste sweet in the beginning, but only for a short time, as Kṛṣṇa points out in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (18.38):

> That happiness which is derived from contact of the senses with their objects and which appears like nectar at first but poison at the end is said to be of the nature of passion.

The Remedy: Chanting the Holy Name

Fortunately, Rūpa Gosvāmī also offers the cure for this disease:

> The holy name, character, pastimes, and activities of Kṛṣṇa are all transcendentally sweet like sugar candy. Although the tongue of one afflicted by the jaundice of *avidyā* [ignorance] cannot taste anything sweet, it is wonderful that simply by carefully chanting these sweet names every day, a natural relish awakens within his tongue, and his disease is gradually destroyed at the root. (*Upadeśāmṛta* 7)

In the purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes:

> Although Kṛṣṇa consciousness may not be very palatable for a diseased person, Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī nonetheless advises that if one wants to be cured of the material disease, he must take to it with great care and attention. One begins the treatment by chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra* because by chanting the holy name of the Lord a person in the material condition will be relieved from all misconceptions *(ceto-darpaṇa-mārjanam). Avidyā*, a misconception about one's spiritual identity, provides the foundation for *ahaṅkāra*, or false ego, within the heart.
>
> The real disease is in the heart. If the mind is cleansed and consciousness is purified, a person cannot be harmed by the material disease. To cleanse the mind and heart from all misconceptions, one should take to the chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra*. This is both easy and beneficial. By chanting the holy name of the Lord, one is immediately freed from the blazing fire of material existence.

Deliverance Through the Holy Name

In the next stanza, Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura mentions the deliverance of Jagāi and Madhāi as proof of the transcendental redeeming power of the holy name. Jagāi and Mādhāi were two

notorious brothers from a high-class *brāhmaṇa* family in Navadvīpa, Bengal, known for their sinful activities, including violence and debauchery. They were feared and despised by the town's people due to their criminal and immoral behavior. One day, Nityānanda Prabhu approached them while preaching and urged them to chant the holy name. In response, Mādhāi struck Nityānanda on the head with a clay pot, causing him to bleed. Despite the attack, Nityānanda remained calm, pleading with them again to chant Kṛṣṇa's name.

Jagāi, moved by Nityānanda's remarkable forbearance and compassion, restrained Mādhāi from further violence. When Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu heard of the attack on Nityānanda, He rushed to the scene, ready to invoke His divine chakra weapon to punish the brothers, but Nityānanda intervened, urging forgiveness. He pointed out that Jagāi had protected him from further harm, showing signs of repentance. Hearing this, Lord Caitanya forgave the brothers, and they, filled with remorse, surrendered to Him and began to chant the holy name. By the Lord's mercy, Jagāi and Mādhāi transformed into devoted followers of Kṛṣṇa, abandoning their sinful ways and embracing a life of devotion.

This story is a powerful example of the limitless mercy of Lord Caitanya and Lord Nityānanda, showing that no soul is beyond redemption if they sincerely take shelter of the Lord's holy name.

Conclusion: Surrendering to Kṛṣṇa

Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura concludes his song by acknowledging that only Kṛṣṇa's mercy can save him from the misery of material life. He surrenders fully to the Lord, seeking shelter at His lotus feet. This song serves as a reminder of the preciousness of human life, the dangers of wasting it on temporary pleasures, and the ultimate relief found in the holy name.

Song 4

The Original Song

Hari hari! biphale

Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura

1

hari hari! biphale janama goṅāinu
manuṣya-janama pāiyā, rādhā-kṛṣṇa nā bhajiyā,
jāniyā śuniyā biṣa khāinu

hari hari!—O Lord Hari!; *biphale*—uselessly; *janama goṅāinu*—I have spent my life; *manuṣya-janama pāiyā*—having obtained a human birth; *rādhā-kṛṣṇa*—Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa; *nā bhajiyā*—having not worshiped; *jāniyā śuniyā*—even after knowing and hearing about it; *biṣa khāinu*—I have drunk poison.

O Lord Hari, I have wasted my life. Although I have obtained this rare human birth, I have not served Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, and thus I have knowingly drunk poison.

2

golokera prema-dhana, hari-nāma-saṅkīrtana,
rati nā janmila kene tāya
saṁsāra-viṣānale, dibā-niśi hiyā jvale,
jurāite nā kainu upāya

golokera—of Goloka Vṛndāvana; *prema-dhana*—the treasure of divine love; *hari-nāma-saṅkīrtana*—the congregational chanting of Lord Hari's holy names; *rati*—my attraction; *nā janmila*—never came about; *kene*—why?; *tāya*—for that; *saṁsāra-viṣānale*—in the fire of the poison of worldliness; *dibā-niśi*—day and night; *hiyā jvale*—my heart burns; *jurāite*—to relieve it; *nā kainu upāya*—I have not taken the means.

The treasure of divine love in Goloka Vṛndāvana has descended as the congregational chanting of Lord Hari's holy names. Why did my attraction for that chanting never come about? Day and night my heart burns in the fire of the poison of worldliness, and I have not accepted the means for relieving it.

3

vrajendra-nandana yei, śacī-suta haila sei,
balarāma haila nitāi
dīna-hīna yata chila, hari-nāme uddhārila,
tāra śākṣī jagāi mādhāi

vrajendra-nandana yei—Lord Kṛṣṇa, the son of the King of Vraja; *śacī-suta*—the son of Śacī (Lord Caitanya); *haila*—became; *sei*—He; *balarāma*—Lord Balarāma; *haila*—became; *nitāi*—Lord Nityānanda; *dīna-hīna*—who were lowly and wretched; *yata chila*—all those souls who were; *hari-nāme*—by the holy name; *uddhārila*—were delivered; *tāra śākṣī*—the evidence of that; *jagāi mādhāi*—the two sinners named Jagāi and Mādhāi.

Lord Kṛṣṇa, the son of the King of Vraja, became the son of Śacī, and Balarāma became Nitāi. The holy name delivered all those souls who were lowly and wretched. The two sinners Jagāi and Mādhāi are evidence of this.

4

hā hā prabhu nanda-suta, vṛṣabhānu-sutā-yuta,
karuṇā karaha ei-bāra
narottama-dāsa kaya, nā ṭheliha rāṅgā pāya,
tomā vine ke āche āmāra

hā hā prabhu—alas! alas! O dear Lord!; *nanda-suta*—O son of Nanda!; *vṛṣabhānu-sutā yuta*—accompanied by the daughter of Vṛṣabhānu; *karuṇā karaha*—please be merciful to me; *ei-bāra*—now; *narottama-dāsa kaya*—Narottama dāsa says; *nā ṭheliha*—please do not push me away; *raṅga pāya*—from Your reddish lotus feet; *tomā vine*—except for You; *ke āche āmāra*—who is my beloved?.

O Lord Kṛṣṇa, son of Nanda, accompanied by the daughter of Vṛṣabhānu, please be merciful to me now. Narottama Dāsa says, "O Lord, please do not push me away from Your reddish lotus feet, for who is my beloved except for You?"

Song 5

Cry for Help

(An adaptation of Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura's *Ṭhākura vaiṣṇava-gaṇa*)





1

O Vaishnava Thākura, hear this prayer
from a wretched and fallen soul.
I am drowning, pull me by the hair
from *saṁsāra's* ocean, make me whole.



2

The laws of Providence, a force unyielding,
for *dharma* and *jñāna* they do not care.
They bind me with ropes of *karma* unending,
without spiritual guidance, my life in despair!



3

Like a blind wanderer, my mind goes astray,
discernment lost, no guiding star in sight.
Lust, anger, pride, and illusion lead the way.
In this darkened realm, I yearn for light.



4

The path of devotion my heart disdained,
in harmful company I chose to remain.
Now I seek redemption, a sinner's plea,
embrace me, O master, set my spirit free.



5

Narottama admits, in humility's voice,
"I spurned your shelter, a foolish choice.
Now fear has overtaken my troubled mind,
keep me safe at Your lotus feet, be kind.”



O Vaishnava Thākura, hear this prayer
from a wretched and fallen soul.
I am drowning, pull me by the hair
from *saṁsāra's* ocean, make me whole.

I am drowning, pull me by the hair.
I am drowning, pull me by the hair.

Commentary

Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura's prayer *Cry for Help* forms part of his poetry collection *Prārthana*. The official title is *Vaiṣṇava-vijñapti* (Prayer to the Vaiṣṇava). As in other songs, the importance of *vaiṣṇava-sevā* (service to the devotees) is stressed. Prabhupāda often quotes the following line from Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura: *chāriyā vaiṣṇava-sevā nistāra pāyeche kebā*, which means, "Who has ever attained liberation without serving the *vaiṣṇavas*?"

The Urgency of Rescue from Saṁsāra

Taking the position of an ordinary, fallen soul, Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura addresses a devotee, a Vaiṣṇava Thākura, in the first stanza and begs him to rescue him from the ocean of birth and death—if need be by force, pulling him by the hair. In another song from *Prārthana*, he prays to the Lord: "O Hari, kindly catch my hair and pull me out of the well of material existence." Being pulled by the hair is painful and, in ordinary circumstances, considered aggressive and offensive. In this case, however, being pulled by the hair is seen as an act of kindness because the prospect of drowning in the ocean of *saṁsāra* or the well of *māyā* is much worse, resulting in the repeated suffering of the miseries of birth and death. Therefore, a dire situation warrants an intense, perhaps even harsh, effort emphasizing the urgency and desperation involved in the rescue.

In the *Udyoga-parva* of the *Mahābhārata*, there is a relevant passage where Kṛṣṇa says that a true friend should intervene and pull another away from harmful actions, even if it means using force, such as seizing them by the hair. This underscores the importance of taking decisive actions to protect a friend from impending calamity, thus fulfilling the role of a genuine friend who prioritizes the well-being of their companion over momentary discomfort or offense. In the *Śrī*

Caitanya-caritāmṛta (*Antya-līlā* 4. 46-47), Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu says: “Glorious is that devotee who does not give up the shelter of his Lord, and glorious is that Lord who does not abandon His servant. If by chance a servant falls down and goes somewhere else, glorious is that master who captures him and brings him back by the hair.”

The Inescapable Power of Karma

In the second stanza, Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura describes the lamentable situation of a person who has no spiritual guide to show them the path of *dharma* and teach spiritual knowledge. Without such guidance he feels himself at the mercy of the powerful force of Providence. Providence is understood to be an unseen, inconceivable influence (*daiva*) that comes from higher authorities, like God Himself, a demigod, the laws of nature, or the law of *karma*. Providence is beyond our control. Therefore, it is advised not to waste time and energy in a futile attempt to counteract such influences but to learn to tolerate adverse circumstances and take shelter of the Lord.

The best way to learn this art is to accept the guidance of a bona fide spiritual master, a Vaiṣṇava Ṭhākura, who is capable of teaching their disciple how to surrender to the shelter at the lotus feet of the Lord. Generally, fear (*bhaya*) is considered an enemy, but from a another angle of vision, it can also be considered a friend when it serves as an impetus to look for a solution to the fearful condition of material existence. As Śrīla Prabhupāda said in a lecture in 1968 in Montreal: “Because *māyā* is very strong, we should be always fearful that ‘*Māyā* may not catch me.’ Always stick to Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet so *māyā* will not be able to touch you. Just like in a contaminated, diseased area, the doctor is also fearful, but he is taking precautions.”

How to become fearless is the theme of another song, namely Govinda dāsa Kavirāja’s *Bhajahū re mana,* which is included in this collection under the title *Free From Fear*.

The Blind Wanderer

In the third stanza, Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura compares his mind to a blind wanderer who does not know where he is going. Having lost his good sense of discrimination, he follows blindly the urges of lust, anger, greed, illusion, madness and envy. All conditioned souls are to a greater or lesser degree under the sway of these six enemies. When the mind is colored by their influence, it becomes the cause of gross material bodies, one after another. As Kṛṣṇa explains in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (8.6), it is the mental condition at the time of death that determines our next life.

You are the Company You Keep

In the next two stanzas, Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura laments his choice to seek bad company, another recurring theme in many songs by the previous *ācāryas*. The harmful influence of materialistic people cannot be overstated. As the saying goes: "association rubs off," meaning that the qualities, behaviors, and habits of the people we associate with tend to influence and affect our own. In the *Bhagavad-gītā* (2.62) this idea is expressed as *"saṅgāt sañjāyate kāmaḥ,"* which means "desire arises from association." This reflects the concept that the company we keep greatly influences our desires and behavior. Consequently, another common phrase that conveys a similar message is "You are the company you keep," emphasizing that the people we surround ourselves with have a significant impact on our character, values, and actions.

In the context of *bhakti,* or devotional life, great emphasis is placed on the concept of good company, *sādhu-saṅga* (association with saintly persons), which is considered essential for spiritual progress. By associating with spiritually elevated individuals, our consciousness becomes purified and more focused on spiritual goals.

Conversely, associating with worldly or negative influences will most likely degrade our character and lead us away from spiritual pursuits.

At the end of his prayer, Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura realizes that he was foolish when rejecting the good company of a saintly person, a Vaiṣṇava Ṭhākura. Seeing his precarious position in material existence, he is overtaken by fear. He is, therefore, now willing to surrender to a pure devotee who, as God's representative, can also grant freedom from fear.

The Original Song

Ṭhākura vaiṣṇava-gaṇa

Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura

1

ṭhākura vaiṣṇava-gaṇa kari ei nivedana
mo bara adhama durācāra
dārūṇa-saṁsāra-nidhi tāte ḍubāila vidhi
keśe dhari more kara pāra

ṭhākura vaiṣṇava-gaṇa—the Vaiṣṇavas; *kari ei nivedana*—I request; *mo*—I am; *bara*—very; *adhama*—fallen; *durācāra*—wretched; *dārūṇa*—terrible; *saṁsāra-nidhi*—ocean of material existence; *tābe*—it; *ḍubāila*—drowned; *vidhi*—by Providence; *keśe dhari*—pulling my hair; *more kara pāra*—please deliver me.

O saintly Vaiṣṇava! Please hear my prayer. I am the most wretched and fallen soul, drowning in this formidable material ocean by Providence. Please help me to cross over this ocean by grabbing me by the hair and pulling me out.

2

vidhi bara balavān nā śune dharama-jñāna
sadāi karama-pāśe bāṅdhe
nā dekhi tāraṇa leśa jata dekhi saba kleśa
anātha kātare tewi kānde

vidhi—the Providence; *bara balavān*—very powerful; *nā śune*—not heed; *dharama*—religious principles; *jñāna*—knowledge; *sadāi*—always; *karama-pāśe*—

with the ropes of karma; *baṅdhe*—binds; *nā dekhi*—I do not see; *tāraṇa leśa*—the way of deliverance; *jata dekhi*—whatever I see; *saba kleśa*—is simply distress; *anātha*—helpless; *kātare*—pathetic; *tewi*—because of that; *kānde*—weep.

The laws of Providence are so powerful that they do not consider religion or knowledge, rather they bind one with the ropes of karma. I do not find any source of deliverance from these miserable conditions, and I always lament because I am afflicted by this, and I am without a master.

3

kāma krodha lobha moha mada abhimāna saha
āpana āpana sthāne ṭāne
aichana āmāra mana phire jena andha jana
supatha vipatha nāhi jāne

kāma—lust; *krodha*—anger; *lobha*—greed; *moha*—illusion; *mada*—pride; *abhimāna*—false ego; *saha*—along with; *apana āpana sthāne*—to their respective ends; *ṭāne*—pulls; *aichana*—such; *āmāra mana*—my mind; *phire*—wanders; *jena*—like; *andha jana*—blind man; *supatha*—right path; *vipatha*—wrong path; *nāhi jāne*—does not know.

Lust, anger, greed, illusion, false pride and false ego are pulling me to their respective places. Thus my mind is like a blind man without knowing which one is the right path and which one is the wrong one.

4

nā lainu sat mata asate majila citta
tuwā pāye nā karinu āśa
narottama dāse kaya dekhi śuni lāge bhaya
tarāiyā laha nija pāśa

nā lainu—did not take; *sat mata*—the path of the devotees; *asate*—in bad association; *majila*—absorbed; *citta*—heart; *tuyā pāye*—on your lotus feet; *nā karinu*—did not; *āśa*—desire; *narottama dāse*—Narottama dāsa; *kaya*—says; *dekhi śuni*—by seeing and hearing; *lāge bhaya*—I am afraid of; *tarāiyā*—by delivering; *laha*—keep me; *nija pāśa*—at your lotus feet.

My mind did not accept the path of the devotees. I was absorbed in bad association. Narottama dāsa says, "I did not aspire for your lotus feet, O Lord. Please accept me and keep me at your lotus feet, as I am afraid."

Song 6

Magic Lantern Dream

(An adaptation of Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's *Durlabha mānava-janma*)





1a

In this human life so rare
my soul is gripped by agony.
I never worshiped Krishna,
losing a great opportunity.



1b
Missed the chance for perfection,
to whom shall I tell my misery?
Now I am lost in dejection,
who will listen to my story?



[Chorus]
A sad, sad story!
No gain, no glory!
To whom shall I tell my misery?
Who will soothe my agony?



2

In worldly affairs I am trapped and bound,
in vain pursuits little joy is found.
No tangible gain, no benefit in sight,
only endless trouble, day and night.



3

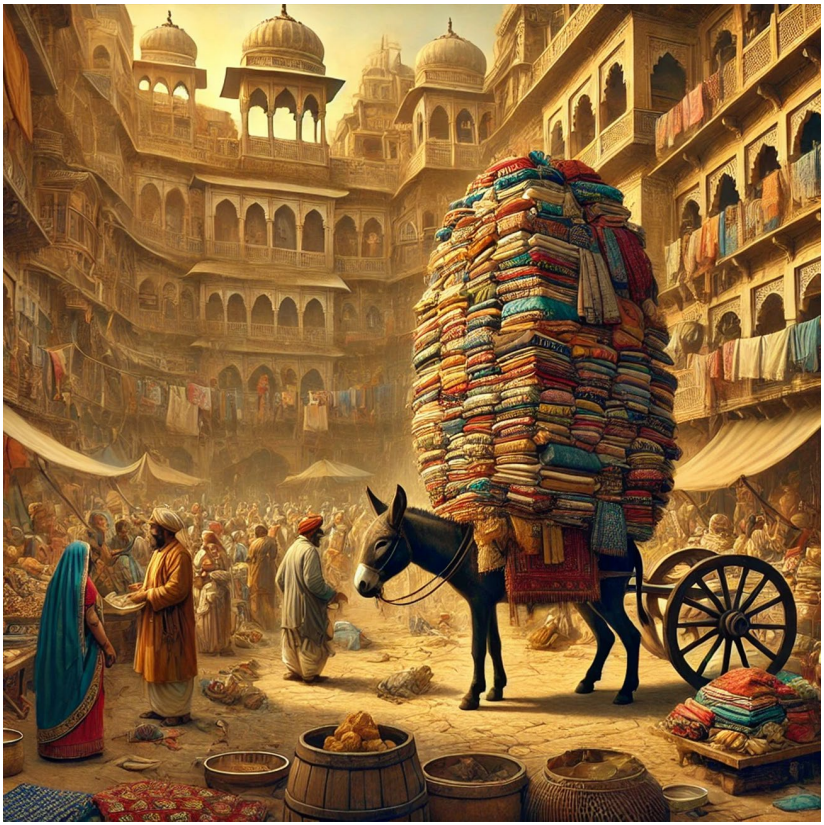
This world is a carnival of shadows bright,
dancing illusions that dazzle my sight.
Attached to this world, days slip away in vain,
I feel lost in this magic lantern's domain.



4

When the end is near and the body fails,
what remains mine when everthing pales?
Loved ones and friends stand helplessly by,
they cannot console my departing sigh.

A sad, sad story!
No gain, no glory!
To whom shall I tell my misery?
Who will soothe my agony?



5

Like an ass, I labor, day by day.
For whom do I toil? I can't really say.
Illusion surrounds me, a maze with no end.
For what do my efforts I expend?



6a

My days wasted in futile endeavors,
my nights in sleep or feverish pleasures.



6b

Blinded by illusive thrill and glee,
I’m oblivious to death sitting next to me.



7

A carefree life, in whims, I lead,
eating much or little, fast or feast.
I never consider, being blind,
that soon I'll have to leave this body behind.



8

Beneath a veneer of cheerfulness,
I am plagued by anxiety, in silent distress.
Concerns of maintaining my family and more
destroy my good sense to the very core.



9

In remorse, my heart deeply sinks,
troubled, away from wisdom it shrinks.
All is ephemeral and will perish soon.
What will remain when I'm dead and gone?



10a

At the end, into a pit my body is thrown,
for crows and vultures a feast to the bone.



10b

Ants and worms are sumptuously fed,
eating their way from toe to head.



11

Dogs and jackals, in delight they dance
around my remains, a festive prance.
They celebrate while others bemourn
a corpse expired, tossed and torn.



12a
This body is destined to vanish soon,
to always remember this is a boon.



12b
All that we cherish, to dust shall return,
family and friends to ashes will burn.



13

To all thougthful persons, a plea I make:
Forsake illusion, the true path take.
Seek pure devotion, Lord Kṛṣṇa's grace,
eternal truth at last embrace.



Thus ends this story!
A happy end in glory!
The highest attainment of human birth,
pure love of Godhead on this Earth.

Commentary

The song *Magic Lantern Dream (Durlabha mānava-janma)*, is found in Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's songbook *Kalyāṇa-kalpataru*, under the section *Nirveda-lakṣaṇa-upalabdhi* (Attainment of the Symptoms of Despondent, Disinterested Callousness Towards Worldly Affairs).

This seemingly negative attitude toward material life is, from a spiritual perspective, not only considered positive but necessary for cultivating the determination to pursue spiritual life seriously. However, many people find this way of thinking difficult to appreciate. They subscribe to the worldview, "Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we may die," a much-used idiom, particularly popular among young people. A similar attitude is expressed in the term YOLO—You Only Live Once—a philosophy that has been around for centuries, but only recently entered the mainstream lexicon. The Latin term "carpe diem" (seize the day), coined by the Roman philosopher Horace, expresses a similar idea. Even in India, where the concept of transmigration and *saṁsāra*—the continuous cycle of birth and death—is widely understood, Cārvāka Muni presented an atheistic philosophy similar to YOLO thousands of years ago. Since in India ghee (clarified butter) is essential in preparing many delicious dishes, Cārvāka Muni advised people to eat food made with ghee as much as possible. He even suggested getting ghee by any means—begging, borrowing or stealing—because, as he believed, when the body is burned to ashes after death, everything is finished. Therefore, he advised enjoying the body as much as possible while alive.

A Deeper Perspective: Understanding Transience

A thoughtful person can easily see that this philosophy is short-sighted. In our experience, we have a past, a present, and a future at

every stage of life. A young person can remember their childhood, lives in the present, and plans for their future as an adult and later old person. And why should there be no future for the elderly? There is a future, and that future involves getting another body— whether human, animal, plant, demigod, or an associate of God.

As in many of his songs, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura places himself in the position of an ordinary conditioned soul and, speaking in the first person, describes the typical human experience over the course of a lifetime. He begins by pointing out that the human body is a rare gift, using the word *durlabha*, which literally means “difficult to obtain.” Vedic literature states that the soul reaches the human level after passing through 8,000,000 species. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura laments that he did not take advantage of the unique potential life as a human being offers. Only in human life can one attain self-realization and solve the fundamental problems of existence: birth death old age and disease. Since self-realization means understanding oneself as a spirit soul and an eternal servant of the Supreme Soul, Kṛṣṇa, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura regrets in this song that he did not use this valuable human life to worship the Lord.

The Endless Cycle of Saṁsāra

He begins by repeating the word *saṁsāra* twice, emphasizing its importance. *Saṁsāra* is a combination of *sam* (with) and *sāra* (flowing or passing), meaning "the continuous flow" or "the cycle of existence," referring to the cycle of birth and death. This repetition highlights the constant change and temporary nature of material life. Because all things must pass, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura concludes that by engaging only in worldly affairs he has passed his life uselessly, without any permanent benefit. Quite the opposite: he only gained trouble and botheration.

The Shadow Theater

In the next stanza, he compares the world of *saṁsāra* to a shadow theater, a magic lantern, or a dreamlike display of illusions. Shadow theaters are an ancient form of storytelling and entertainment and are still in use in India, China and other parts of Asia. They employ flat articulated cut-out figures (shadow puppets) held between a light source and a translucent screen. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura uses this metaphor to convey that whatever we see in the world has no substance, but is a mere reflection or shadow of spiritual reality. As the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (2.2.3) explains, the material world is only a world of names. In a compelling purport to this verse, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes:

> The whole material creation is a jugglery of names only; in fact, it is nothing but a bewildering creation of matter like earth, water and fire. The buildings, furniture, cars, bungalows, mills, factories, industries, peace, war or even the highest perfection of material science, namely atomic energy and electronics, are all simply bewildering names of material elements with their concomitant reactions of the three modes. Since the devotee of the Lord knows them perfectly well, he is not interested in creating unwanted things for a situation which is not at all reality, but simply names. The great kings, leaders and soldiers fight with one another in order to perpetuate their names in history. They are forgotten in due course of time, and they make a place for another era in history. But the devotee realizes how much history and historical persons are useless products of flickering time.

Another example illustrating the illusory nature of material existence is the reflection of a tree on a riverbank or the image of a face in a mirror. Both reflected images appear real but are not; the substance exists elsewhere. Similarly, any material manifestation may appear

real but is ultimately illusory. Reality is indestructible and permanent, while reflections or shadows are fleeting and will disappear under certain conditions or with the passing of time. This is why Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura compares manifestations in the material world to optical illusions. Under the influence of time, everything here is created, remains for a while, and is eventually destroyed. All things come and go, constantly in flux. Still, we become attached to material objects and try to hang on to them as long as possible, often desperately fighting decay. However, because in due course of time they will be destroyed, there is no ultimate gain. Therefore, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura laments that although he feels great attachment to these shadows and illusions, in the end he is empty-handed: “Attached to this world, days slip away in vain, I feel lost in this magic lantern's domain.”

Confronting Death

In the next stanza he raises a topic that nobody likes to talk about—death. He asks himself what will remain in his possession at that dreaded time, and what happiness will his relatives be able to give him? As the saying goes: "I was born with nothing, and I will die with nothing.” Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura will return to this theme in the final stanzas, but for now, he takes a hard look at his everyday life.

He compares himself to an ass, a symbol of foolishness. Despite the ass working so hard, its confusion persists. Prabhupāda gives the example of an ass working for a washerman carrying heavy loads of laundry. What for? To get a few morsels of grass which it could get by the roadside for free. Or the ass is duped by a carrot dangling in front of it constantly moving forward in the belief it will reach the carrot at the next step, unaware that the carrot remains out of reach, no matter how many steps it takes. So much effort for nothing. But, being foolish, the ass does not realize that all its endeavors are futile. Ṛṣabhadeva mentions futile endeavors in his instructions to his sons

(SB 5.5.5): “As long as one does not inquire about the spiritual values of life, one is defeated and subjected to miseries arising from ignorance.”

The Greatest Wonder

This theme continues in the next two stanzas where Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura laments that he wastes his days in trivial activities and his nights in sleep, never considering that death is always near. Without much thought to his precarious situation he continues to live a carefree lifestyle comparable to today’s tendency for people to socialize at parties, bars, clubs, discos, or sport events. Nārada Muni describes a similar situation to King Pracinabarhi (SB 4.29.53) with the aim of awakening in him a sense of urgency to solve life’s real problems, namely the repetition of birth and death. Nārada gives the example of a deer who is peacefully grazing in a beautiful flower garden with its mate. The deer is enjoying the sweet singing of bumblebees, but is unaware that ahead of him is a tiger, accustomed to living at the cost of another's flesh, and behind him is a hunter, poised to pierce it with sharp arrows. Just as the deer's death is imminent, so is ours, yet we never consider that one day we will have to give up our body. This kind of oblivious indifference is considered the greatest wonder, as illustrated in the *Mahābhārata*, when Yudhiṣṭhīra is asked by Yamarāja in the form of a Yakṣa: *kiṁ āścaryam*. “What is the greatest wonder?”, whereupon the king answered: *ahaḥni ahaḥni bhūtāni gacchanti yamālayam,* śeṣāḥ *sthāvaram icchanti kim āścaryam ataḥ param.* "Day after day, countless creatures go to the abode of Yama (the god of death); yet those who remain believe themselves to be immortal. What could be more astonishing than this?"

The Struggles of Family Life

In stanzas 8 and 9, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura reflects on the struggles of family life, especially the anxiety of maintaining family members and preventing their inevitable decline. The last few stanzas describe in graphic terms the destination of the material body, referencing the Parsi practice in India of leaving corpses exposed to scavenging birds such as vultures and crows, as well as jackals and worms.

Letting Go of Illusions

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura concludes his song by urging all thoughtful persons to give up the temporary illusions presented by *māyā* and seek the means to attain pure love of God, the only eternal truth and the ultimate goal of life.

The Original Song

Durlabha mānava-janma

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura

1

durlabha mānava-janma labhiyā saṁsāre
kṛṣṇa nā bhajinu-duḥkha kahiba kāhāre?

durlabha—rare; *mānava-janma*—human birth; *labhiyā*—attaining; *saṁsāre*—in the material world; *kṛṣṇa*—Lord Kṛṣṇa; *nā bhajinu*—I have not worshipped; *duḥkha*—the misery; *kahiba*—I will speak; *kāhāre*—to whom?

Although the human form of life is the rarest opportunity for attaining spiritual perfection, I am now lamenting bitterly. This is because somehow or other I have been born with such an opportunity, but have simply wasted it by never worshiping Lord Kṛṣṇa. Oh, to whom shall I tell the tale of my misery?

2

'saṁsāra' 'saṁsāra', ka're miche gela kāla
lābha nā haila kichu, ghaṭila jañjāla

saṁsāra saṁsāra—nothing but worldly affairs; *ka're*—doing; *miche*—uselessly; *gela kāla*—the time has passed; *lābha*—gain; *nā haila*—there has not been; *kichu*—anything; *ghaṭila*—happened; *jañjāla*—anguish.

Having married and entered the entanglements of materialistic family life, I passed my time in vain. I never got any tangible gain or permanent benefit, but only trouble and botheration.

3

kisera saṁsāra ei chāyābāji prāya
ihāte mamatā kari' bṛthā dina jāya

kisera—what type of; *saṁsāra*—world; *ei*—this; *chāyābāji*—shadow-theater; *prāya*—just like; *ihāte*—in this; *mamatā*—false sense of possession; *kari'*—doing; *bṛthā*—fruitlessly; *dina jāya*—the days have passed.

What kind of world is this? It seems to be just like a magic lantern show, wherein so many shadows and optical illusions dance magically before my eyes. I feel great attachment and identification with such a world, and thus day after day passes in vain, without obtaining real benefit.

4

e deha patana ha'le ki ra'be āmāra?
keha sukha nāhi dibe putra-parivāra

e deha—this body; *patana ha'le*—upon falling (dying); *ki ra'be*—what will remain; *āmāra*—mine; *keha*—some; *sukha*—happiness; *nāhi dibe*—will not give; *putra-parivāra*—sons and family.

When this body drops dead on the ground, what will then remain mine? At that moment, all of my sons and dearest loved ones will not be able to give me any happiness.

5

gardabhera mata āmi kari pariśrama
kā'ra lāgi' eta kari, nā ghucila bhrama

gardabhera mata—just like an ass; *āmi kari*—I perform; *pariśrama*—labor; *kā'ra lāgi'*—on behalf of whom?; *eta kari*—I work like this; *nā*—not; *ghucila*—has removed; *bhrama*—my bewilderment.

I work hard just like an ass every day, and now I am wondering: For whom am I working so hard? I am still surrounded by so many illusions.

6

dina jāya michā kāje, niśā nidrā-baśe
nāhi bhāvi-maraṇa nikaṭe āche ba'se

dina jāya—the day passes; *micha kāje*—in trivial endeavors; *niśā*—the night; *nidrā-baśe*—under the control of sleep; *nāhi bhāvi*—I do not think; *maraṇa*—death; *nikaṭe*—nearby; *āche*—is there; *ba'se*—sitting.

I waste every day in useless, insignificant work, and I waste every night controlled by sleep. And in every twenty-four hours I never consider that cruel death is always sitting right in front of me.

7

bhāla manda khāi, heri, pari, cintā-hīna
nāhi bhāvi, e deha chāriba kona dina

bhāla—very much; *manda*—or a little; *khāi*—I eat; *heri*—I see; *pari*—I wear; *cintā-hīna*—carefree; *nāhi bhāvi*—I do not think; *e deha*—this body; *chāriba*—I will leave; *kona dina*—some day.

I imagine that I live a very carefree life-style, sometimes eating a lot, or eating a little if I feel like it. Sometimes I see nice things around the town, or sometimes I do not go out at all. Sometimes I wear opulent clothing, or if I'm in the mood, I'll wear something simple. I live so carefree that I never consider that one day I will have to give up this body.

8

deha-geha-kalatrādi-cintā avirata
jāgiche hṛdaye mora buddhi kari' hata

deha—the body; *geha*—the home; *kalatra*—the wife; *ādi*—and so forth; *cintā*—concern; *avirata*—incessantly; *jāgiche*—awakening; *hṛdaye mora*—in my heart; *buddhi*—intelligence; *kari' hata*—is crushed.

But in actuality my poor heart is plagued by constant anxieties regarding the maintenance of my body, my house, my wife, my family members, and my social obligations. All these anxieties are pinching me sharply and truly destroying my intelligence.

9

hāya, hāya! nāhi bhāvi-anitya e saba
jīvana vigate kothā rahibe vaibhava?

hāya hāya—alas! alas!; *nāhi bhāvi*—I do not think; *anitya*—temporary; *e saba*—all of this; *jīvana vigate*—when life runs out; *kothā*—where; *rahibe*—will remain; *vaibhava*—these opulences.

Alas, alas! What a remorseful situation has arisen! I am engrossed with all this trouble, but I never consider that all these things are temporary and subject to perish very soon. After I'm dead and gone, what will remain of all my material opulences?

10

śmaśāne śarīra mama pariyā rahibe
bihaṅga-pataṅga tāya vihāra karibe

śmaśāne—at the crematorium; *śarīra mama*—my body; *pariyā*—falling flat; *rahibe*—will remain motionless; *bihaṅga-pataṅga*—birds and bugs; *tāya*—there; *vihāra karibe*—will frolic.

When my body is thrown into the pit at the cremation grounds, it will simply lie there motionless. Then many crows, vultures, ants, and worms will come and playfully sport there.

11

kukkura sṛgāla saba ānandita ha'ye
mahotsava karibe āmāra deha la'ye

kukkura—dogs; *sṛgāla*—and jackals; *saba*—all; *ānandita ha'ye*—becoming ecstatic; *mahotsava*—great festival; *karibe*—will be; *āmāra deha*—my body; *la'ye*—taking.

All the stray dogs and jackals will become very much delighted, and in great ecstasy they will make a festival ground out of my body and have a huge feast.

12

ye dehera ei gati, tā'ra anugata
saṁsāra-vaibhava āra bandhu-jana yata

ye dehera—of which body; *ei gati*—this end; *tā'ra anugata*—its followers; *saṁsāra-vaibhava*—opulence of the material world; *āra*—and; *bandhu-jana*—friends; *yata*—all.

Just see, such is the ultimate destination of this material body. And the most amazing thing is that all material opulences—my house, family and friends—have exactly the same destination.

13

ataeva māyā-moha chāri' buddhimāna
nitya-tattva kṛṣṇa-bhakti karuna sandhāna

ataeva—therefore; *māyā-moha*—the bewilderment of illusion; *chāri'*—rejecting; *buddhimān*—a wise person; *nitya-tattva*—eternal truth; *kṛṣṇa-bhakti*—devotion to Kṛṣṇa; *karuna sandhāna*—please seek.

Therefore I advise those of you who have keen intelligence: "Please give up all these temporary illusions presented by māyā, and search after the means to get pure devotion to Lord Kṛṣṇa, for this is the only eternal truth."

Song 7

The Ocean of Nescience

(An adaptation of Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's *Anādi karama phale*)





1

Tasting the fruit of my acts beyond past,
I'm plunged into the ocean of nescience so vast.
Day and night my troubled heart is ablaze
in the poisonous fire of sensual craze.
My mind is in anguish and cannot see
how to find relief and peace, and be happy.



2

My hundreds and thousands of plans for happiness
have ended in suffering and mental distress.
I'm tossed and carried by the worldly tide,
lust, anger and greed are like thieves by my side.
Envy, illusion and madness they sow,
life slips away, fear continues to grow.



Plunged into the ocean of nescience so vast,
I am lost in its waves surging up from the past.
Day and night my troubled heart is ablaze
in the poisonous fire of sensual craze.

3

Jñāna and *karma*, these two thugs have cheated me
and finally threw me into the ocean of misery.
O Kṛṣṇa, ocean of mercy, You are my friend,
I have no strength to leave this predicament.
I pray to You and hope for Your helping hand
to lift me out of this dire ocean of torment.



4

Kindly place this fallen servant at Your lotus feet,
as a particle of dust—that is all I plead.
Bhaktivinoda says: “I am Your servant eternally,
but now Māyā’s alluring network has captured me.
Somehow or other, I forgot You, O Lord;
now please pick me up and keep me close to Your heart.
Please pick me up and keep me close to Your heart.

Commentary

The Ocean of Nescience (*Anādi-karama-phale*) is based on Verse 5 of the *Śikṣāṣṭaka Prayers*, where Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu pleads with Kṛṣṇa, the son of Nanda, to lift Him from the ocean of birth and death and to place Him as a particle of dust at His lotus feet. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura elaborates on this theme in four stanzas, focusing on the soul's entrapment in material existence and the need for the Lord's intervention to attain liberation.

Self-Imposed Suffering

The first stanza begins with a description of the living entity's precarious position after having fallen into the vast ocean of material existence. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura acknowledges that the cause is not some external force but his own doing which Śrīla Prabhupāda often characterizes as "our misuse of independence." Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura uses the expression *anādi-karama-phale* which means "the fruit *(phala)*, or result, of an action *(karma)* that occurred before the beginning of time *(anādi)*." Consequently, nobody can trace the history of when the soul began to live in a material body, and because we cannot trace the history of when we became conditioned, the living entity in the material world is called *nitya-baddha* (eternally conditioned), in contrast to the *nitya-siddhas*, the eternally perfect and liberated souls living in the spiritual world.

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura describes the *jīva's* situation in the ocean of material existence in graphic terms: "Tasting the fruits of my acts beyond past, I'm plunged into the ocean of nescience so vast. Day and night my troubled heart is ablaze in the poisonous fire of sensual craze. My mind is in anguish and cannot see how to find relief and peace, and be happy."

The metaphor of a poisonous fire of sensual craze may sound exaggerated, but it is not. Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (3.39):

> Thus the wise living entity's pure consciousness becomes covered by his eternal enemy in the form of lust, which is never satisfied and which burns like fire.

The nature of fire is that it is insatiable. No matter how much fuel is supplied, it will want more and more. And the more fuel supplied, the higher the flames rise. Our senses are like that. No matter how much food, drink, sex, or any other pleasure is given, they always demand more. Due to the natural limitations of the physical body, a point of satiation is usually reached after a short while, but after a period of regeneration, the sensual demands awaken again, often hungrier than before.

Nevertheless, despite this experience, we conditioned souls try repeatedly to achieve happiness and satisfaction by pleasing the senses, including the mind, but the final result is always saturation and frustration. As Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura observes in this song: “My hundreds and thousands of plans for happiness have ended in suffering and mental distress.”

The Six Enemies and Fear

He then enumerates six main enemies that torment the conditioned soul: lust, anger, greed, illusion, madness, and envy (*kāma, krodha, lobha, moha, mada, mātsarya*). When one succumbs to any of these tendencies— whether individually or several at once—fear inevitably arises. Fear (*bhaya*) is, along with eating, sleeping, and mating, one of the four fundamental aspects of material existence, signifying its unavoidable presence. All living beings in this impermanent world experience constant anxiety, as the threat of losing possessions or even the body looms persistently over their lives.

Attachment to bodily relationships—such as family, friends, wealth, and social status—further intensifies mental disturbances. These attachments cloud spiritual clarity and lead to anxiety about outcomes, as individuals cling to fragile aspects of life, distressed by the prospect of loss.

In contrast, pure devotional service (*bhakti*) to the Supreme Personality of Godhead dispels these fears. As Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī explains, *bhakti-yoga* is exceptionally powerful. Even in the early stages of *sādhana-bhakti*—where devotion is cultivated through discipline and regulated practices—a practitioner can experience a state of fearlessness as a divine gift from the Lord. This initial taste of fearlessness strengthens the devotee's determination and diminishes attachment to the temporary. As devotion matures, the Supreme Lord reveals Himself more fully, deepening the devotee's experience of security and peace. In this mature state, the devotee reaches a point of complete fearlessness, residing on the eternal, undisturbed spiritual plane of Vaikuṇṭha, free from anxiety and insecurity.

The Deception of Karma and Jñāna

In the third stanza, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura speaks of two paths that people in this world generally pursue to achieve success and satisfaction: *karma* and *jñāna* (fruitive action and cultivation of knowledge). The great majority of human beings simply pursue the fruits of *karma. Karma* is therefore translated as "fruitive activities." As the term implies, most people work to obtain a fruit they can enjoy. In the past, these fruits were agricultural goods in the form of grains, vegetables, and fruits, or natural products like fibers, wood, metals or jewels. Today, the most common fruit is money which allows its owner to buy various products that provide pleasurable sensations to the senses. *Jñāna*, the pursuit of knowledge, operates

on a more subtle level, but the final goal is the same: to obtain a fruit that is relishable.

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura compares these two ways of life to thugs who cheat the living entity and finally throw it into an ocean of misery. The meaning of this simile is that both *karma* and *jñāna* promise happiness but fail to deliver it. Because the living entity is a spiritual being, no amount of material happiness produced by fruitive work or the accumulation of material knowledge can satisfy its thirst for joy. In another song of this cycle, *The Learned Ass*, also composed by Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, the deceptive nature of worldly knowledge is described in more detail.

The Lord's Lotus Feet as the Ultimate Shelter

To conclude his song, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura implores the Lord to help him out of his predicament and shelter him at His lotus feet. In other words, to be fixed at the lotus feet of the Lord, even "only" as a tiny particle of dust, is more desirable and valuable—and more satisfying—than any amount of gross or subtle pleasure in the material world. Once again, the lotus feet of the Lord are mentioned as the only shelter, and again we quote a verse from the Tenth Canto of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (10.2.30) where the demigods pray to Lord Kṛṣṇa in the womb praising His lotus feet:

> O lotus-eyed Lord, by concentrating one's meditation on Your lotus feet, which are the reservoir of all existence, and by accepting those lotus feet as the boat by which to cross the ocean of nescience, one follows in the footsteps of great saints, sages and devotees. By this simple process, one can cross the ocean of nescience as easily as one steps over the hoofprint of a calf.

Śrīla Prabhupāda comments on this verse as follows:

> The true mission in life is to cross the ocean of nescience, of repeated birth and death. Those in the darkness of ignorance, however, do not know this mission. Instead, being carried away by the waves of material nature (*prakṛteḥ kriyamāṇāni guṇaiḥ karmāṇi sarvaśaḥ* [Bg. 3.27]), they are undergoing the tribulations of *mṛtyu-saṁsāra-vartmani* [Bg. 9.3], repeated birth and death. But persons who have achieved knowledge by the association of devotees follow the *mahājanas* (*mahat-kṛtena*). Such a person always concentrates his mind upon the lotus feet of the Lord and executes one or more of the nine varieties of devotional service (*śravaṇaṁ kīrtanaṁ viṣṇoḥ smaraṇaṁ pāda-sevanam* [SB 7.5.23]). Simply by this process, one can cross the insurmountable ocean of nescience.

The Original Song

Anādi karama-phale

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura

1
anādi' karama-phale, pari' bhavārṇara jale,
taribāre nā dekhi upāya
ei viṣaya-halāhale, divā-niśi hiyā jvale,
mana kabhu sukha nāhi pāya

anādi'—beginningless (from time immemorial); *karama*—activities; *phale*—fruitive; *pari'*—I have fallen into; *bhava*—of birth and death; *arṇava*—of the ocean; *jale*—the waters; *taribāre*—of deliverance; *nā* —no; *dekhi*—I see; *upāya*—means; *ei*—of these; *viṣaya*—acts of sense gratification; *halāhale*—the poison; *divā*—day; *niśi*—night; *hiyā*—my heart; *jvale*—burns; *mana*—my mind; *kabhu*—at any time; *sukha*—happiness; *nāhi*—does not; *pāya*—attain.

Due to my past fruitive activities, I have fallen into this great ocean of nescience, and I do not find any means of getting out. Day and night my heart burns from the poison of acts for sense pleasure, and as a result my mind is not at all happy.

2
āśā-pāśa-śata-śata, kleśa deya avirata,
pravṛtti-ūrmira tāhe khelā
kāma-krodha-ādi chaya, bāṭapāḍe deya bhaya,
avasāna haila āsi' belā

āśā—plans for happiness; *pāśa*—ropes; *śata-śata*—hundreds and thousands; *kleśa*—pain; *deya*—giving; *avirata*—constantly; *pravṛtti*—materialism; *ūrmira*—the waves; *tāhe*—in that (ocean of nescience); *khelā*—pastimes; *kāma*—lust; *krodha*—anger; *ādi*—and so on; *chaya*—six; *bāṭapāḍe*—thieves and rogues; *deya*—giving; *bhaya*—fear; *avasāna*—the end (of my life); *hoilo*—is; *āsi'*—coming; *belā*—soon.

I am always making hundreds and thousands of plans to become happy, but all these plans give me pain twenty-four hours a day. Indeed, I am being tossed again and again by the waves of the ocean of materialism. Furthermore, there are many thieves and rogues, of whom six are prominent: lust, anger, greed, envy, illusion, and madness. They are causing me great fear, and in this way my life is coming to an end.

3
jnāna-karma-ṭhaga dui, more pratārīya laya,
avaśeṣe phele sindhu-jale
e hena samaye, bandhu, tumi kṛṣṇa kṛpā-sindhu,
kṛpā kari' tolo more bale

jnāna—mental speculation; *karma*—fruitive activity; *ṭhaga*—cheaters or thugs; *dui*—two; *more*—me; *pratārīya*—misleading; *laya*—are taking; *avaśeṣe*—finally; *phele*—throwing; *sindhu-jale*—into *the* ocean of misery; *e*—this; *hena*—such as; *samaye*—time; *bandhu*—friend; *tumi*—You; *kṛṣṇa*—O Kṛṣṇa; *kṛpā*—of mercy; *sindhu*—ocean; *kṛpā*—mercy; *kari'*—having shown; *tolo*—pick up; *more*—me; *bale*—by Your strength.

The two thugs of mental speculation and fruitive activity have cheated me, misled me, and finally thrown me into the ocean of misery. Under the circumstances, my dear Kṛṣṇa, O ocean of mercy, You are my only friend. I have no strength to get out of this ocean of nescience, so I pray to Your lotus feet that You will be kind and by Your strength lift me out of this ocean of suffering.

4

patita-kiṅkare dhari', pāda-padma-dhuli kari',
deha bhaktivinoda āśraya
āmi tava nitya-dāsa, bhuliyā māyāra pāśa,
baddha ha'ye āchi dayāmaya

patita—fallen; *kiṅkare*—servant; *dhari'*—having held up; *pāda*—feet; *padma*—lotus; dhuli—particle of dust; *kari'*—having fixed; *deho*—give; *bhaktivinoda*—Bhaktivinoda; *āśraya*—shelter; *āmi*—I am; *tava*—Your; *nitya*—eternal; *dāsa*—servant; *bhuliyā*—having forgotten; *māyāra*—of *māyā*; *pāśa*—network; *baddha*—bound up; *ho'ye*—being; *āchi*—I am; *dayāmaya*—kindly save me.

Kindly lift up this fallen servant of Yours and fix me as one of the particles of dust at Your lotus feet. Please give Bhaktivinoda shelter at Your lotus feet. I am Your eternal servant, but somehow or other I forgot You and have now fallen into this entangling network of *māyā*. Kindly save me.

Song 8

Forgotten

(An adaptation of Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's *Bhuliyā tomāre*)





1
I turned from You, O Lord,
to a realm where sorrow reigns,
And now, before Your lotus feet,
I lay my tale of pains.



2
Inside my mother's womb,
fettered and unseen,
Your vision blessed my infant eyes,
then vanished from the scene,
leaving Your servant behind.



3
I vowed at birth to worship You,
yet as Māyā's veil descended,
the illusions of this earthly sphere
my early promise ended.



4
As a cherished child, I smiled and laughed,
embraced by kin so dear.
Thus I forgot You more and more,
and the world as paradise appeared.



5a

Day by day, I grew, and with my friends
in games and mirth I shared.



5b
Soon intellect awoke in me,
in studies I was snared.



6a

From place to place I travelled,
absorbed in maintaining my family.



6b
Proud of my learning and wealth amassed,
I forgot You, O Hari!



I turned from You, O Lord,
to a realm where sorrow reigns,
And now, before Your lotus feet,
I lay my tale of pains.

7

Now in old age, with sadness in my heart,
I weep alone bitterly, as death lurks in the dark.
O Lord, I failed to worship You,
my days passed in vain.
What will be my fate now?

Commentary

Forgetfulness of our identity as Kṛṣṇa's eternal servant and the eternal spiritual relationship we have with Him is the root cause of material bondage which implies being situated in different material bodies—as humans, animals, demigods, etc. Therefore, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura sings *bhuliyā tomāre, saṁsāre āsiyā:* "Forgetting You, I have come to the world of *saṁsāra* and entered the cycle of repeated birth and death." This song forms part of the songbook *Śaraṇāgati*, a collection of songs published in 1893 about the process of surrender.

Kṛṣṇa as the Deliverer

In the *Bhagavad-gītā* (12.7), Kṛṣṇa describes Himself as the *samuddhartā mṛtyu-saṁsāra-sāgarāt*, the deliverer from the ocean of birth and death, for those who surrender unto Him. Surrender is therefore key to being delivered, and that is why Kṛṣṇa concludes His instructions in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (18.66) with a call for surrender. In exchange, He promises to protect the surrendered soul from all sinful reactions. However, as Śrīla Prabhupāda points out, Kṛṣṇa did not explain *how* to surrender, and because most people were unable to do so, He came again, this time as a devotee—Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu—who explained in detail how to surrender to one of His foremost disciples, Sanātana Gosvāmī.

Understanding the Jīva's Position

When Sanātana Gosvāmī approached Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, he posed two fundamental questions: "Who am I? and Why am I suffering from the threefold miseries?" Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu began His explanation by first establishing the *jīva's* constitutional position as the eternal servant of Kṛṣṇa. The living entity is Kṛṣṇa's marginal energy, simultaneously one with and distinct from the Lord,

like a molecular particle of sunshine or fire. Consequently, the *jīva* is naturally dependent on its source, which translates into service within a personal relationship. The *jīva* suffers the threefold miseries of material existence because it is influenced by the *avidyā* (nescience) potency, which obscures its constitutional identity. Next Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu pointed out the root cause of the *jīva's* suffering condition: *kṛṣṇa bhuli'*, forgetfulness of Kṛṣṇa (Cc. Madhya 20.117):

> Forgetting Kṛṣṇa, the living entity has been attracted by the external feature from time immemorial. Therefore the illusory energy [*māyā*] gives him all kinds of misery in his material existence [*saṁsāra-duḥkha*].

The Forgotten Promise

Forgotten (*Bhuliyā tomāre*) deals with this topic in depth. Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura begins his song by describing the embryo in the womb, a suffering condition experienced not only by humans but also by other living beings, including birds and insects, who are confined in eggs. Being trapped in a reduced space—whether womb or egg—over a period of time is very uncomfortable. However, it is only the human being who can become aware of their pitiable situation and look for a solution. As Kṛṣṇa says in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (7.14), the solution is to surrender to Him who is the controller of the illusory energy, *māyā*:

> This divine energy of Mine, consisting of the three modes of material nature, is difficult to overcome. But those who have surrendered unto Me can easily cross beyond it.

Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu tells Sanātana Gosvāmī that the process of surrender consists of six steps: the acceptance of those things favorable to devotional service, the rejection of unfavorable things,

the conviction that Kṛṣṇa will give protection, the acceptance of the Lord as one's guardian or master, full self-surrender, and humility.

Humility vs. Pride

It is important to note that these steps are not necessarily sequential. They don't have to be taken one after another, as is evident from the way Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura structured his songbook. He wrote 31 songs to illustrate the surrendering process, and the first seven songs are about *dainya* (humility), which comes last in Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu's list. Why *dainya* first? It could be reasoned that without a minimum of humility, one will not even consider beginning the process of surrender. A proud person not only scoffs at the idea of being humble but considers humility a sign of weakness. In fact, such a person considers pride a virtue. There are numerous historical examples—such as the French Revolution, American Revolution, and Indian Independence Movement—where political leaders have invoked national pride, rooted in a shared cultural and historical identity, to rally mass support for their causes, elevating the sense of national pride to a desirable goal for the entire country. However, as Kṛṣṇa points out in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (16.4), pride, arrogance, and conceit are key traits of a non-devotional mentality that must be curbed. Instead, humility is exalted as a fundamental virtue, essential for surrender. Through his songs, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura teaches us what the mentality of true surrender looks like. His method is to speak in the first person, putting himself in the position of a conditioned soul, to show us how to approach the Lord in a humble state of mind.

The Typical Life Journey

In the first of the seven songs, *Bhuliyā tomāre*, he submits his life story which he calls a tale of woe (*duḥkhera kathā*). *Bhuliyā tomāre, saṁsāre āsiyā:* "O Lord, having forgotten You, I have come to this

material world." This reflects Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu's explanation to Sanātana Gosvāmī on how the *jīva* comes to the material world: *kṛṣṇa bhuli' sei jīva anādi-bahirmukha.* "Forgetting Kṛṣṇa, the living entity has been attracted by the external feature from time immemorial."

In the next five stanzas, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura paints a picture of the typical life course of a human being in the material world. His description of the living entity's position in the womb reminds us of Kapiladeva's description in the Third Canto of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam.* There Kapila describes to His mother Devahūti in Chapter 31 the movements of the living entities. The *jīva* is trapped inside a womb, which resembles an airtight bag, where it can hardly move. Shortly before delivery, if a child is fortunate, it can remember all the troubles of its past one hundred births and then pray to the Supreme Lord for relief from all fear promising to engage in His devotional service. But then, as Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura describes it, immediately after birth, the *jīva's* consciousness is covered by the veil of *māyā* and thus it forgets everything, including its promise.

Later, being surrounded by fond relatives, the infant forgets completely the suffering it had experienced within the womb and during birth. In the following months and years, being showered with affection by its mother, father, and other relatives, the living entity falls more and more under the spell of illusion. As Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura says in Stanza 4: "I began to think that the material world was a very nice place."

The Illusions of the World

In the following stanzas, he describes a typical life journey from childhood with its plays, to youth with its studies, to adulthood with its earning wealth and having a family, and finally to old age. Old age is the time of reckoning, and the author laments that he failed to

worship the Lord and instead passed his days in vain. The concluding words are foreboding: “What will be my fate now?”

A Timeless Message

Although this song was composed almost 150 years ago, its message is as relevant as ever. Circumstances may change due to the influence of time, but the underlying nature of material existence remains the same, whether 150 years or 150,000 years ago. Even millions of years ago, the conditioned souls faced the same problems. Prahlāda Mahārāja, who lived during that time, gave a similar description to his schoolmates. He said that a human being lives for a maximum of one hundred years of which half are lost due to sleeping. Then, during childhood, when everyone is bewildered, one passes ten years. Similarly, in boyhood, engaged in sporting and playing, one passes another ten years. In this way, twenty years are wasted. Later, in old age, when one is an invalid, unable to perform even material activities, one passes another twenty years wastefully. In the remaining years one becomes increasingly attached to family life because of insatiable lusty desires and strong illusions. In this way, the opportunity for self-realization that the human form of life offers is lost.

Throughout the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, we find similar stories and instructions because forgetfulness is a common phenomenon, especially in Kali-yuga. Consequently, regularly hearing about spiritual topics and being reminded of the real purpose of life is a practice recommended by all great teachers.

Song 8

The Original Song

Bhuliyā tomāre

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura

1

bhuliyā tomāre, saṁsāre āsiyā,
peye nānā-vidha byathā
tomāra caraṇe, āsiyāchi āmi,
baliba duḥkhera kathā

bhuliyā—forgetting; *tomāre*—You; *saṁsāre*—to this material world; *āsiyā*—having come; *peye*—experienced; *nānā*—many; *vidha*—varieties; *byathā*—of sufferings; *tomāra*—Your; *caraṇe*—to lotus feet; *āsiyāchi*—have come; *āmi*—I; *baliba*—I will speak; *duḥkhera*—of woe; *kathā*—my tale.

O Lord, having forgotten You and come to this material world, I have experienced a host of sins and sorrows. Now I approach Your lotus feet and submit my tale of woe.

2

jananī jaṭhare, chilāma yakhana,
viṣama bandhana-pāśe
eka-bāra prabhu! dekhā diyā more,
vañcile e dīna dāse

jananī—of my mother; *jaṭhare*—in the womb; *chilāma*—I was; *yakhana*—when; *viṣama*—painful; *bandhana*—in the encagement; *pāśe*—bound up; *eka*—one; *bāra*—time; *prabhu*—O Lord; *dekhā*—a vision (of Yourself); *diyā*—having given; *more*—to me; *vañcile*—abandoned; *e*—this; *dīna*—poor; *dāse*—servant.

While I was bound up tightly in the unbearable confines of my mother's womb, O Lord, You once revealed Yourself before me. After appearing briefly, You abandoned this poor servant of Yours.

3

takhana bhāvinu, janama pāiyā,
kariba bhajana tava
janama hoila, pari' māyā-jāle,
nā hoila jñāna-lava

takhana—at that time; *bhāvinu*—I thought; *janama*—birth; *pāiyā*—after taking; *kariba*—I will perform; *bhajana*—worship; *tava*—Your; *janama*—birth; *hoila*—having taken; *pari'*—I fell; *māyā*—of illusions; *jāle*—into a network; *nā*—not; *hoila*—there was; *jñāna*—of knowledge; *lava*—a drop.

At that moment I thought, "After my birth this time, I will surely worship You with undivided attention." But alas, after taking birth I fell into the entangling network of worldly illusions; thus I possessed not even a drop of true knowledge.

4

ādarera chele, sva-janera kole,
hāsiyā kāṭānu kāla
janaka jananī-snehete bhuliyā,
saṁsāra lāgila bhāla

ādarera—dear; *chele*—son; *sva-janera*—of relatives; *kole*—in the arms; *hāsiyā*—laughing; *kāṭānu*—spent; *kāla*—my time; *janaka*—of my father; *jananī*—of my mother; *snehete*—by the affection; *bhuliyā*—I forgot (You); *saṁsāra*—the material world; *lāgila*—seemed to be; *bhāla*—good.

As a dear son fondled in the laps of attentive relatives, I passed my time smiling and laughing. The affection of my father and mother helped me forget You still more, and I began to think that the material world was a very nice place.

5

krame dina dina, bālaka hoiyā,
bhelinu bālaka-saha
āra kichu dine, jnāna upajila,
pāṭha pari ahara-ahaḥ

krame—gradually; *dina dina*—day by day; *bālaka*—a young boy; *hoiyā*—I became; *bhelinu*—played; *bālaka*—other boys; *saha*—with; *āra*—more; *kichu*—(after) a few; *dine*—days; *jnāna*—my knowledge; *upajila*—grew; *pāṭha*—school lessons; *pari*—I studied; *ahara-ahaḥ*—every day.

Day by day I gradually grew into a young boy and began playing with other boys. Soon my powers of understanding emerged, so I diligently studied my school lessons every day.

6

vidyāra gaurave, bhrami' deśe deśe,
dhana uparjana kari

sva-jana pālana, kari eka-mane,
bhulinu tomāre, hari!

vidyāra—of my education; *gaurave*—proud; *bhrami'*—I traveled; *deśe deśe*—from place to place; *dhana*—of wealth; *uparjana*—the earning; *kari*—I did; *sva-jana*—of my family; *pālana*—the maintenance; *kari*—I did; *eka*—with one-pointed; *mane*—attention; *bhulinu*—I forgot; *tomāre*—You; *hari*—O Lord Hari.

Proud of my accomplished education, I later traveled from place to place and earned much wealth. Thereby maintaining my family with undivided attention, I forgot You, O Lord Hari!

7

bārdhakye ekhana, bhakativinoda,
kāṅdiyā kātara ati
nā bhajiyā tore, dina bṛthā gela,
ekhana ki habe gati?

bārdhakye—in old age; *ekhana*—now; *bhakativinoda*— Bhaktivinoda; *kāṅdiyā*—weeps; *kātara*—in sadness; *ati*—great; *nā*—not; *bhajiyā*—worshiped; *tore*—You; *dina*—days; *bṛthā*—useless; *gela*—have gone; *ekhana*—now; *ki*—what; *habe*—will be; *gati*—my fate.

Now in old age, this Bhaktivinoda very sadly weeps as death approaches. I failed to worship You, O Lord, and instead passed my days in vain. What will be my fate now?

Song 9

My Life

(An adaptation of Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's *Āmara jīvana*)





1

In a life consumed by sinful deeds,
no trace of piety, only evil seeds.
To trouble others and spark grim fright,
to see their suffering is my delight.
In a life consumed by sinful deeds,
all auspiciousness soon recedes.



2

No mercy or truthfulness within me you will find.
My rule is, “Me first, leave the rest behind!”
When others are happy, I feel distress;
when I see them suffer—that gives me happiness.



3

Within my heart endless desires swell,
anger and deceit—my soul's dark spell.
The craving for pleasure drives me mad,
pride and malice adorn my thick head.



4

Sloth and sleep overshadow my days,
good deeds I shun, evil deeds I praise.
Seeking esteem, I deceive all along,
lust and greed, their grip so strong.



5

Wretched as I am, devotees I avoid,
always an offender, any goodness destroyed.
Mischievous thoughts always fill my mind,
at the fag end of my life, with misery entwined.



6

As life's journey nears its end,
regret and sorrow are my only friends.
Now in old age, I lower my head,
forced to be submissive, my ego shed.



7

Bhaktivinoda, at the Lord's lotus feet,
tells his sad story, admitting defeat.
Humble and meek, he prays: "O my Lord,
Your causeless mercy, my only resort."

Commentary

My Life (Āmāra jīvana) is the fourth song in Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's songbook *Śaranāgati*, under the *First Principle of Surrender: Dainya* (Humility). The author, presenting himself as a conditioned soul, reflects on his self-centered lifestyle and approaches the Lord in a humble mood of remorse and surrender. Becoming introspective and recognizing one's fallen condition is a crucial step on the path of self-realization. Without understanding the nature of the false self and and striving for purification, progress in spiritual life remains elusive.

The Way of Worldly Life

In the opening verse, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura confesses his sinful life *(sadā pāpe rata)* implying that a person, blinded by desire, does not hesitate to act in any way, including harming others, for personal gain. This mentality is condemned by Ṛṣabhadeva who warns his sons (SB 5.5.4):

> When a person considers sense gratification the aim of life, he certainly becomes mad after materialistic living and engages in all kinds of sinful activity. He does not know that due to his past misdeeds he has already received a body which, although temporary, is the cause of his misery. Actually the living entity should not have taken on a material body, but he has been awarded the material body for sense gratification. Therefore I think it not befitting an intelligent man to involve himself again in the activities of sense gratification by which he perpetually gets material bodies one after another.

Envy and Schadenfreude

Next he describes sentiments that are very typical for conditioned souls: envy and *Schadenfreude* (the joy in another's suffering). The word *Schadenfreude*, a German term adopted into various languages,

reflects this mindset. It is a common human trait, even among children, to feel joy when seeing others come to harm or struggle with some difficulty. The opposite, and for a devotee, the desirable quality, is compassion which literally means “to suffer together”—a feeling that arises when one is confronted with another's suffering and feels motivated to relieve that suffering. A devotee is expected to become *para-duḥkha-duḥkhī kṛpāmbudhiḥ,* an ocean of compassion when seeing the suffering of others. The prime example, often quoted by Śrīla Prabhupāda, is Prahlāda Māhārāja who prayed to Nṛsiṁhadeva (SB 7.9.43):

> O best of the great personalities, I am not at all afraid of material existence, for wherever I stay I am fully absorbed in thoughts of Your glories and activities. My concern is only for the fools and rascals who are making elaborate plans for material happiness and maintaining their families, societies and countries. I am simply concerned with love for them.

The Gates to Degradation

In the following stanzas, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura lists all the undesirable qualities generally seen in a materialistic person: endless cravings for sensual pleasure, anger, deceit, malice, false pride, sloth, laziness, hankering after prestige, greed and lust. All of these are considered demoniac tendencies that a devotee is expected to become free from, especially the three gates to hell—lust, anger and greed—which lead to the degradation of the soul. In the purport to this verse spoken by Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (16.21), Śrīla Prabhupāda says:

> A sane man who does not want to glide down to the species of demoniac life must try to give up these three enemies, which can kill the self to such an extent that there will be no possibility of liberation from this material entanglement.

The Turning Point

As in many other songs of this collection, the author reaches a turning point. Contemplating his situation, he realizes that the main reason for his deplorable condition is the lack of saintly association, *sādhu-saṅga*. The importance of good company cannot be emphasized enough. When Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu instructed Sanātana Gosvāmī, He told him that *sādhu-saṅga* was the root cause of devotional service (*kṛṣṇa-bhakti-janma-mūla*) and that even after developing *kṛṣṇa-prema* (pure love of God)*, sādhu-saṅga* was still essential. For this reason, Śrīla Prabhupāda often said that he founded ISKCON to give people the opportunity for *sādhu-saṅga*, which implies that by meeting devotees they will get the opportunity to hear about Kṛṣṇa, participate in chanting and experience a higher taste by taking *prasādam*, spiritualized food.

An Opportunity for Spiritual Reflection

In the last stanza, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura again refers, as in other songs, to old age which he feels is forcing him to become meek and humble, finally enabling him to approach the Lord in a mood of surrender. From a material point of view, old age is unwanted because it diminishes the capacity for enjoyment and gradually destroys it completely. From a spiritual point of view, old age is welcome because it removes the obstacle of unrestricted sensual enjoyment which binds the *jīva* to this world. As external aspects of life become less important, one is able to devote more time to introspection.

In conclusion, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's poem illustrates the transformation from a life filled with sinful actions and pride to one marked by humility and surrender. Recognizing one's fallen condition is the first step toward genuine spiritual progress, leading to taking shelter at the Lord's lotus feet.

The Original Song

Āmāra jīvana

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura

1

āmāra jīvana, sadā pāpe rata,
nāhika puṇyera leṣa
parere udvega, diyāchi ye kata,
diyāchi jīvere kleśa

āmāra—my; *jīvana*—life; *sadā*—always; *pāpe*—in sinful activities; *rata*—engaged; *nāhika*—there is not; *puṇyera*—of pious activities; *leṣa*—a trace; *parere*—to others; *udvega*—anxiety; *diyāchi*—I am inclined to give; *ye*—who; *kata*—great; *diyāchi*—I give; *jīvere*—to living entities; *kleśa*—suffering.

My life is always engaged in sinful activities, without a trace of pious activities. I am always inclined to give great anxiety and trouble to other living entities.

2

nija sukha lāgi', pāpe nāhi ḍari,
dayā-hīna svārtha-para
para-sukhe duḥkhī, sadā mithya-bhāṣī,
para-duḥkha sukha-kara

nija—my own; *sukha*—happiness, pleasure; *lāgi'*—for; *pāpe*—in sinful activity; *nāhi*—there is no; *ḍari*—restraint; *dayā*—mercy; *hīna*—devoid of; *sva-artha*—to my personal interest; *para*—I am dedicated; *para*—of others; *sukhe*—in the happiness; *duḥkhī*—I am unhappy; *sadā*—always; *mithya*—false; *bhāṣī*—words; *para*—of others; *duḥkha*—the misery; *sukha*—my happiness; *kara*—makes.

For my personal pleasure, I don't hesitate to commit any kind of sinful activity. I am not at all merciful, and I see only to my personal interest. When others are suffering I become very happy, I am always speaking lies, and if someone is suffering, that is very pleasant to me.

3

āśeṣa kāmanā, hṛdi mājhe mora,
krodhī, dambha-parāyaṇa
mada-matta sadā, viṣaye mohita,
hiṁsā-garva vibhūṣaṇa

āśeṣa—endless; *kāmanā*—material desires; *hṛdi*—the heart; *mājhe*—in; *mora*—my; *krodhī*—I am angry; *dambha*—to deceit; *parāyaṇa*—dedicated; *mada*—mad; *matta*—with intoxication; *sadā*—always; *viṣaye*—in sense gratification; *mohita*—captivated; *himsā*—malice; *garva*—false pride; *vibhūṣaṇa*—ornaments.

I have lots of material desires within my heart and am always angry and deceitful. I am captivated by subject matters of sense gratification and am almost crazy. My ornaments are malice and false pride.

4

nidrālasya hata, sukārye virata,
akārye udyogī āmi
pratiṣṭha lāgiyā, śāṭhya-ācaraṇa,
lobha-hata sadā kāmī

nidra—by sleep; *ālasya*—by laziness; *hata*—attacked; *sukārye*—to pious activities; *virata*—averse; *akārye*—of impious activities; *udyogī*—a performer; *āmi*—I am; *pratiṣṭha*—prestige; *lāgiyā*—for the sake of; *śāṭhya*—cheating; *ācaraṇa*—behavior; *lobha*—by greed; *hata*—conqured; *sadā*—always; *kāmī*—a lusty person.

I am conquered by sleep and laziness and am always averse to pious activities, but I am very enthusiastic to perform impious activities. I always cheat others for my prestige, I am conquered by greed, and I am always lusty.

5

e hena durjana, saj-jana-varjita,
aparādhi nirantara
śubha-kārya-śūnya, sadānartha-manāḥ,
nānā duḥkhe jara jara

e—a; *hena*—such; *durjana*—fallen person; *saj-jana*—with devotees of the Lord; *varjita*—devoid of association; *aparādhi*—an offender; *nirantara*—always; *śubha*—auspicious; *kārya*—activity; *śūnya*—devoid; *sadā*—always; *anartha*—mischievous; *manāḥ*—mind; *nānā*—all kinds of; *duḥkhe*—sufferings; *jara jara*—very old age.

I am so fallen, I have no association with devotees, and I am always an offender. In my life there is not a bit of auspicious activity, and my mind is always attracted by something mischievous. Therefore, at the fag end of my life I have become almost an invalid because of all such sufferings.

6

bārdhakye ekhana, upāya-vihīna,
tā' te dīna akiñcana
bhakativinoda, prabhura caraṇe,

kare duḥkha nivedana

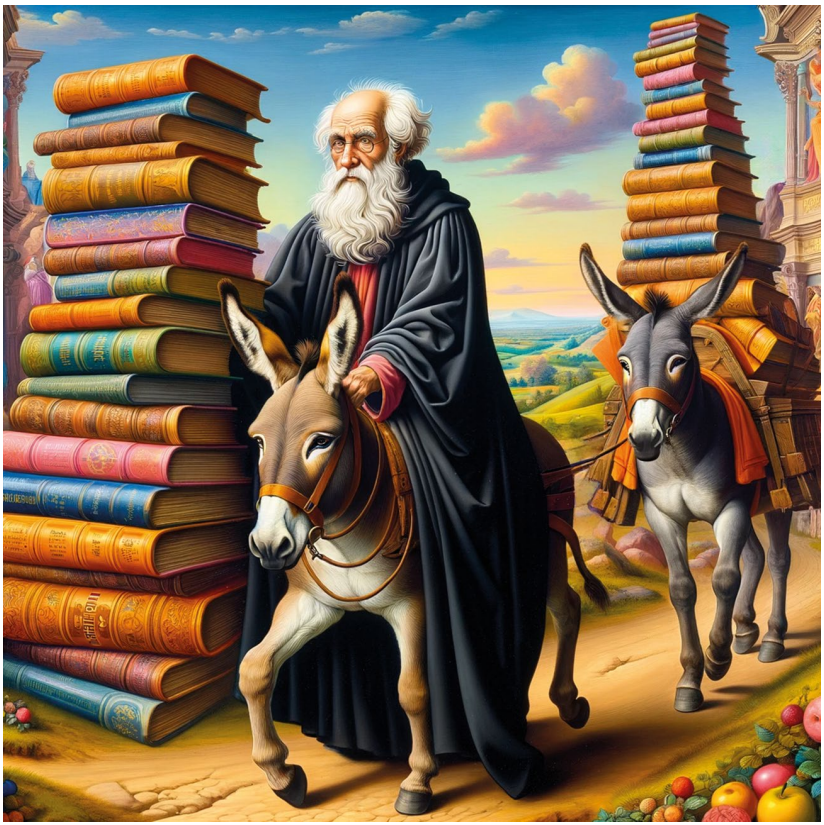
bārdhakye—in old age; *ekhana*—now; *upāya*—an alternative means; *vihīna*—without; *tā' te*—therefore; *dīna*—humble; *akiñcana*—poor; *bhakativinoda*—Bhaktivinoda; prabhura—of the Lord; *caraṇe*—to the lotus feet; *kare*—makes; *duḥkha*—with sadness; *nivedana*—offering.

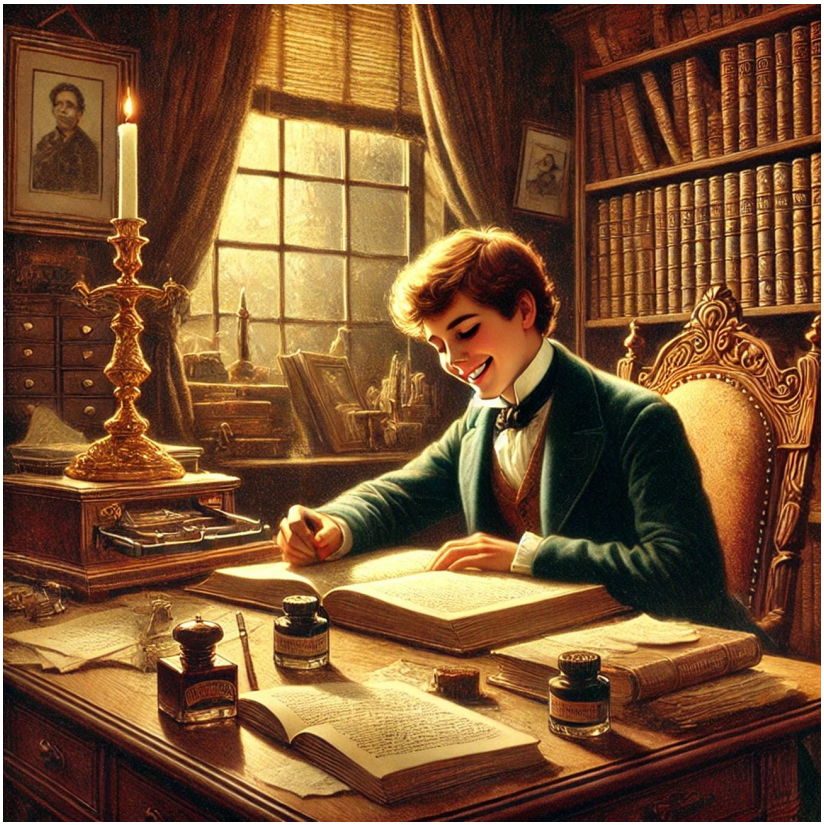
Now in my old age, with no alternative, I have by force become very humble and meek. Thus Bhaktivinoda offers this sad statement of his life's activities at the lotus feet of the Supreme Lord.

Song 10

The Learned Ass

(An adaptation of Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's *Vidyāra vilāse*)





1

In a cheerful mood I spent my time with mundane learning,
confident that worldly wisdom was lofty and rewarding.
I ignored Your lotus feet and never worshiped You, O Lord,
now You are my only shelter, refuge and support.



2

With each book I studied, my hopes surged and soared,
mundane knowledge seemed to be life's ultimate award.
But those hopes turned out to be fruitless and feeble,
now I know such learning to be ignorant babble.



3

The study of worldly matters is illusion's creation,
blocking true devotion, inducing infatuation.
Like an ass, I carried the load of mundane education,
ending only in ambition, frustration, and lamentation.



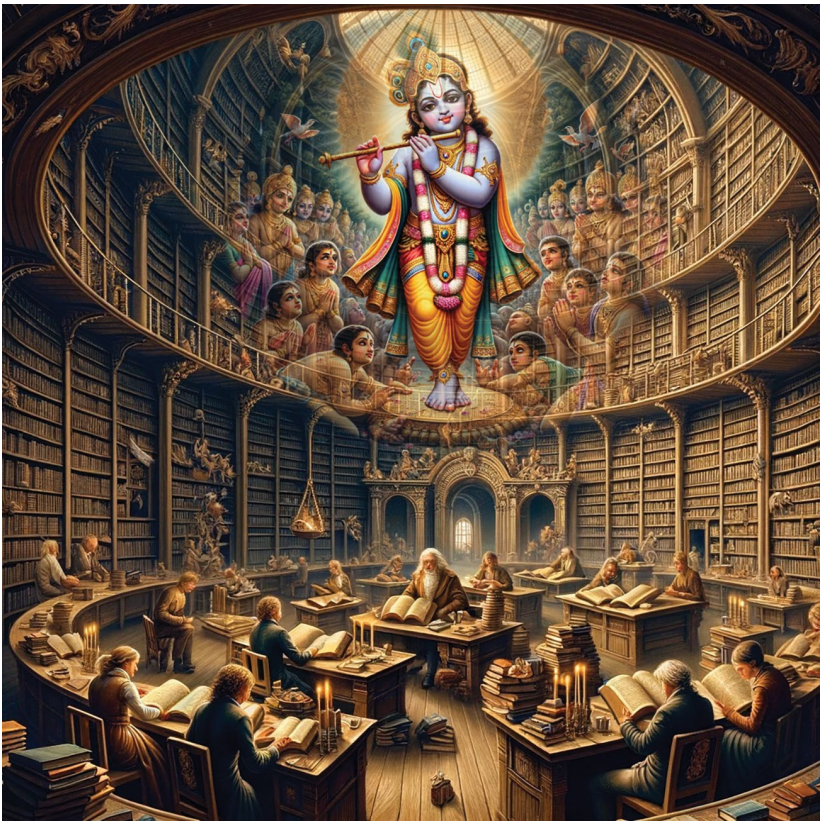
4

Here I stand, a learned ass, proud of my useless load,
absorbed in material life, my spirit overshadowed.
Now in my old age, the power to enjoy curtailed,
nothing at all pleases me, my plans have all failed.



5

Life has become agony, my heart is in pain,
my learning turned out to be devoid of real gain.
It has become a pointed spear piercing my inner sense,
with the unbearable burning pain of abject ignorance.



6

O Lord, in this dreary world there is no other treasure
than Your precious lotus feet, their value beyond measure.
Bhaktivinoda abandons now all dull mundane knowledge
and makes Your feet his life's essence,
transcending all bondage.

Commentary

Vidyāra-vilāse (lit. the joy of learning) is the second song in Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's songbook *Śaranāgati,* illustrating the *First Principle of Surrender: Dainya* (Humility).

Although we have no recording of Śrīla Prabhupāda singing this song, he refers to it many times in his lectures and conversations. In particular, he quotes the third stanza where Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura says*: jaḍa-vidyā yata, māyāra vaibhava, tomāra bhajane bādhā / moha janamiyā, anitya saṁsāre, jīvake karaye gādhā.* "All the so-called knowledge of this world is born of the flickering potency of Your illusory energy (*māyā*). It is an impediment to the execution of devotional service to You. Indulgence in mundane knowledge verily makes an ass of the eternal soul by encouraging its infatuation with this temporary world."

Clarifying the Role of Knowledge

In this regard, to prevent any misunderstanding, it should be noted that Vaiṣṇava philosophy does not categorically reject non-spiritual knowledge. Ordinary knowledge can undoubtedly be helpful in navigating difficult situations in day-to-day life, but devotees caution against relying on such knowledge to solve the real problems of life. Life in the material world means struggle for existence, and many branches of knowledge and scientific research are dedicated to finding solutions to the countless suffering conditions human beings undergo. The ancient Vedic scriptures also contain branches of non-spiritual knowledge, among them the popular *Āyurveda* (medical science), *Sthāpatyaveda* (architecture and engineering), *Jyotiṣa* (astronomy and astrology), and *Gandharvaveda* (the study of music).

The Limitations of Material Knowledge

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura begins this song by telling us that he spent considerable time on educational pursuits hoping that the acquisition of material knowledge would yield inner fulfillment. However, as he points out, these hopes turned out to be false. The reason is that we, as spiritual beings, yearn for spiritual fulfillment, and no amount of material knowledge can quench that thirst. A good analogy is a fish out of water. Although offered all kinds of comfort on land, a fish out of its natural habitat remains unhappy until it is back in the water.

To illustrate the real nature of mundane knowledge, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura uses the example of an ass carrying a huge load. The amount of knowledge that humanity has accumulated over the centuries is staggering, but what is its real value? Scientific advancements, such as electrical engineering, quantum mechanics, molecular biology and gene modification, computer science and the Internet, and more recently the human genome project and artificial intelligence, have dramatically transformed our understanding of the world and our way of life, but the fundamental problems of life—birth, death, old age and disease—remain unsolved. We may discover the intricate workings of the material elements and harness their power to exploit nature, but the wheel of time, the great destroyer, keeps turning relentlessly. Real knowledge teaches us how to escape the crushing force of time.

The Power of Old Age

In the third stanza, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura points out: “Indulgence in mundane knowledge verily makes an ass of the eternal soul by encouraging its infatuation with the temporary world.” As in other songs, he specifically mentions old age as a factor that changes one’s

worldview: *bārdhakye ekhana, śaktira abhāve, kichu nāhi lāge bhāla.* "Now in my old age, for want of the power to enjoy, I find that nothing at all pleases me." The truth of this statement is evident in the world around us, especially among celebrities in the entertainment industry. Throughout their lives, they revel in fame and admiration, enjoying immense wealth that enables them to live in some of the world's most beautiful places and indulge in luxuries beyond the reach of the ordinary person. Yet, as time marches on, youthful attractiveness fades, and the physical and mental faculties that once allowed for enjoyment wane. Disappointment and bitterness inevitably grow, day by day. In the end, perhaps all that remains is a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

The Only Treasure Worth Seeking

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura therefore concludes that the only treasure worth seeking in this world is the lotus feet of the Lord. Sanat-kumāra advised King Pṛthu (SB 4.22.40):

> The ocean of nescience is very difficult to cross because it is infested with many dangerous sharks. Although those who are nondevotees undergo severe austerities and penances to cross that ocean, we recommend that you simply take shelter of the lotus feet of the Lord, which are like boats for crossing the ocean. Although the ocean is difficult to cross, by taking shelter of His lotus feet you will overcome all dangers.

In the beginning of the Tenth Canto of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (10.1.5), Parīkṣit Mahārāja says:

> Taking the boat of Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet, my grandfather Arjuna and others crossed the ocean of the Battlefield of Kurukṣetra, in which such commanders as Bhīṣmadeva resembled great fish that could very easily have swallowed them. By the mercy

> of Lord Kṛṣṇa, my grandfathers crossed this ocean, which was very difficult to cross, as easily as one steps over the hoofprint of a calf.

Later (SB 10.14.58), Brahmā prays to the Lord as follows:

> One who has taken shelter of the lotus feet of the Lord, which are accepted as the most suitable boat for crossing the ocean of nescience, can achieve liberation as easily as one leaps over the holes made by the hooves of a calf. Such persons are meant to reside in the abode of the Lord, and they have nothing to do with a place where there is danger at every step.

Commenting on this verse, Śrīla Prabhupāda says:

> The Lord's lotus feet are an indestructible boat, and if one takes shelter of that boat he can easily cross the ocean of nescience. Consequently, there are no dangers for a devotee although he lives within this material world, which is full of dangers at every step. One should seek the shelter of the all-powerful instead of trying to be protected by one's own concocted ideas.

The Original Song

Vidyāra vilāse

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura

1

vidyāra vilāse, kāṭāinu kāla,
parama sāhase āmi
tomāra caraṇa, nā bhajinu kabhu,
ekhana śaraṇa tumi

vidyāra vilāse—in the joys of mundane learning; *kāṭāinu kāla*—I passed the time; *parama sahase*—with great confidence; āmi—I; *tomāra caraṇa*—Your lotus feet, O Lord; *nā bhajinu*—I did not worship; *kabhu*—ever; *ekhana*—but now; *śaraṇa tumi*—You are my only shelter.

With great enthusiasm I spent my time in the joys of mundane learning, and never worshiped Your lotus feet, O Lord. Now You are my only shelter.

2

parite parite, bharasā bārila,
jñāne gati habe māni'
se āśā biphala, se jñāna durbala,
se jñāna ajñāna jāni

parite parite—reading on and on; *bharasā bārila*—my hope grew; *jñāne*—material knowledge; *gati*—life's true goal; *habe*—will be attained; *māni'*—I considered; *se āśā*—that hope; *biphala*—was fruitless; *se jñāna*—that knowledge; *durbala*—proved feeble; *se jñāna*—that knowledge; *ajñāna*—ignorance; *jāni*—I understand.

Reading on and on, my hopes grew and grew, for I considered the acquisition of material knowledge to be life's true goal., for all my knowledge proved feeble. Now I understand that all such erudition is actually pure ignorance.

3

jaḍa-vidyā yata, māyāra vaibhava,
tomāra bhajane bādhā
moha janamiyā, anitya saṁsāre,
jīvake karaye gādhā

jaḍa-vidyā—mundane knowledge; *yata*—all; *māyāra vaibhava*—is the power of the illusory energy; *tomāra bhajane*—to Your service; *bādhā*—an impediment; *moha janamiyā*—bringing about infatuation; *anitya saṁsāre*—for this temporary world; *jīvake*—to the eternal soul; *karaye gādhā*—it turns into an ass.

All the so-called knowledge of this world is born of the flickering potency of Your illusory energy (māyā). It is an impediment to the execution of devotional service to You. Indulgence in mundane knowledge verily makes an ass of the eternal soul by encouraging his infatuation with this temporary world.

4

sei gādhā ha' ye, saṁsārera bojhā,
vahinu aneka kāla

bārdhakye ekhana, śaktira abhāve,
kichu nāhi lāge bhāla

sei gādhā ha' ye—here is one such ass; *saṁsārera bojhā*—the burden of material existence; *vahinu*—I have carried on my back; *aneka kāla*—for a long time; *bārdhakye*—in my old age; *ekhano*—now; *śaktira abhāve*—for want of the power to enjoy; *kichu nāhi*—absolutely nothing; *lāge bhāla*—pleases me.

Here is one person who has been turned into such an ass, who for so long has carried on his back the useless burden of material existence. Now in my old age, for want of the power to enjoy, I find that nothing at all pleases me.

5

jīvana jātanā, hoila ekhana,
se vidyā avidyā bhela
avidyāra jvālā, ghaṭila viṣama,
se vidyā hoila śela

jīvana—life; *jātanā*—agony; *hoilo*—has become; *ekhano*—now; *se vidyā*—that knowledge; *avidyā bhelo*—has become ignorance; *avidyāra jvālā*—the burning pain of ignorance; *ghaṭilo viṣama*—has become intolerable; *se vidyā*—that knowledge; *hoila śela*—has become a pointed spear.

Life has now become agony, for my so-called erudite knowledge has proven itself to be worthless ignorance. Material knowledge has now become a pointed shaft and has pierced my heart with the intolerable, burning pain of ignorance.

6

tomāra caraṇa, vinā kichu dhana,
saṁsāre nā āche āra
bhakativinoda, jaḍa-vidyā chāri,'
tuvā pada kare sāra

tomāra caraṇa—Your lotus feet; *vinā*—besides; *kichu dhana*—any treasure; *saṁsāre*—in this world; *nā āche āra*—there is none else; *bhakativinoda*—Bhaktivinoda; *jaḍa-vidyā chāri'*—giving up all mundane knowledge; *tuvā pada*—Your lotus feet; *kare sāra*—makes the sum and substance of his life.

O Lord, there is no treasure worth seeking in this world other than Your lotus feet. Bhaktivinoda abandons all his mundane knowledge and makes Your lotus feet the sum and substance of his life.

Song 11

Your Merciful Glance

(An adaptation of Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura's *Gaurāṅga karuṇa koro*)





1

O Gaurāṅga cast Your merciful glance
upon this wretch, allured by Māyā's dance.
Lost in the three worlds' boundless domain,
I am seeking Your lotus feet's shelter again.



2

With a blade of grass between my teeth,
I beg You, o Gaura, Your causeless mercy bequeath.
In the temple of my heart, please take Your seat
in a shrine of love, free from all conceit.



3

If You have no mercy seeing my condition,
my misfortune and dreadful situation,
why are You known as the savior of the fallen?
Why bear this name, if You don't save the forsaken?



4

No escape from the tempest of worldly life,
a constant struggle with no hope to survive.
Your divine lotus feet, a boat to transcend
to the shores of eternity, where all sorrows end.



5

I'm the servant of the servant, Narottama dāsa sings,
of Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya, the savior of all beings.
My prayer flows to Him, like an endless stream,
to the lotus feet of that most munificent Supreme.

Commentary

This song by Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura is a fervent prayer for the mercy of Gaurāṅga, the Supreme Lord in His feature as the most benevolent *avatāra*. Narottama presents himself as a *dīna hīna jana*, a low and destitute person. *Dīna* indicates someone whose mind is stricken with melancholy or sorrow, who is overcome with a sense of humility, and *hīna* means "devoid of" or "deprived of," referring here to a lack of material or spiritual assets. He further emphasizes his lamentable position by stating that it would be difficult to find anyone more fallen in the entire universe.

As seen in many songs by Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura and Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, this self-deprecating attitude is a common theme. It is understood that the Lord is inclined to bestow His mercy on a person who has given up false pride, which Kṛṣṇa describes in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (16.4) as a quality typical of non-devotees.

The Sign of Humility

Following the example of Sanātana Gosvāmī, Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura, in the next stanza, presents himself before Gaura with a blade of grass between his teeth—a sign of utmost humility. He calls out to the Lord and begs Him to reside within the temple of his heart. As Kṛṣṇa says in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (18.61), He is situated within the heart of all living entities and directs their movements. One may wonder why Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura asks the Lord to reside within his heart, if He is already there. The answer is that the Lord, as the Supersoul, generally acts as a witness and sanctioner but does not involve Himself directly and personally as a well-wishing friend. This He does when a *jīva* turns to Him through loving devotional service, as explained in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (10.10). Then the Lord takes His

seat in a purified heart and gives personal instructions on how to come to Him. Or, as explained in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (1.2.17), the Lord becomes a *suhṛt* (a well-wishing friend), when a *jīva* becomes eager to hear about Him, personally cleansing the heart from all inauspicious things. The first step toward this position is to become a humble servant of the Lord and His devotees and patiently wait for their mercy.

A Challenge to the Lord's Title

In the third stanza, Narottama suddenly shifts his mood, seemingly challenging Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu's title of Patita-pāvana, the savior of the fallen. He implies that if the Lord wishes to maintain this title, He should prove His mercy and rescue him. Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura expresses a similar mood in another song, saying: "The purpose of Your coming to this world is to deliver the fallen souls. I assure You that You will not find a soul more fallen than me. Therefore, my claim is first." Such challenges, of course, are not signs of disrespect but rather a desperate plea from the devotee to hasten the downpour of the Lord's mercy. The more fervent and sincere the prayer, the swifter the Lord's response.

The Ocean of Material Existence

In the next stanza, Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura offers a compelling reason for receiving Lord Caitanya's mercy. He explains that he has fallen into an ocean agitated by hurricane-stricken waves. The comparison of the material world to an ocean is frequent in the songs of the Vaiṣṇava *ācāryas* and various Vedic texts. Even the best swimmer cannot survive long in the middle of an ocean, especially if the water is churned by a fierce tempest with towering waves repeatedly pushing the swimmer underwater. The only hope is help from outside, such as a boat from which people can lift the person

out of the water. In his prayers to Kṛṣṇa, Brahmā compares the Lord's lotus feet to such a boat (SB 10.14.58):

samāśritā ye pada-pallava-plavaṁ
mahat-padaṁ puṇya-yaśo murāreḥ
bhavāmbudhir vatsa-padaṁ paraṁ padaṁ
padaṁ padaṁ yad vipadāṁ na teṣām

> For one who has accepted the boat of the lotus feet of the Lord, who is the shelter of the cosmic manifestation and is famous as Mukunda, or the giver of *mukti*, the ocean of the material world is like the water contained in a calf's hoofprint. *Paraṁ padam*, the place where there are no material miseries, or Vaikuṇṭha, is his goal, not the place where there is danger in every step of life.

Here, Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura hopes for the same saving grace and pleads with Gaurāṅga to bestow upon him the gift of His divine lotus feet, which are compared to a boat that can carry a humble servant of the Lord across the ocean of birth and death.

A Repeated Prayer

Narottama dāsa ends his song with a line he uses in many of his songs: *prārthanā karaye sadā, narottama dāsa*—"Narottama dāsa offers this prayer continuously." From this, we can surmise that offering prayers regularly is recommended, not only in moments of need or a crisis. Floating in the agitated ocean of material existence is a constant crisis. Therefore, it is wise to pray for help continuously.

The Original Song

Gaurāṅga karuṇā koro

Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura

1

gaurāṅga karuṇā koro, dīna hīna jane
mo-sama patita prabhu, nāhi tri-bhuvane

gaurāṅga—O my dear Lord Gaurāṅga; *karuṇā kara*—please show Your mercy; *dīna hīna jane*—to this fallen and destitute soul; *mo-sama*—like myself; *patita*—fallen; *prabhu*—O Lord!; *nāhi*—there is not; *tri-bhuvane*—in the three worlds.

O my dear Lord Gaurāṅga! Please show Your mercy to this lowly and destitute soul. O Lord! There is no one more fallen than myself in all the three worlds.

2

dante ṭṛṇa dhari' gaura, ḍāki he tomāra
kṛpā kari' eso āmāra, hṛdaya mandire

dante—between my teeth; *ṭṛṇa dhari'*—holding grass; *gaura*—O Lord Gaura!; *ḍāki*—I am calling out; *he*—O!; *tomāra*—your; *kṛpā*—mercy; *kari'*—showing; *eso*—please come; *āmāra*—my; *hṛdaya mandire*—into the temple of the heart.

Holding grass between my teeth, O Lord Gaura, I am calling out to You now! Please be compassionate upon me and come to reside within the temple of my heart.

3

yadi dayā nā karibe, patita dekhiyā
patita pāvana nāma, kisera lāgiyā

yadi—if; *dayā*—mercy; *nā karibe*—You do not give; *patita*—fallen; *dekhiyā*—seeing; *patita pāvana*—savior of the fallen; *nāma*—the name; *kisera lāgiyā*—why are You known.

If You do not give Your mercy, seeing how fallen I am, then why are You known as Patita Pāvana—the merciful savior of the fallen?

4

pareci bhava tuphāne, nāhika nistāra
śrī caraṇa taraṇī dāne, dāse kara pāra

pareci—I have fallen; *bhava tuphāne*—in the hurricane of this material world; *nāhika nistāra*—there is no escape; *śrī caraṇa*—divine lotus feet; *taraṇī*—compared to a boat; *dāne*—by the gift; *dāse*—to Your servant; *kara pāra*—make cross over.

I am plunged amidst the violent hurricane-stricken waves in the ocean of this material world, from which there is no escape. Kindly give me the gift of Your divine lotus feet, which are compared to a boat in which Your servant may cross over the ocean of birth and death.

5

śrī kṛṣṇa caitanya prabhu, dāsera anudāsa
prārthanā karaye sadā, narottama dāsa

śrī kṛṣṇa caitanya prabhu—Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya Prabhu; *dāsera anudāsa*—servant of the servant; *prārthanā karaye*—makes this prayer; *sadā*—always; *narottama dāsa*—Narottama dāsa.

Narottama dāsa, the servant of the servant of Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya Prabhu, ceaselessly makes this prayer.

Song 12

Jewels on Rags

(An adaptation of Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura's *Hari! hari! ki mor karam abhaga)*





1

Hari! My Lord, O Hari!
How unfortunate my actions can be!
I lived in vain, my poor heart speared by pain,
no true love for You could I gain.



2a
Sacrifices, charity, and meditation,
pious deeds, *mantras*, and holy water dips—

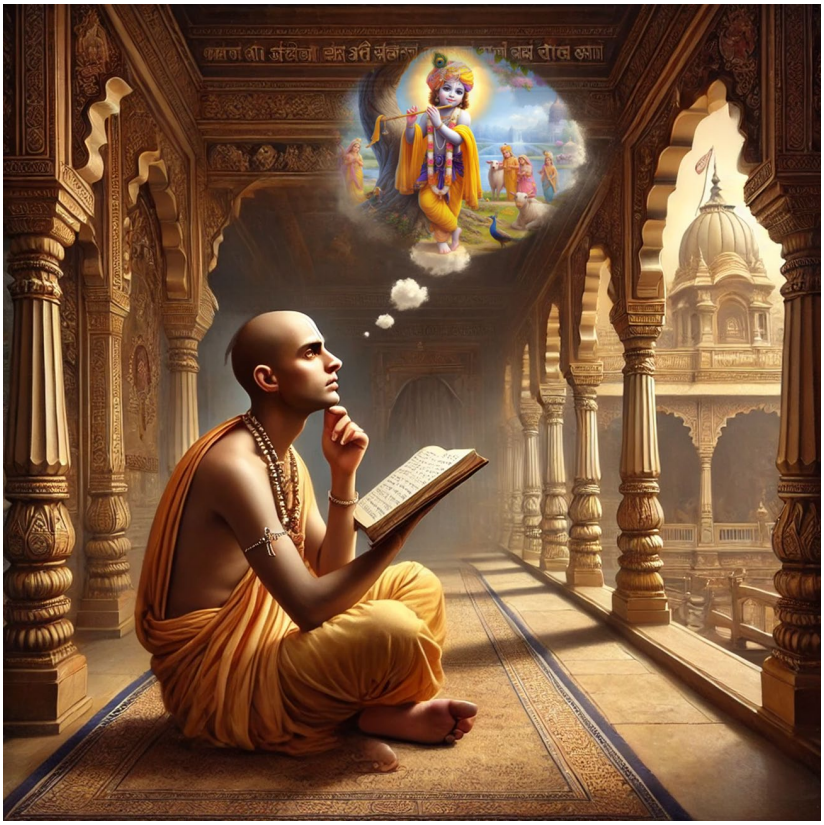


2b
all are illusions, without devotion,
a laughable display, like jewels on rags.



3

The nectarine words from the lips of *sādhus*
never entered my heart, shrouded in offenses.
Bad company has broken any good within me.
Where can I flee when Death comes for me?



4a

From all the Vedic scriptures did I hear
that Hari's lotus feet will free me from fear.



4b

But I chose a life of dizzy delirium,
never praised His name, nor gazed at His form.



5

Now my body and mind I will place
at Rādhā-Krishna's lotus feet by Their grace.
Lowly desires flee—I have no more fear,
with my body and mind in Their care.

Commentary

This song by Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura is part of the section *Dainyā-bodhika* in the songbook *Prārthana* where the author describes his fallen condition. *Hari! Hari! biphale*, which is included in this collection under the title *A Wasted Birth*, is also part of this section.

A Sense of Profound Loss

The overall sentiment is one of deep spiritual regret, where the devotee feels that, despite living an active life crowned with successes and accomplishments, they have failed to cultivate genuine love and devotion to the Lord. This painful realization brings a profound sense of loss and a piercing heartache. Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura uses the word *abhāga* (unfortunate), and the word *biphale* (lit. "bad fruit") to describe the futility of a life dedicated only to worldly pursuits.

In another song, also included in *Dainyā-bodhika,* he expresses a similar sentiment:

hari hari! boro śela marame rahila
pāiyā dūrlabha tanu śrī-kṛṣṇa-bhajana vinū
janma mora biphala haila

"O Lord Hari, a great spear of lamentation is piercing my heart. Even after attaining this rare human body, still I have not worshipped my beloved Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and thus my life has become useless."

Illusion of Pious Deeds

In the second stanza, Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura lists various practices that people generally follow to accrue pious credit, practices promised to lead to a better future life or, at the very least, recognition as a good person. However, he calls all these practices

illusions because unless they are tinged with *bhakti*, they will not lead to the ultimate goal—pure devotional service, which is the only true and permanent asset. All attainments in this world are temporary and will vanish in time, including the results of pious activities. Such superficial religiosity is likened to the absurdity of wearing valuable jewelry on cheap clothing. Rūpa Gosvāmī describes this kind of pseudo-spirituality as *niyama-āgraha*—adhering to religious principles merely for appearance's sake or to be seen as a loyal follower, rather than for genuine spiritual advancement.

Consequences of Bad Company

In the third stanza, Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura expresses remorse for not acting on the wisdom imparted by saints. He acknowledges that continuous association with materialistic people (*asat saṅga*) has led to the destruction or failure of everything worthwhile in his life. He now realizes that bad company can easily lead to spiritual and moral decay. The stanza ends with a poignant question, conveying anxiety and despair about the inevitable approach of death and what can possibly be done when the last hour arrives.

Regret for Missed Opportunities

The fourth stanza again expresses regret. Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura acknowledges that, despite living a life filled with comfort and opportunities, as indicated by the word *sukhe* (happiness), he failed to engage in essential devotional practices such as chanting the holy name of Kṛṣṇa or meditating on His divine form. The tone reflects a recognition of missed spiritual opportunities and the realization of having neglected what is truly important.

Essence of Devotional Surrender

The final stanza beautifully encapsulates the essence of devotional surrender, where the devotee wishes to be entirely absorbed in

divine love, free from worldly attachments. Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura expresses his resolve to surrender everything unconditionally—body, mind and soul—at the lotus feet of the Divine Couple, Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Through this act of unreserved surrender to Their Lordships, with all worldly desires kept at a distance, he is freed from all fear and finds peace under Their shelter.

In the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (2.8.6), we find the following verse expressing a similar sentiment:

> A pure devotee of the Lord whose heart has once been cleansed by the process of devotional service never relinquishes the lotus feet of Lord Kṛṣṇa, for they fully satisfy him, as a traveler is satisfied at home after a troubled journey.

The Original Song

Hari! hari! ki mora karama abhaga

Dainyā-bodhika Prārthana

(Prayer Wherein the Author Describes His Fallen Condition)

Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura

1

hari hari ki mora karama abhāga
biphale jīvana gela, hṛdaye rahila śela
nāhi bhela hari-anurāga

hari—O Hari; *hari*—O Hari; *ki*—how; *karama*—activities; *abhāga*—unfortunate; *biphale*—useless; *jīvana*—the life is passed *hṛdaye*—in the heart; *rahile*—placed; *śela*—a spear; *nāhi*—not; *bhela*—mixed; *hari*—for Hari; *anurāga*—love.

O Hari, O Hari, everything that I do is inauspicious. I have uselessly wasted my life, and I have no love for You. It is as if my heart were pierced by a sharp spear.

2

yajña, dāna, tīrtha-snāna, puṇya karma japa dhyāna,
akāraṇe sab gelo mohe
bujhilām mane heno, upahāsa hoy yeno,
vastra hīna ābharaṇa dehe

yajña—Vedic sacrifices; *dāna*—charity; *tīrtha*—in pilgrimage places; *snāna*—bathing; *puṇya*—pious; *karma*—activities; *japa*—chanting of *mantras*; *dhyāna*—meditation; *akāraṇe*—useless; *saba*—all; *gela*—were; *mohe*—in illusion; *bujhilāma*—I knew; *mane*—in the mind; hena—like this; *upahāsa*—laughter; haya—was; *yena*—by which; *vastra*—elegant clothing; *hīna*—without; alankara—ornaments; dehe—on the body.

Vedic sacrifices, charity, bathing in holy places of pilgrimage, pious deeds, mantra-chanting, and meditation, are all useless and illusory. When I think of these things laughter arises within my mind. Engaging in these activities without performing devotional service is like placing valuable ornaments on a body clothed in rags.

3

sādhu mukhe kathāmṛta, śuniyā vimala cita,
nāhi bhela aparādha kāraṇa
satata asat saṅga, sakali hoilo bhaṅga,
ki kariba āile śamana

sādhu—of the saintly devotees; *mukhe*—from the mouth; *kathā*—topics; *amṛta*—nectar; *śuniyā*—hearing; *vimala*— purified; *cita*—mind, heart, consciousness; *nāhi*—not; *bhela*—mixed; *aparādha*—of offenses; karana—the cause; *satata*—constantly; *asat*—of the non-devotees; *saṅga*—association; *sakali*—everything; *haila*—has become; *bhaṅga*—broken; *ki*—how; *kariba*—will appear; *āile*—on the horizen; *śamana*—death.

Although I sometimes hear the nectarean message of Godhead from the mouths of the devotees, because I commit so many offenses, I do not become purified. I continually associate with non-devotees, and in this way all my spiritual advancement is broken apart. Furthermore, death will soon appear on my horizon.

4

śruti smṛti sadā rabe, śuniyāchi ei sabe,
hari pada abhaya śaraṇa

janama loiyā sukhe, kṛṣṇa nā bolinu mukhe,
nā kariṇu se rūpa bhāvana

śruti—of the Śruti scriptures; *smṛti*—of the Smṛti scriptures; *sadā*—always; *rabe*—in the statements; *śuniyāchi*—I have heard; *ei*—this; *sabe*—all; *hari*—of Hari; *pada*—the lotus feet; *abhaya*—fearless; *śarana*—the shelter; *janama*—this life; *laiyā*—having passed; *sukhe*—happy; *kṛṣṇa*—the sound Kṛṣṇa; *na*—not; *balinu*—I chanted; *mukhe*—in the mouth; *na*—not; *kariṇu*—I do; se-rupa—of His transcendental form; bhabana—the meditation.

Although I have repeatedly heard the words of the Śruti and Smṛti scriptures saying that one should take shelter of Hari's lotus feet to become fearless, nevertheless I refuse to happily chant the holy name of Krsna, and I decline to meditate on His transcendental form.

5

rādhā-kṛṣṇa duhuṅ pāy, tanu mana rahu tāy,
ār dūre jāuk vāsanā
narottama dāse kāya, āra mora nāhi bhāya,
tanu mana saṁpinu āpanā

rādhā—Radha; *kṛṣṇa*—Krsna; *duhuṅ*—both; *pāya*—lotus feet; *tanu*—body; *mana*—-mind; *rahu*—may stay; *tāya*—that; *āra*—and; *dūre*—far away; *jāuka*—go; *vāsanā*—material desires; *narottama dāsa*—Narottama dāsa; *kāya*—saying; *āra*—and; *mora*—of me; *nāhi*—there is no; *bhāya*—fear; *tanu*—body; *mana*—and mind; *saṁpinu*—in place; *āpanā*—spontaneously.

I shall now concentrate my mind on the lotus feet of Śrī Śrī Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, and all my material desires will flee far away. Narottama dāsa says: Now that I have fixed my mind on Śrī Śrī Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, I am no longer afraid of what may be coming.

Song 13

O Mind, Listen to Me

(An adaptation of Locana dāsa Ṭhākura's *Avatāra-sāra*)





1

O mind, why don't you worship Gaura,
the crown-jewel of all *avatāras*?
Although near water, you are still thirsty,
your past bad *karma* keeps you afar.



2

O mind, you always served thorny trees,
hoping to harvest nectar fruits.
Gaurāṅga, the wish-fulfilling tree of *prema*,
you shunned, thinking Him poisonous.



3a
You searched for fragrance in the *palāśa* flower,
but only an insect crawled into your nose.



3b
Desiring nectar you sucked on dry wood,
but how can you get from it any sweet juice?



4a
O mind, death is like a coiling snake
you put around your neck like a flower garland.



4b
You entered fire, expecting cool breezes,
only to suffer painful burns in the end.



5

O mind, enjoying worldly pleasures,
the merciful Gaura you have forgotten.
Never heeding the words of the *sādhus*,
both this world and the next are lost to you.



6
O mind, why don't you worship Gaura,
the crown-jewel of all *avatāras*?
The most magnanimous and loving Lord,
bestowing pure *prema* freely to all.

O mind, listen to me!
O mind, listen to me!
O mind, why don't you worship Gaura?
O mind!

Commentary

In this song, Locana dāsa Ṭhākura reproaches his mind for avoiding Gaura, the most magnanimous *avatāra* of all, whose sublime character and mission were described by Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī as follows (Cc. Madhya 19.53-54):

> O most munificent incarnation! You are Kṛṣṇa Himself appearing as Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya Mahāprabhu. You have assumed the golden color of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī, and You are widely distributing pure love of Kṛṣṇa. We offer our respectful obeisances unto You.
>
> We offer our respectful obeisances unto that merciful Supreme Personality of Godhead who has converted all three worlds, which were maddened by ignorance, and saved them from their diseased condition by making them mad with the nectar from the treasure-house of love of God. Let us take full shelter of that Personality of Godhead, Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya, whose activities are wonderful.

Thirsty Although Surrounded by Water

Addressing his mind, Locana dāsa Ṭhākura reproaches himself for being foolish in not taking advantage of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu's appearance. He compares his situation to that of a thirsty man who has a source of pure water right in front of him but cannot take advantage of the opportunity due to bad *karma*. This metaphor is reminiscent of the story of Tantalus in Greek mythology, who, because of his offenses to the gods, was placed in a pool of water beneath a fruit tree. When he tried to drink, the water receded, and when he reached for the fruit, the branches moved just out of his grasp.

Locana dāsa expresses a similar sentiment in another of his songs, *Parama-karuṇa*, where he says that he feels entrapped by desires for sense enjoyment and therefore has no attraction to the lotus feet of Lord Caitanya and Lord Nityānanda. He attributes his unfortunate situation to being punished by the superintendent of death, Yamarāja, for his past sins, who therefore does not allow him to be attracted by the *saṅkīrtana* movement.

Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura expresses a similar regret in the song *Gorā Pahū*, where he laments that because he habitually drinks the dangerous poison of sense gratification, he cannot fully absorb myself in the blissful nectar of chanting Lord Caitanya's glories.

Another example is given in the *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, *Ādi-līlā*, Chapter 7, where it is said that Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu and the members of the Pañca-tattva caused a flood of love of Godhead that inundated the whole world, immersing everyone. Thus, everyone had the chance to quench their thirst for true happiness. Only unfortunate people—such as impersonlist philosophers, die-hard sense enjoyers, false logicians and nondevotees—were surrounded by water but unable to drink even a single drop (*karī' nīre vāsa, gela na piyāsa*).

Foolish Pursuits of Happiness

Locana dāsa Ṭhākura then gives several examples to illustrate the mind's foolish attempts to become happy. The pursuit of happiness is natural (*ānandamāyo' bhyāsāt*), but one must know how to achieve true happiness. Attempting to attain true, everlasting happiness through material means is compared to cultivating thorny trees in the hope of obtaining sweet, juicy fruits. Just as this is impossible and will only result in disappointment, any amount of material happiness will eventually reach its limit, ending in frustration. Unending spiritual happiness (*brahma-saukhyam tv anantam*) can only be attained by contacting the reservoir of all

pleasure, Kṛṣṇa, who is the supreme embodiment of bliss (*sac-cid-ānanda vigraha*). Gaura teaches the world how to connect to that source of bliss and is therefore described in this song as the beautiful and nectarean tree of *prema*. Unfortunately, under the influence of ignorance, the conditioned soul mistakes this nectar-tree for a poison-tree and ignores or rejects it.

The Deceptive Beauty of the Palāśa Flower

The next example Locana dāsa Ṭhākura gives is of the *palāśa* flower, also known as the "Flame of the Forest," which stands out due to its bright reddish-orange petals. Although the flower is stunningly beautiful and promises a superb fragrance, there is utter disappointment because it has absolutely no scent. Quite the contrary, instead of a sweet aroma, an insect may crawl into one's nostrils. Similarly, the glamorous external features of the illusory energy may lure us into enjoyment, but in the end, expectations fall short, and the promised satisfaction and fulfillment don't last long or fail to manifest at all.

The Futility of "Chewing the Chewed"

The analogy of mistaking dry wood for sweet, juicy sugar cane is reminiscent of Prahlāda Mahārāja's teachings to his father. He tells him that materialistic life, where the sole aim is to repeatedly enjoy the senses in the hope of extracting some pleasure from different objects, can be compared to chewing dry sugar cane from which the juice has already been extracted. He uses the expression "chewing the chewed" (*punaḥ punaś carvita-carvaṇānām*, SB 7.5.30). This attempt is obviously useless and foolish, yet the conditioned soul, enamored by the material energy, is in exactly that position. It tries to enjoy its senses in different bodies, life after life, but is never truly

satisfied and thus is always seeking newer and newer pleasurable experiences. Consequently, Locana dāsa Ṭhākura tells his mind that such endeavors are simply a frustrating waste of time.

The Snake of Death as a Garland

He then compares death to a coiling snake that we mistakingly place around our necks, thinking it to be a flower garland. In the Vedic scriptures, several metaphors are used for death, including a tiger, crocodile, hunter and snake. In the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (4.7.28), it says: "In this formidable fort of conditional existence the time element, like a snake, is always looking for an opportunity to strike." In the Fifth Canto (SB 5.8.26), Śukadeva Gosvāmī says of Bharata Mahārāja: "In due course of time, insurmountable death, which is compared to a venomous snake that enters the hole created by a mouse, situated itself before him." In the Eighth Canto (SB 8.2.33), Śrīla Prabhupāda comments on Gajendra's crisis:

> We are always in danger because at any moment death can take place. It is not that only Gajendra, the king of the elephants, was afraid of death. Everyone should fear death because everyone is caught by the crocodile of eternal time and may die at any moment. The best course, therefore, is to seek shelter of Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and be saved from the struggle for existence in this material world, in which one repeatedly takes birth and dies. To reach this understanding is the ultimate goal of life.

One may wonder why Locana dāsa Ṭhākura compares death to a flower garland. Who would be so crazy as to put a snake around their neck, mistaking it for a garland?

The Illusory Power of Māyā

The fact is that the illusioned *jīva*, under the spell of *māyā*, is indeed capable of acting in unbelievably foolish ways. Jagadānanda Paṇḍita says in Chapter 6 of *Prema-vivarta*:

> When the living entity desires to enjoy separately from Kṛṣṇa, the illusory potency of the Lord, *māyā*, immediately grabs the soul in her clutches. Being *māyā's* captive, the *jīva* becomes bewildered and acts like someone possessed by a witch.

In the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (4.29.53), Nārada Muni tells King Pracinabarhi the following allegory to illustrate this truth:

> My dear King, please search out that deer who is engaged in eating grass in a very nice flower garden along with his wife. That deer is very much attached to his business, and he is enjoying the sweet singing of the bumblebees in his garden. Just try to understand his position. He is unaware that before him is a tiger, which is accustomed to living at the cost of another's flesh. Behind the deer is a hunter, who is threatening to pierce him with sharp arrows. Thus the deer's death is imminent.

The Folly of Ignoring Danger

Another metaphor vividly to describe people who are seemingly unaware of imminent danger or the consequences of their actions is "dancing on a volcano." Kṛṣṇa's advice in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (13.8) is just the opposite. He tells us to "be always aware of the miseries of birth, death, old age and disease."

Entering Fire in Search of Coolness

The next example is similar: only someone who is blind or completely bewildered would enter fire thinking it will cool them. The only result

of such foolishness is to be burned. Locana dāsa Ṭhākura concludes his song by reproaching his mind for spoiling his valuable human life by chasing fleeting sensual pleasures and ignoring the wise counsel of saintly persons. *Sādhus* are the true friends of conditioned souls because they genuinely care about everyone's real welfare. Their concern is to enlighten people in *bhakti-yoga*, or devotional service, and for this purpose, they travel from door to door, encouraging people to become devotees of Kṛṣṇa.

The Original Song

Avatāra-sāra

Locana dāsa Ṭhākura

1

avatāra-sāra, gaura-avatāra
kena nā bhajili tā´re
kari' nīre bāsa, gela nā piyāsa
āpana karama phere

avatāra—incarnation; *sāra*—best; *gaura avatāra*—incarnation of Gaura; *kena*—why?; *nā*—not; *bhajili*—you worshiped; *tā´re*—to Him; *kari'*—having made; *nīre*—in waters; *bāsa*—residence; *gela*—gone; *nā*—not; *piyāsa*—thirst; *āpana*—your own; *karama*—activities; *phere*—in consequence.

O my mind, why don't you worship Śrī Gaura, the crown-jewel of all incarnations? You always stayed in water but your thirst was never satiated due to your own past bad activities.

2

kaṇṭakera taru, sadāi sevili, (mana)
amṛta pāibāra āśe
prema-kalpataru, śrī gaurāṅga āmāra,
tāhāre bhāvili viṣe

kaṇṭakera—of thorns; *taru*—tree; *sadā i*—always; *sevili*—you served; *(mana)*—O mind; *amṛta*—nectar; *pāibāra*—of obtaining; *āśe*—with desire; *prema*—divine love;

kalpataru—wish-fulfilling tree; *śrī gaurāṅga*—Śrī Gaurānga; *āmāra*—my; *tāhāre*—to Him; *bhāvili*—you considered; *viṣe*—as poison.

You always hoped to attain sweet, juicy fruits from your worship of thorny trees, but this is not possible. Our Gaurasundara is a desire-tree offering divine love, but you left Him, thinking Him to be poison.

3

saurabhera āśe, palāśa śukili, (mana)
nāśāte paśila kīta
ikṣudaṇḍa bhāvi', kāṭha cuṣili, (mana)
kemane pāibi miṭha

saurabhera—of sweet fragance; *āśe*—with desire; *palāśa*—the *palāśa* flower; *śukili*—you smelled; *(mana)*—O mind; *nāśāte*—in nose; *paśila*—entered; *kīta*—insect; *ikṣudaṇḍa*—sugar cane; *bhāvi'*—having considered; *kāṭha*—wood; *cuṣili*—you sucked; *(mana)*—O mind; *kemane*—how?; *pāibi*—you will get; *miṭha*—sweetness.

O my mind, searching for some sweet fragrance, you smelled the beautiful palāśa flower (but it has no scent), and instead, an insect from the flower entered your nose. You sucked on dry wood, mistaking it for sugar cane, but how can you get from it any sweet juice?

4

hāra baliyā, galāya parili, (mana)
śamana kiṅkara-sāpa
śītala baliyā, āguna pohāli, (mana)
pāili bajara tāpa

hāra—necklace; *baliyā*—having considered; *galāya*—on neck; *parili*—you put on; *(mana)*—O mind; *śamana*—the Lord of Death; *kiṅkara*—servant; *sāpa*—snake; *śītala*—cool; *baliyā*—having considered; *āguna*—fire; *pohāli*—you basked; *(mana)*—O mind; *pāili*—you got; *bajara*—excruciating; *tāpa*—heat.

O my mind, death is like snake which you place around your neck, thinking it to be a garland. You entered fire, thinking it to be cool, and suffered excruciating burning.

5

saṁsāra bhajili, śrī gaurāṅga bhulili,
nā sunili sādhura kathā
iha parakāla, du'kāla khāoyāli, (mana)
khāili āpana māthā

saṁsāra—material existence; *bhajili*—you worshiped; *śrī gaurāṅga*—Śrī Gaurāṅga; *bhulili*—you forgot; *nā*—not; *sunili*—you listened; *sādhura*—devotee´s; *kathā*—words; *iha*—this; *parakāla*—the hereafter; *du'*—both; *kāla*—times (this life and the next); *khāoyāli*—you lost, you wasted; *(mana)*—O mind; *khāili*—you caused to spoil or ruin; *āpana*—your own; *māthā*—head (from Samsad Bengali Dictionary: māthā khāoyā v. (fig.) to ruin, to spoil, (fig.) to deprave.)

O my mind, enjoying material pleasures, you never heeded the devotees' words and forgot Gaurasundara. Thus, both this world and the next are lost to you.

Song 14

Bird of My Heart

(An adaptation of Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's *Kena Hare Kṛṣṇa*)





1

Why does the bird of my heart not cry
while singing Kṛṣṇa's holy name?
Why no ecstatic emotions arise,
no change of heart—who is to blame?



2

Why does the bird of my heart keep silent,
not chanting the name, letting moments slip by?
Offenses are said to be the cause of this ailment
of not being able to chant and cry.



3

O forest bird, I have a gift for you
kept within the temple of my heart—
the holy name as sweet as pure golden honey.
If you were taught to chant, you could master the art.

A bird can learn all kinds of names,
why my mind's bird refuses to sing?
Why does my heart not melt in the flames
of spiritual bliss evoked by chanting?



4

O bird! Let's go to the spiritual world,
the land of everlasting beauty,
where beings of mere thought will never come and go,
where life is real, not fleeting imagery.



5

O bird, remember well your earthly fate,
laid on a deathbed by time's ruthless hand,
carried to fires that consume and devastate
your tongue to silence now condemned.

6a

Then it's too late to chant the Lord's holy names.
O bird of my heart, don't miss this chance.



6b

Before your tongue is eaten by the flames,
praise the Lord, sing His name and dance.

Commentary

This song can be taken as a soliloquy, a thoughtful deliberation, in which Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura speaks to himself, addressing his soul as a bird. This conception is borrowed from the *Upaniṣads* where the individual soul and the Supersoul are compared to two birds sitting on a peepal tree, the tree symbolizing the body. Commenting on this analogy, Śrīla Prabhupāda states (SB 6.4.24):

> The individual soul and the Supreme Soul live together within the body. This is confirmed in the *Upaniṣads* by the analogy that two friendly birds live in one tree—one bird eating the fruit of the tree and the other simply witnessing and directing. Although the individual living being, who is compared to the bird that is eating, is sitting with his friend the Supreme Soul, the individual living being cannot see Him. Actually the Supersoul is directing the workings of one's senses in the enjoyment of sense objects, but as these sense objects cannot see the senses, the conditioned soul cannot see the directing soul. The conditioned soul has desires, and the Supreme Soul fulfills them, but the conditioned soul is unable to see the Supreme Soul.

The Soul's Reluctance to Chant

The main theme of this song is the feeling of disappointment over the soul's reluctance to chant the holy name of the Lord. The author wonders why the soul in his heart remains indifferent to the all-auspicious sound vibration of the holy name. As described in the Vedic scriptures, "The holy name of Kṛṣṇa is transcendentally blissful. It bestows all spiritual benedictions, for it is Kṛṣṇa Himself, the reservoir of all pleasure." It is therefore only natural and expected that a *jīva* who comes in contact with the transcendentally blissful name will also become blissful, and manifest ecstatic symptoms like

trembling, shedding tears, and crying. Consequently, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura asks himself, "Why does the bird of my heart not cry while singing Kṛṣṇa's holy name? Why do no ecstatic emotions arise, no change of heart—who is to blame?" Putting himself in the position of an ordinary person, he wonders what the reason could be for not feeling ecstasy while chanting Kṛṣṇa's name.

Devotees Developing *Kṛṣṇa-prema*

It is noteworthy that Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, in his novel *Jaiva-dharma*, describes several devotees who develop *kṛṣṇa-prema*—love of God—and experience ecstatic symptoms while chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mantra* after only a short time of practice, sometimes within a matter of days. Unless we dismiss these descriptions as exaggerations, or fantasy, we can conclude that the fruits of chanting can indeed be tasted very quickly if the right conditions are met. In other words, certain conditions foster the development of *kṛṣṇa-prema*, while others inhibit or slow the process. Just as in science, experiments in physics or chemistry require specific conditions to yield the desired result; otherwise, the experiment is likely to fail. Controlled variables such as ingredient proportions, room temperature, and atmospheric moisture are crucial. Similarly, the process of *bhakti-yoga* can be considered scientific because it, too, requires the right conditions to produce the desired fruit.

For example, basic conditions include observing the regulative principles and regularly chanting the *mahā-mantra* while avoiding the ten offenses. Additional conditions that accelerate advancement on the path include humility and tolerance.

The Reality of Today's Devotional Practice

As of 2024, many devotees who have been chanting the *mahā-mantra* for decades may still may find themselves in a situation similar to that described in this song: no ecstatic emotions arise.

Those initiated by Śrīla Prabhupāda have chanted the holy names Kṛṣṇa and Rāma over 250 million times in the past 50 years. Yet, they may still be waiting for the miracle—the moment when the heart finally cries out while chanting Kṛṣṇa's name. But alas, no tears come to the eyes, no shivering arises in the body, and no hairs stand on end. According to *śāstra*, the most likely reason for this condition is *aparādha*, or offense.

The Role of Offenses

The Sanskrit word *aparādha* literally means moving away from what is proper. It implies acting in a way that obstructs success, and is often translated as "fault," "mistake," or simply "offense."

When Śrīla Prabhupāda gave initiation, he generally explained the ten offenses that should be avoided while chanting the holy name. To the degree that these offenses are being committed, the heart does not change and the pure name does not appear. As stated in the *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta* (*Ādi-līlā* 8.16):

> If one is infested with the ten offenses in the chanting of the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra*, despite his endeavor to chant the holy name for many births, he will not get the love of Godhead that is the ultimate goal of this chanting.

From this verse it seems that although chanting for 30 or 50 years may seem like a long time, actually it is not. The Bengali text says, *bahu janma*—many births, not years. Thus one may be chanting for hundreds or even thousands of years, but still the result of chanting will not manifest because of offenses. Even one offense is enough to block one's progress, and one will not achieve the treasure of love of God (*nā pāya kṛṣṇa-pade prema-dhana*).

However, this seemingly dire scenario should not discourage us. We, conditioned souls, have been rotating in the cycle of birth and death since time immemorial, with no hope of escape. Now, by

Kṛṣṇa's causeless mercy, we have come in contact with a pure devotee and received the seed of devotional service, the *bhakti-latā-bīja*. Even if we do not attain perfection in this lifetime, we should not become depressed, and give up the process. As long as we continue on the right path, it is simply a matter of time—and time is eternal.

Mukunda Datta's example can serve as encouragement. He was an intimate devotee of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu but was known to occasionally associate with impersonalist philosophers, which displeased the Lord. One day, when Mukunda tried to join a gathering of Lord Caitanya and His devotees, he was refused entry. Heartbroken, Mukunda pleaded with the devotees to ask the Lord if he would ever again be granted His mercy. When the question was relayed, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu replied, "Tell him he will see Me after ten million births." Upon hearing this, Mukunda was overjoyed and began to dance, exclaiming, "I will see Him again, even if after ten million births!" Seeing Mukunda's sincere joy and determination, the Lord immediately called him back, forgave him, and accepted him into His circle.

To be admitted into the Lord's inner circle is not so easy; one must be qualified. In this regard, Śrīla Prabhupāda said about becoming a Vaiṣṇava: "It is not a cheap thing." However, although it may not be easy, it is not impossible. If we endeavor with enthusiasm, patience and determination, it is likely that we won't have to wait ten million births.

A Hard Heart as a Result of Offenses

About offenses being an obstacle on the path, in Chapter 8 of the *Ādi-līlā,* it further says:

> There are offenses to be considered while chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mantra*. Therefore simply by chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa one does not become ecstatic.

If one's heart does not change, tears do not flow from his eyes, his body does not shiver, and his bodily hairs do not stand on end as he chants the Hare Kṛṣṇa *mahā-mantra*, it should be understood that his heart is as hard as iron. This is due to his offenses at the lotus feet of the Lord's holy name.

If one chants the exalted holy name of the Lord again and again and yet his love for the Supreme Lord does not develop and tears do not appear in his eyes, it is evident that because of his offenses in chanting, the seed of the holy name of Kṛṣṇa does not sprout.

Inattentiveness as the Main Culprit

In his treatise *Bhaktyāloka* (Illuminations on Bhakti), Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura explains the reasons behind this unfortunate situation, pointing to one factor in particular as the main culprit: inattentiveness. He writes:

In *Śrī Hari-bhakti-vilāsa,* carelessness is listed as one of the offenses against the holy name. There the word *pramāda* is translated as, "inattentiveness". *Śrī Hari-nāma-cintāmaṇi* has further divided inattentiveness into three types: apathy, inactivity, and distraction. Until one gets free from these three types of inattentiveness, one cannot perform pure devotional service. Even if one gives up all other *nāma-aparādhas*, if one is inattentive, attraction for the holy name will not arise. If one has enthusiasm at the beginning of devotional service, and that enthusiasm does not grow cold, one will never become apathetic, lazy, or distracted in chanting the holy names. Therefore enthusiasm is the only support for all types of devotional service. By enthusiastically performing devotional service, one can give up *aniṣṭhitā* (unsteady) service in a very short time and thus attain *niṣṭhā* (steadiness).

The Importance of Niṣṭhā

In the stages of developing love for God described by Rūpa Gosvāmī, *niṣṭhā* comes before *ruci* (taste), which means that we cannot attain *nāma-ruci* (taste for the holy name) unless we attain *niṣṭhā.* Regarding *aniṣṭhitā* (unsteady) devotional service, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura quotes Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura, who describes this stage in *Madhurya-kadambinī*:

> When the *sādhaka* (spiritual practitioner) attains the stage of firm faith, he engages in *niṣṭhitā* (fixed) devotional service. Until he attains this fixed devotional service, his service remains flickering. In this unsteady stage, there are six symptoms: *utsāha-mayī* (false confidence), *ghana-taralā* (sporadic endeavor), *vyūḍha-vikalpā* (indecision), *viṣaya-saṅgarā* (struggle with the senses), *niyamākṣamā* (inability to uphold vows), and *taraṅga-rangiṇī* (enjoying the facilities offered by *bhakti*).

The Holy Name as a Gift

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura describes how he offers the holy name, as sweet as honey (*madhu mākhā ei hari-nāma*), as a gift. Chanting is free of charge, and he adds that it is not difficult to learn the art of chanting. Indeed, in the third stanza he says that usually birds, such as parrots, mynah birds, and even crows, can learn to repeat names. Why then does the bird of his heart refuse to chant? The answer is again: the most likely cause are offenses. As Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu says in the second verse of the *Śikṣāṣṭaka*: “Because of offenses, I feel no attraction for chanting the holy name.”

An Invitation to the Spiritual World

In the next stanza, the author offers an incentive to the bird of his heart: “Let us go to the land of everlasting beauty, the spiritual

world." The special feature of this realm is that the soul is finally liberated from the cycle of birth and death. "The imaginary man of the mind will never again come and go." *Maner manush* is a Bengali term referring to our imaginary existence as a man, woman, or anything else, along with identifications like belonging to a certain nation or family, or being tall, short, thin, fat, pretty, ugly etc. These conceptions are called *upadhis*—false designations—and are considered imaginary, because the pure soul has nothing to do with any material identity. The real identity of the soul is *jīvera 'svarūpa' haya-kṛṣṇera 'nitya-dāsa'*, to be an eternal servant of Kṛṣṇa. In the spiritual world, all souls are aware of their true identity and live accordingly. In this world, however, our so-called identity changes with every change of the body or, nowadays, even while still in the same body. Here the imaginary man, *maner manush*, comes and goes perpetually—sometimes as a king, sometimes as a beggar—, but not in the spiritual realm where existence is eternal, full of bliss and knowledge.

The Urgency of Chanting Before Death

In the final two stanzas, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura explains the consequences of remaining idle and not heeding his urgent call. Death will come, sooner or later, and by then it will be too late. At that time, the opportunity to chant will be lost because the cremation fire will consume the tongue. He asks himself, "Then what will you do?" and advises his heart-bird to sing and dance in praise of the Lord before it is too late.

In the *Bhagavad-gītā* (8.5-6), Kṛṣṇa explains how transmigration from one body to the next occurs. It is the subtle body, composed of mind, intelligence, and ego, that determines the next gross body. This process is like constructing a house: first conceived in the mind, then outlined on an architect's drawing board, and finally built with bricks and mortar. Consequently, the state of mind at the time of death is

of paramount importance. In the purports to these verses, Śrīla Prabhupāda emphasizes that consciousness at the time of death is critical, as it determines the soul's next destination. Kṛṣṇa explains that whatever one thinks of at the final moment shapes the form of the next body. Prabhupāda stresses that only by cultivating a life dedicated to devotional service and remembrance of Kṛṣṇa can one hope to attain a favorable rebirth—or ideally, liberation from the cycle of birth and death. He underscores the importance of consistent practice, particularly chanting the holy name, explaining that if one's mind is trained to focus on Kṛṣṇa throughout life, it will naturally be drawn to Him at death, thus ensuring a spiritual destination. Otherwise, without sufficient practice, it is unlikely that one will remember the Lord at the time of leaving the body, thus continuing to wander from one body to the next.

The Original Song

Kena hare kṛṣṇa

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura

(Refrain)
kena hare-kṛṣṇa-nāma hari bale
mana prāṇa kāṅde nā

kena—why?; *hare kṛṣṇa nāma*—the names Hare Kṛṣṇa; *hari bale*—chanting the name Hari; *mana prāṇa*—my inner heart; *kāṅde nā*—does not weep.

Oh, why does my heart not weep from chanting the holy names Hare Kṛṣṇa and Hari?

1
pakṣi nā jāni kona aparādhe
mukhe hare-kṛṣṇa-nāma bala nā

pakṣi—the bird (my heart); *nā jāni*—I do not know; *kona aparādhe*—by some offense; *mukhe*—with the mouth; *hare kṛṣṇa nāma*—the names of Hare Kṛṣṇa; *bala nā*—does not chant.

The bird of my heart does not know what offenses it has committed to cause this inability to chant Hare Kṛṣṇa properly.

2
vanera pakṣi re dhare rāklām hṛdaya mandire
madhu mākhā ei hari-nāma pakṣi re śikṣaile śikṣe

vanera pakṣi—a bird of the forest; *re*—O!; *dhare*—holding; *rāklām*—I have kept; *hṛdaya mandire*—in the temple of my heart; *madhu mākhā*—smeared with honey; *ei*—this; *hari nāma*—name of Lord Hari; *pakṣi re*—O bird!; *śikṣaile*—upon being instructed; *śikṣe*—learns.

O forest bird! I have kept something for you very carefully within the temple of my heart—the holy name of Lord Hari, which is overflowing with pure sweet honey. O bird, you could learn the chanting of this name if you were taught.

3
pakṣi sakala nāma balte para
kena hare-kṛṣṇa-nāma bala na

pakṣi—a bird; *sakala nāma*—all names; *balte para*—is able to speak; *kena*—why?; *hare kṛṣṇa nām*—the names Hare Kṛṣṇa; *bala na*—does not chant.

A bird can learn to speak all kinds of names. Why then does this bird of my heart refuse to chant Hare Kṛṣṇa? Oh, why does my heart not weep from chanting the holy names Hare Kṛṣṇa?

4

cala pakṣi rūpera deśe jāi
ye deśete manera mānuśa āsā jāoyā nāi

cala—please go; *pakṣi*—O bird!; *rūpera deśe*—to the land of true beauty; *jāi*—I go; *ye deśete*—at which place; *manera mānuśa*—the mentally-imagined man; *āsā jāoyā*—comes and goes (as in repeated birth and death); *nāi*—not.

O bird! Come, let us go to the spiritual world, the land of true and everlasting beauty. It is the place where the imaginary man of the mind will never again come and go in the cycle of repeated birth and death.

5

ye pakṣi re tora maraṇa kālete
carabi vāter dolāte
ore cāri janete kandhe kare
laye yābe śmaśāna ghāṭete

ye—that; *pakṣi re*—O bird!; *tora*—your; *maraṇa kālete*—at the time of death; *carabi*—you will be placed; *vāter*—made from bamboo; *dolāte*—on the funeral stretcher; *ore*—oh!; *cār janete*—by four persons; *kandhe kare*—placing on the shoulder; *laye*—carrying; *yābe*—will proceed; *śmaśān ghāṭete*—to the cremation *Ghat*.

O bird! At the time of death, your body will simply be placed upon a funeral stretcher, lifted on the shoulders of four persons and carried to the cremation grounds.

6

ore o tora mukhe āguna jihve tule
ki karabi tāi bala nā

ore o—alas!; *tora*—your; *mukhe*—in the mouth; *āguna*—fire; *jihve*—the tongue; *tule*—obliterate; *ki karabi*—what can you do?; *tāi*—at that; *bala nā*—you do not speak.

Alas! The cremation fire will then enter your mouth and consume your tongue. Then what will you do? Now it's too late because you cannot speak any more.

Song 15

Free From Fear

(An adaptation of Govinda dāsa Kavirāja's *Bhajahū re mana*)





1

O Mind, just worship the lotus feet
of Nanda's son, Śrī Nanda-nandan,
His feet are the only shelter
of fearlessness for everyone.



2
Having obtained this rare human birth,
seek saintly association,
and cross the ocean of birth and death,
thus ending transmigration.



3

I've toiled in heat, cold, wind and rain,
sleepless nights my only gain.
I've served the miserly, wicked and heartless
for tiny bits of fleeting happiness.



4a

Wealth, youth, sons and relatives,
what true satisfaction or bliss they can give?



4b

Like a drop of water on a lotus leaf,
life is tottering—therefore take shelter of Hari's feet.



5

To hear and chant about Hari,
remember Him, pray with sincerity,
serve His lotus feet, become His servant,
worship Him and be His friend.



6

Offer your very self at His feet,
surrender your life and soul.
Govinda dāsa has this longing,
desires to attain this goal.

Commentary

Bhajahū re mana, which is presented in this collection as *Free From Fear*, is one of the more popular songs in Vaiṣṇava circles. In this song, Govinda dāsa Kavirāja offers a method to overcome fear.

The Universal Principle of Fear

Nobody likes to live in fear, but life in the material world is characterized by constant fearfulness. Every living entity—including birds, beasts, and insects, and even higher beings like the demigods—lives in an atmosphere of uncertainty, not knowing what will happen in the near or distant future. Therefore, *bhaya* (fear, anxiety) is one of the four basic universal principles that all living entities have in common: *āhāra, nidrā, bhaya*, and *maithuna*—eating, sleeping, fearing (defending), and mating. Out of these four, three we pursue and one we try to avoid. Every creature, including birds and bees, likes to eat, sleep and mate; however, nobody likes to live in fear. But fear is unavoidable. As long as we live within a body composed of destructible material elements, and identify with it, thinking that the body is the self, we are accompanied by anxiety due to the transient nature of our perceived existence. Since there is no guarantee that we will still be alive tomorrow, such uncertainty generates anxiety and fear.

How to Overcome Fear

Govinda dāsa recommends taking shelter of Kṛṣṇa as the best means to overcome fear. Because fear is generated in the mind, he addresses his mind: “My dear mind, just worship the lotus feet of Nanda-nandana, Kṛṣṇa, the son of Nanda Mahārāja. In this way, you will become fearless.” One may wonder, what is so special about the Lord’s feet that they offer such protection?

Kṛṣṇa's Lotus Feet

In the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (3.5.39-40), the demigods pray:

> O Lord, Your lotus feet are like an umbrella for the surrendered souls, protecting them from all the miseries of material existence. All the sages under that shelter throw off all material miseries. We therefore offer our respectful obeisances unto Your lotus feet.
>
> O Father, O Lord, O Personality of Godhead, the living entities in the material world can never have any happiness because they are overwhelmed by the three kinds of miseries. Therefore they take shelter of the shade of Your lotus feet, which are full of knowledge, and we also take shelter of them.

When the demigods felt distress because of the demon Vṛtrāsura, they sought shelter of the Lord's lotus feet prayed to Him for relief. In the purport (SB 6.9.43) Prabhupāda says:

> One need only seek shelter of the shade of the Lord's lotus feet. Then all the material tribulations that disturb him will be subdued, just as when one comes under the shadow of a big tree, the disturbances caused by the heat of the scorching sun are immediately mitigated, without one's asking for relief. Therefore the whole concern of the conditioned soul should be the lotus feet of the Lord. The conditioned soul suffering from various tribulations because of existing in this material world can be relieved only when he seeks shelter at the Lord's lotus feet.

The concept of the Lord's or pure devotee's lotus feet, along with the dust or washwater from such feet, holds profound symbolic and spiritual significance in Vedic culture, deeply embedded in its social etiquette, religious practices, and philosophical teachings. Reverence

towards feet, especially the act of touching or surrendering to a saintly person's feet, reflects respect, humility, and the acknowledgment of spiritual superiority.

As the feet are the lowest part of the body and make direct contact with the ground, it is natural they collect dust, especially when walking barefoot—a common practice in ancient India. To take the dust from someone's feet symbolizes surrendering the ego and one's false prestige to receive blessings, instructions, and protection. It's an act of devotion, indicating the devotee's readiness to follow the spiritual path laid out by the *guru* or to receive the Lord's grace.

In Śrīla Prabhupāda's books, we find many statements about the relationship between an aspiring devotee and the Lord's or spiritual teacher's lotus feet. Here are some illustrative examples:

> The Ganges water is celebrated because it emanates from the lotus feet of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Similarly, those who are directly in touch with the lotus feet of the Supreme Personality of Godhead and who are absorbed in the chanting of His glories are freed from all material contamination. Such unalloyed devotees are able to show mercy to the common conditioned soul. (SB 4.24.58)

> Bali Mahārāja said to Lord Vāmanadeva: "O son of a *brāhmaṇa*, today the fire of sacrifice is ablaze according to the injunction of the *śāstra*, and I have been freed from all the sinful reactions of my life by the water that has washed Your lotus feet. O my Lord, by the touch of Your small lotus feet the entire surface of the world has been sanctified." (SB 8.18.31)

> The devotee's love for the Supreme Personality of Godhead is so intense that he wants to kiss the lotus feet of the Lord constantly, and he wants to touch the tips of the toes of the Lord and constantly embrace His lotus feet. (SB 4.9.3)

> Since the Supreme Lord is all-powerful, He can do things that seem wonderful for a common man. Similarly, a devotee who has taken shelter at the lotus feet of the Lord can also do wonderful things unimaginable to a common man, by the grace of the dust of those lotus feet. Caitanya Mahāprabhu therefore teaches us to take shelter of the Lord's lotus feet. (SB 5.1.35)

Sādhu-Saṅga and Spiritual Progress

In the second part of the first stanza, the author points out that association of saintly persons (*sādhu-saṅga*) is the recommended means to cross over the ocean of birth and death. Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu told Sanātana Gosvāmī (Cc. Madhya 22.49, 83):

> By associating with a *sādhu*, one awakens his faith in devotional service to Kṛṣṇa. Because of devotional service, one's dormant love for Kṛṣṇa awakens, and thus one's material, conditioned existence comes to an end.
>
> The root cause of devotional service to Lord Kṛṣṇa is association with advanced devotees. Even when one's dormant love for Kṛṣṇa awakens, association with devotees is still most essential.

Śrīla Prabhupāda explains in the *Upadeśāmṛta* that he formed the International Society for Krishna Consciousness to give people the opportunity to associate with devotees. However, he did not intend for this to be an ordinary "coming together" to talk about mundane topics and enjoy a social life. For this reason, he translated the word *sādhu* in the above verse as "advanced devotees." Advanced *sādhus* have no interest in mundane conversations, which are regarded, in the words of Nārada Muni in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (1.5.10), as a place of pilgrimage for crows. Rather, advanced devotees are only

interested in *kṛṣṇa-kathā,* which can purify, enliven, and change the heart.

Kapiladeva describes the effects of such *sādhu-saṅga* as follows (SB 3.25.25):

> In the association of pure devotees, discussion of the pastimes and activities of the Supreme Personality of Godhead is very pleasing and satisfying to the ear and the heart. By cultivating such knowledge one gradually becomes advanced on the path of liberation, and thereafter he is freed, and his attraction becomes fixed. Then real devotion and devotional service begin.

The Common Worker's Struggle

In the third stanza, Govinda dāsa Kavirāja reflects on the situation of a common fruitive worker in this world:

I've toiled in heat, cold, wind and rain,
sleepless nights my only gain.
I've served the miserly, wicked and heartless
for tiny bits of fleeting happiness

To make money, people are willing to work under awkward, unhealthy and hazardous conditions, sometimes even risking their lives. As a consequence, stress, anxiety and depression in the workplace are growing global concerns. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), as of 2024, over 1 billion people were suffering from mental health issues, and the numbers are rising.

It should be noted, however, that this situation is not a new phenomenon. Govinda dāsa Kavirāja wrote this song almost 500 years ago, and even if it had been written 5,000or 5000,000 years ago, the conclusion would remain the same. His observations are timeless. The material world is by nature a place of suffering, as Kṛṣṇa points out in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (8.15): *duḥkhālayam aśāśvatam*. It is

a temporary place full of miseries. And as if external conditions, like severe heat or cold, weren't enough, often a person has to work under mean and abusive superiors adding mental distress to physical suffering.

The Pursuit of Happiness Amid Life's Hardships

Why would a person tolerate such conditions? The answer is to obtain happiness. The American Constitution even recognizes the pursuit of happiness as an essential human inclination and, therefore, a fundamental human right. Actually, it is the soul's natural tendency, expressed in all species of life. Every living entity wants to obtain pleasure and avoid pain. But, to obtain pleasure, a certain amount of pain is often accepted. In the face of this imperfect reality, the phrase "C'est la vie" (That's life) has been coined. However, transcendentalists counter that this is not life, not real life. They look at this so-called reality from a different angle. They propose that one should limit the pursuit of material or worldly happiness to a minimum and invest one's time and energy mainly in the pursuit of spiritual happiness. As Ṛṣabhadeva explains in the Fifth Canto of the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, the pursuit of spiritual happiness involves a certain amount of austerity, or discomfort, but the acceptance of such undesirable conditions is worthwhile because the end result is *brahma-saukhyaṁ tv anantam*—unending spiritual happiness—while material happiness has a beginning and an end. Spiritual happiness continues even after one gives up the present body, whereas material happiness ends when the body is finished.

The Illusion of Security in Family and Comforts

The next stanza describes in detail what material happiness means for most people: wealth, youth, children, and family. Family, in particular, is often the most important part of their lives. Many are willing to do anything, even sacrifice their own well-being, for the

sake of family. Yet, even if one is fortunate enough to have a wonderful family where all members enjoy good health, harmonious relationships, and financial stability, such happiness can change in an instant. There are countless examples of sudden misfortune—a disaster may strike at any time, whether through accident, illness, or external forces like earthquakes, hurricanes, or floods.

A Drop of Water on a Lotus

Govinda dāsa Kavirāja captures this precarious condition with an apt analogy: a drop of water on a lotus leaf. In the sunlight, a droplet glistening on a lotus looks beautiful, yet with the slightest movement, it can slide down and vanish into the water. Our life in this world is just like that: it may end at any moment. A water droplet cannot stay long on a lotus leaf, as the leaf's waxy surface repels water, causing the droplet to bead up and easily roll off. Life in the material world is equally fragile.

Overcoming Life's Dangers

This delicate situation is expressed by Brahmā in his prayers to Kṛṣṇa as *padaṁ padaṁ yad vipadam*—a place where danger exists at every step. In this prayer, found in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (10.14.58), Brahmā recommends taking shelter of the Lord's lotus feet as a means to escape such a perilous situation:

> For those who have accepted the boat of the lotus feet of the Lord, who is the shelter of the cosmic manifestation and is famous as Murāri, the enemy of the Mura demon, the ocean of the material world is like the water contained in a calf's hoofprint. Their goal is *paraṁ padam*, Vaikuṇṭha, the place where there are no material miseries—not the place where there is danger at every step.

In the last stanza, Govinda dāsa Kavirāja enumerates the nine processes of devotional service, as described by Prahlāda Māhārāja in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (7.5.23-24):

> Hearing and chanting about the transcendental holy name, form, qualities, paraphernalia, and pastimes of Lord Viṣṇu, remembering them; serving the lotus feet of the Lord; offering the Lord respectful worship with sixteen types of paraphernalia; offering prayers to the Lord; becoming His servant; considering the Lord one's best friend, and surrendering everything unto Him (in other words, serving Him with the body, mind and words)—these nine processes are accepted as pure devotional service. One who has dedicated his life to the service of Kṛṣṇa through these nine methods should be understood to be the most learned person, for he has acquired complete knowledge.

The Mind as Friend or Enemy

These are instructions to the mind, which is likened to the driver of a car-like body. We, the living entities, are the passengers, ideally guiding the driver on where to take us. Unfortunately, however, the driver often acts independently and recklessly. This is the situation for the majority of conditioned souls in the material world. As Kṛṣṇa explains to Arjuna in Chapter 6 of the *Bhagavad-gītā*, an uncontrolled mind is our worst enemy. We are advised to bring it under control and make it our friend. This is the message Govinda dāsa Kavirāja wishes to convey: “Dear mind, be my friend by worshiping the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa, for in this way, we can both become fearless and cross over the ocean of material suffering to reach the shore of the spiritual realm, where life is eternal and blissful.”

The Original Song

Bhajahū re mana

Govinda dāsa Kavirāja

1

bhajahū re mana śrī-nanda-nandana
abhaya-caraṇāravinda re
durlabha mānava-janama sat-saṅge
taraha e bhava-sindhu re

bhajahū—just worship; *re*—O!; *mana*—mind; *śrī-nanda-nandana*—of the son of Nanda; *abhaya-caraṇāravinda*—the lotus feet which make one fearless; *re*—O!; *durlabha mānava-janama*—this rare human birth; *sat-saṅge*—in the association of saintly persons; *taraha*—cross over; *e bhava-sindhu*—this ocean of worldly existence; *re*—O!

O mind, just worship the lotus feet of the son of Nanda, which make one fearless. Having obtained this rare human birth, cross over this ocean of worldly existence by associating with saintly persons.

2

śīta ātapa vāta variṣaṇa
e dina yāminī jāgi re
biphale sevinu kṛpaṇa durajana
capala sukha-lava lāgi' re

śīta—cold; *ātapa*—heat; *vāta*—wind; *variṣaṇa*—rain; *e*—this; *dina*—day; *yāminī*—night; *jāgi*—I remain sleepless; *re*—O!; *biphale*—uselessly; *sevinu*—I have served; *kṛpaṇa durajana*—miserly and wicked men; *capala*—flickering; *sukha-lava*—a fraction of happiness; *lāgi'*—for the purpose of; *re*—O!

Day and night I can find no sleep, suffering the onslaught of heat and cold, wind and rain. For a bit of flickering happiness I have vainly served wicked and miserly men.

3

e dhana, yauvana, putra, parijana
ithe ki āche paratīti re
kamala-dala-jala, jīvana ṭalamala
bhajahū hari-pada nīti re

e—this; *dhana*—wealth; *yauvana*—youthfulness; *putra*—sons; *parijana*—family members; *ithe*—in these; *ki āche*—what is it?; *paratīti*—understanding; re—O!; *kamala-dala*—on a lotus petal; *jala*—like a drop of water; *jīvana*—this life; *ṭalamala*—is tottering; *bhajahū*—you should always worship; *hari-pada*—the feet of Lord Hari; *nīti*—the practice; *re*—O!

What assurance of real happiness is there in all one's wealth, youth, sons, and relatives? This life totters like a drop of water on a lotus petal; therefore you should always worship the lotus feet of Lord Hari.

4

śravaṇa, kīrtana, smaraṇa, vandana,
pāda-sevana, dāsya re
pūjana, sakhī-jana, ātma-nivedana
govinda-dāsa-abhilāṣa re

śravaṇa—hearing the glories of Lord Hari; *kīrtana*—chanting those glories; *smaraṇa*—constantly remembering Him; *vandana*—offering prayers to Him; *pāda-sevana*—serving the Lord's lotus feet; *dāsya*—serving the Supreme Lord as a servant; *re*—O!; *pūjana*—worshiping Him with flowers and incense and so forth; *sakhī-jana*—serving Him as a friend; *ātma-nivedana*—and completely offering the Lord one's very self; *govinda-dāsa-abhilāṣa*—(these nine processes of devotion are) the desire and great longing of Govinda dāsa; *re*—O!

Govinda dāsa longs to hear the glories of Lord Hari, chant His glories, constantly remember Him, offer Him prayers, serve His lotus feet, become His servant, worship Him, serve Him as a friend, and completely offer Him his very self.

Song 16

Treasure of Love

(An adaptation of Narottama Dāsa Ṭhākura's *Gorā Pahū*)





1

Gorā Pahū, I failed to worship You.
Gorā Pahū, I have no devotion true.

Instead of the jewel-like treasure of pure love divine,
I only gained my spirit's ever-increasing decline.



2

The purpose of human life—not my concern in the least,
chasing fleeting shadows instead—illusion only increased.
Drowning in the ocean of birth and death, chained by misdeeds and sins,
the treasure of pure love forsaken, my only pursuit: worthless things.



3

Sat-saṅga I always shunned, to enjoy with the unsaintly,
bound by *karma's* unyieling ropes, unable to get free.
I am always tempted to swallow the poison of sensual passion.
I have no taste to absorb myself in the nectar of Gaura's *kīrtaṇa*.



4

Why do I continue to linger in this world of worry and woe?
What happiness can be found here, where sorrow only grows?
Narottama dāsa ponders, in a heartfelt lament and cry,
"Why am I still living? Why long ago I did not die."

Commentary

The original title of this song, commonly known as *Gorā Pahū*, is *Akṣepa* (Regret). Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura expresses deep disappointment over his failure to worship Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, also called Gorā Pahū—the most magnanimous of Kṛṣṇa's *avatāras*—who brought the jewel-like treasure of pure love *(prema-ratana-dhana)* to this world. He laments that he was not interested in pursuing the true purpose of life, which is to free oneself from material bondage and enter the kingdom of God, where *prema* (divine love) reigns supreme. Instead, he spent his life chasing fleeting shadows. Material objects, no matter how valuable they seem, can be compared to shadows because they lack real substance. The material creation, with its innumerable gold mines, diamond fields, pearl beds, and countless other precious things, comes and goes in cosmic cycles. It is therefore compared to a shadow that moves according to the laws of nature, which act according to the will of the Supreme Controller. Above all, our own body, through which we enjoy these things is also transient. Consequently, all our plans and attempts to create lasting happiness are destined to end in failure.

The Consequences of Material Attachment

As Ṛṣabhadeva points out to his sons in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (5.5.5):

> As long as one does not inquire about the spiritual values of life, one is defeated and subjected to miseries arising from ignorance. Be it sinful or pious, *karma* has its resultant actions. If a person is engaged in any kind of *karma*, his mind is called *karmātmaka*, colored with fruitive activity. As long as the mind

> is impure, consciousness is unclear, and as long as one is absorbed in fruitive activity, he has to accept a material body.

Having a material body means being subjected to the inevitable miseries of birth, death, old age and disease. Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura admits that he feels as though he is drowning in the ocean of birth and death. He understands that this dire situation is the result of his own misdeeds, which have bound him with the ropes of *karma*. However, not only evil deeds but even good deeds create binding karmic ropes, as Ṛṣabhadeva points out in the above-mentioned verse. A sober person will therefore act in such a way that no karmic reactions are produced. That type of action is described in the *Bhagavad-gītā* as *akarma*, action in Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

The Root Cause of Misfortune

In the third stanza, Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura identifies the root cause of his misfortune as bad association (*asat-saṅga*). He admits that he avoided good association (*sat-saṅga*) and instead preferred the company of materialistic people (*asate vilāsa*). *Saṅga*, whether *sat* or *asat*, is a key concept in Vaiṣṇava philosophy. A simple definition is "an intimate connection on a physical, mental-emotional or spiritual level." Through such *saṅga*, our consciousness becomes colored and shaped, and takes a certain direction in life, thus preparing our future.

Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura warns of the dangerous effects of *asat-saṅga* by comparing it to drinking poison, a metaphor that appears in other songs as well, notably *Hari! Hari! biphale*, included in this song cycle as *A Wasted Human Birth*. He cautions that one of the harmful effects of drinking *viṣaya-viṣa*, the poison of sense gratification, is the loss of taste for *gaura-kīrtana*, the chanting and hearing of Gaurāṅga's glories.

The Futility of a Life Without Spiritual Content

Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura concludes his song with a rhetorical question: “Why am I still living?” In essence, he questions the value of a life devoid of spiritual purpose. Most people, however, do not ask themselves this question, as they are content with simply being healthy and wealthy. To become wise is not on their list of goals to achieve. Śrīla Prabhupāda frequently highlighted this materialistic mindset, warning against a life focused solely on enjoyment without spiritual pursuit. In his commentary on *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (2.3.18), he explains that modern society's obsession with extending material life often blinds people to the true purpose of existence.

> The materialistic man of the modern age will argue that life, or part of it, is never meant for discussion of theosophical or theological arguments. Life is meant for the maximum duration of existence for eating, drinking, sexual intercourse, making merry and enjoyment. The modern man wants to live forever through the advancement of material science, and there are many foolish theories for prolonging life to the maximum duration. But the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* affirms that life is not meant for so-called economic development or the advancement of materialistic science for the hedonistic philosophy of eating, mating, drinking and merrymaking. Life is solely meant for *tapasya*, for purifying existence so that one may enter into eternal life just after the end of the human form of life.

Song 16

The Original Song

Gorā Pahū

(Akṣepa)

Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura

1

gorā pahū nā bhajiyā goinu
prema-ratana-dhana helāya hārāinu

gorā pahū—Lord Gaurāṅga; *nā bhajiyā*—not worshiping; *goinu*—I invited spiritual death; *prema*—of love of God; *ratana*—the jewel; *dhana*—transcendental treasure; *helāya*—by neglect; *hārāinu*—I have lost.

I did not consider worshiping Lord Gaurāṅga, but instead brought about my spiritual ruin by neglecting that treasure trove of pure love of God.

2

adhane yatana kari dhana teyāginu
āpana karama-doṣe āpani ḍubinu

adhane—for worthless things; *yatana*—striving; *kari*—doing; *dhana*—the treasure of love of God (the real purpose of life); *teyāginu*—I have rejected; *āpana*—my; *karama-doṣe*—in the misdeeds; *āpani*—myself; *ḍubinu*—I have drowned.

I rejected the real purpose of my life and strove for worthless things. I am drowning in the ocean of birth and death because of my own misdeeds.

3

sat-saṅga chāri' kainu asate vilāsa
te-kāraṇe lāgila ye karma-bandha-phāṅsa

sat—of devotees; *saṅga*—the association; *chāri'*—giving up; *kainu*—I have made; *asate*—with materialists; *vilāsa*—enjoyment; *te-kāraṇe*—for that reason; *lāgila*—began; *ye*—which; *karma*—of fruitive activities; *bandha*—of the entanglement; *phāṅsa*—the web.

I gave up the association of the saintly devotees to enjoy myself in the company of the ungodly. Therefore I am bound up by the snare of karma.

4

viṣaya-viṣama-viṣa satata khāinu
gaura-kīrtana-rase maghana nā hainu

viṣaya—of sense gratification; *viṣama*—most dangerous; *viṣa*—the poison; *satata*—always; *khāinu*—I have drunk; *gaura*—of Lord Caitanya; *kīrtana*—of the congregational chanting of the holy name; *rase*—in the mellows; *maghana*—merged; *nā*—not; *hainu*—I have become.

I am always drinking the dangerous poison of sense gratification, and therefore I can never absorb myself in the blissful nectar of chanting the glories of Lord Caitanya.

5

kena vā āchaye prāṇa ki sukha pāiyā
narottama dāsa kena nā gela mariyā

kena vā—why; *āchaye*—is there; *prāṇa*—life; *ki*—what; *sukha*—happiness; *pāiyā*—getting; *narottama dāsa*—Narottama dāsa; *kena*—why; *nā*—did not; *gela*—go; *mariyā*—(to) death.

Why am I still living and what happiness do I have? Narottama dāsa says, "Why have I not died long ago?"

Song 17

Mind, Body and Home

(An adaptation of Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's *Manasa, deha, geha*)





1

Mind, body, and home, and all I own and adore,
I offer at Your lotus feet, O Nanda-kiśora.



2-3

In good fortune or bad, in life, death or defeat,
all my troubles will vanish, under Your lotus feet.
Slay or protect me, as You wish, do as You want,
I am Your eternal servant—that is our natural bond.



4-5

If rebirth be Your will, then let it take place
in the home of a devotee, by Your divine grace.
Let me become an ant even, if I can still serve You,
no desire to be born as a Brahmā averse to You and untrue.



6-8

I yearn for the company of that unalloyed devotee,
who does not desire worldly pleasures or impersonal *mukti*.
Father, mother, lover, son, preceptor, husband and more,
You are to me everything, O Nanda-kiśora.

Bhaktivinoda begs and pleads, "O Kāna, hear my petition,
O Lord of Rādhā, my life and soul, object of my devotion!”

Commentary

This song appears in Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's songbook *Śaraṇāgati*, in the section titled *Second Principle of Surrender: Ātma-nivedana* (Dedication of the Self). In our song cycle, *Mind, Body, and Home* is the penultimate song, introducing the practical application of *ātma-nivedana* (self-surrender), the final stage of the ninefold devotional practices. The essence of introspection is to reach the point of unconditional surrender, a theme emphasized at the end of many songs in this collection.

Ātma-nivedana (Dedication of the Self)

Ātma may refer to the soul, the mind, or the body, depending on the context, and *nivedana* means "offering" or "submission." Therefore, *ātma-nivedana* can be translated as "offering one's soul, mind, body, and everything related to it." Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura addresses Kṛṣṇa in His form as Nanda-kiśora, the son of Nanda Mahārāja, and declares that he offers everything in his possession, including his very self, at the Lord's lotus feet. The shelter-giving quality of Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet has been widely praised in many of the previous songs. Śrīla Prabhupāda elaborates on the wonderful qualities of these feet as follows: (SB 4.23.49):

> The lotus feet of the Lord are known as *mahat-padam*; this means that the total source of material existence rests on the lotus feet of the Lord. As stated in *Bhagavad-gītā* (10.8), *ahaṁ sarvasya prabhavaḥ*: everything emanates from Him. This cosmic manifestation, which is compared to an ocean of nescience, also rests on the lotus feet of the Lord. As such, this great ocean of nescience is minimized by a person who is a pure devotee. One who has taken shelter of the lotus feet of

> the Lord need not cross over the ocean, for he has already crossed it by virtue of his position at the Lord's lotus feet. By hearing and chanting the glories of the Lord or the Lord's devotee, one can become firmly fixed in the service of the lotus feet of the Lord.

Expressions of Unreserved Surrender

In the third stanza, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura expresses his unreserved surrender with these words: *mārobi rākhobi-yo icchā tohārā*, meaning, "Slay me or protect me, as You wish." The *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* contains many stories illustrating this attitude, with the prime example being Māhārāja Ambarīṣa, who remained undisturbed when facing the danger of being killed by a demon produced from the wrath of Durvāsā Muni. Prabhupāda comments on this incident in one of his lectures:

> Durvāsā Muni created a demon to kill the king, Mahārāja Ambarīṣa, who, although a devotee, had no such yogic power to counteract. Ambarīṣa thought, 'All right, if it is Kṛṣṇa's desire that this demon should kill me, then let him kill me.' Thus, Ambarīṣa stood there motionless, fully surrendered. *Mārobi rākhobi jo icchā tohārā*—that is surrender. 'I have surrendered to You. If You wish to kill me through this demon, that's all right. Welcome. Why not? Perhaps I am at fault, and if You want to end my life this way, let it be so.' Ambarīṣa was not afraid for his life; he simply stood there, accepting the Lord's will.

Praying for a Humble Birth Among Devotees

In stanzas 4 and 5, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura contemplates the possibility of being reborn in the material world. However, instead of requesting a prestigious or prosperous position, he asks the Lord for the blessing to be born into a family of devotees. Referring to this, Śrīla

Prabhupāda says in a lecture on Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's Appearance Day:

> A devotee does not say, 'Elevate me to a heavenly planet or a Vaikuṇṭha planet.' No. 'You can put me anywhere.' Just like Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura says, *kīṭa-janma hau*: 'My dear Lord, I have no objection if I have to take my next birth as an insect. What to speak of a human being or any other being—as an insect. But it must be in the house of a devotee, so that by eating the remnants of foodstuff left by the devotee, he'll be delivered. *Kīṭa-janma hau jatha tuyā, bahira-mukha brahma-janma nāhi mora āśā*: 'I don't want my next birth as Lord Brahmā if I forget You.' That is wanted. A devotee prays to the Lord that he would be able to constantly remember His lotus feet. Never mind whether as an insect, as a king, or as a dog, never mind. That is a pure devotee's desire."

The Power of Sādhu-saṅga

In the sixth stanza, the author expresses his longing for *sādhu-saṅga*, the company of saintly devotees. As Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu states, all perfection can be attained by even a moment's association with a *sādhu*. When questioned about this seemingly exaggerated statement, Śrīla Prabhupāda explained that if one is sincere, even a brief encounter with a pure devotee can lead to spiritual enlightenment. He compared this to dry wood igniting immediately upon contact with fire—it depends on the quality of the wood. If it is moist, it will not ignite even after a long time, but if it is dry, it only takes a moment.

Kṛṣṇa as the Source of All Relationships

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura concludes the song by addressing the Lord in various roles that He may take in relationship with His devotees. He

says: *sarva-moy*. 'You are everything to me.' Although Kṛṣṇa is one (*advaitam*), He appears in unlimited forms (*ananta-rūpam*) to reciprocate with His devotees according to their desires and degree of surrender. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes in one of his *Bhagavad-gītā* purports (4.11):

> One devotee may want Kṛṣṇa as supreme master, another as his personal friend, another as his son, and still another as his lover. Kṛṣṇa rewards all the devotees equally, according to their different intensities of love for Him. In the material world, the same reciprocations of feelings are there, and they are equally exchanged by the Lord with the different types of worshipers. The pure devotees both here and in the transcendental abode associate with Him in person and are able to render personal service to the Lord and thus derive transcendental bliss in His loving service.

The Fruit of Surrender

In the next and final song of this collection, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura describes in detail the wonderful fruit a devotee relishes upon surrendering to the lotus feet of the Lord.

The Original Song

Mānasa, deha, geha

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura

1

mānasa, deha, geha, yo kichu mora
arpilūṅ tuwā pade, nanda-kiśora!

mānasa—my mind; *deha*—body; *geha*—family and home; *yo kichu*—whatever; *mora*—is mine; *arpilū*—I have offered; *tuwā pade*—at Your lotus feet; *nanda-kiśora*—O youthful son of Nanda!

Mind, body, and family, whatever may be mine, I have surrendered at Your lotus feet, O youthful son of Nanda!

2

sampade vipade, jīvane-maraṇe
dāya mama gelā, tuwā o-pada varaṇe

sampade vipade—in good fortune or in bad; *jīvane-maraṇe*—in life or death; *dāya*—difficulties; *mama*—my; *gelā*—have disappeared; *tuwā o-pada*—those feet of Yours; *varaṇe*—by submissive acceptance.

In good fortune or bad, in life or death, all my difficulties have disappeared because I have chosen those lotus feet of Yours as my only shelter.

3

mārabi rākhabi-yo icchā tohārā
nitya-dāsa prati tuwā adhikārā

mārabi rākhabi—slay me or protect me; *yo icchā tohāra*—as You wish; *nitya-dāsa*—Your eternal servant; *prati*—toward; *tuwā adhikāra*—it is Your prerogative.

Slay me or protect me as You wish, for You are the master of Your eternal servant.

4

janmāobi more icchā yadi tora
bhakta-gṛhe jani janma hau mora

janmāobi more—that I be born again; *icchā yadi tora*—if it is Your will; *bhakta-gṛhe*—in the home of Your devotee; *jani janma*—take birth; *hau*—may it be; *mora*—mine.

If it is Your will that I be born again, then may it be in the home of Your devotee.

5

kīṭa-janma hau yathā tuvā dāsa
bahira-mukha brahma janme nāhi āśa

kīṭa-janma—born as an insect, or a worm; *hau*—may it be; *yathā*—so long as; *tuvā dāsa*—I remain Your devotee; *bahira-mukha*—averse to You; *brahma-janme*—to be born as Lord Brahmā; *nāhi āśa*—I have no desire.

Let me be born again even as a worm or an insect, as long as I may remain Your devotee. I have no desire to be born as a Brahmā averse to You.

6

bhukti-mukti-spṛhā vihīna ye bhakta
labhaite tāka saṅga anurakta

bhukti-mukti-spṛhā—desire for worldly enjoyment or liberation; *vihīna*—who is completely devoid; *ye bhakta*—that devotee; *labhaite*—to attain; *tāka saṅga*—their association; *anurakta*—I yearn.

I yearn for the company of that devotee who is completely free of all desire for worldly enjoyment or liberation.

7

janaka, jananī, dayita, tanaya
prabhu, guru, pati-tuhū sarva-maya

janaka—father; *jananī*—mother; *dayita*—lover; *tanay*—son; *prabhu*—Lord; *guru*—preceptor; *pati*—husband; *tuh*—You; *sarva-moy*—are everything to me.

Father, mother, lover, son, Lord, preceptor, husband—You are everything to me.

8

bhakativinoda kahe, śuna kāna!
rādhā-nātha! tuhū hāmāra parāṇa

bhakativinoda kahe—Ṭhākura Bhaktivinoda says; *śuna kāna!*—O Kāna, please hear me!; *rādhā-nātha*!—O Lord of Rādhā!; *tuhū*—You; *hāmāra parāṇa*—are my life and soul.

Bhaktivinoda says, "O Kāna, please hear me! O Lord of Rādhā, You are my life and soul!"

Song 18

The Ocean of Bliss

(An adaptation of Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's *Ātma-nivedana*)





1

By surrendering myself to Your lotus feet,
O Lord, I have become supremely happy.
Misery has vanished, worries are no more,
all I see is joy and wonder everywhere.



2
From Your lotus feet, immortal nectar flows,
protecting Your devotee from both fear and sorrow.
Under their shelter, I have found lasting peace,
no more anxiety in worldly existence.



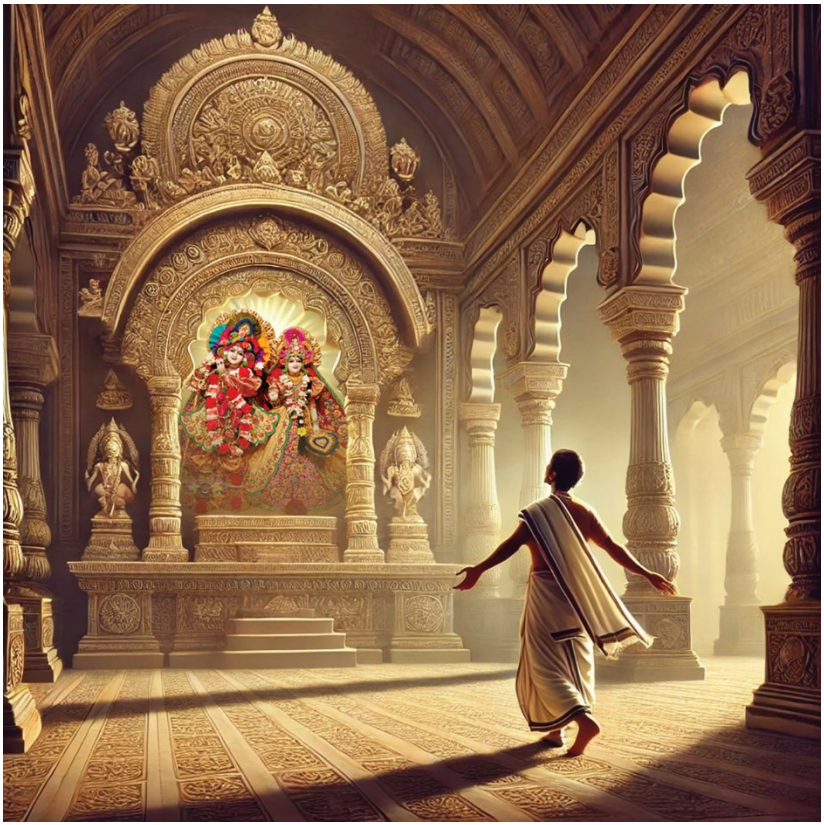
3

Service in Your temple I will render without motive,
never seeking any fruits in return.
Rather, I shall strive for whatever pleases You,
with full attachment to Your lotus feet.



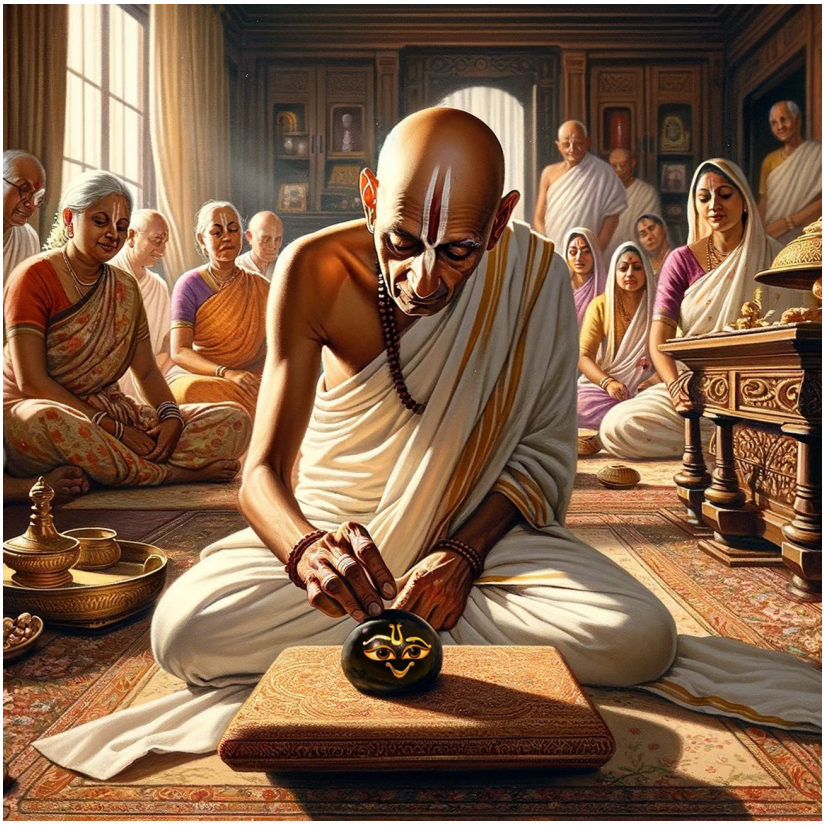
4

Troubles in Your service are a source of happiness,
for both joy and sorrow are actually blessings.
Bestowing great fortune and spiritual opulence,
they destroy the misery of stubborn ignorance.



5

My sad past history is all but forgotten,
my mind is now enlivened by Your blissful service.
I am rightly Yours and You are truly mine,
no need for any other treasure divine.



6

Bhaktivinoda dives deeply into the ocean of pure happiness
by engaging in Your service with devotion and gratefulness.
Your wishes are his life and soul, no other desire in his heart,
while living in Your house and serving You. You are his only resort.

Commentary

This song is the last of eight in Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's songbook *Śaraṇāgati* in the section titled *Second Principle of Surrender: Ātma-nivedana* (Dedication of the Self). It concludes the song cycle *Introspection* by opening a new chapter. The heavy-hearted, somber mood expressed in the previous introspective songs gives way to a light-hearted, cheerful mood characteristic of a soul who has fully realized their identity as an eternal servant of Kṛṣṇa and experiences the full potential of bliss inherent in devotional service.

Service Beyond Material Servitude

Devotional service to the Lord is vastly different from ordinary service in the material world. Generally, no one likes to be a servant—a position often associated with inferiority and dependence—even if the pay is attractive. Most would prefer a position of superiority, with the power to exercise control and give orders. However, in the realm of *bhakti,* this is not the case. As Śrīla Prabhupāda explains in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (9.29): "Devotional service to the Lord is not an activity of this material world; it is part of the spiritual world, where eternity, bliss and knowledge predominate."

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura expresses this mood precisely, saying that by engaging in service to the Supreme Lord he has become supremely happy *(parama sukhī)*. When Kṛṣṇa revealed the most confidential knowledge to Arjuna, He mentioned that one of the characteristics of devotional service is that it is joyfully performed (Bg. 9.2).

Kṛṣṇa is the embodiment of supreme joy, and by coming in contact with Him—even as a menial servant—one also experiences supreme joy. Misery finds no place in a mind enlivened by devotional service, and Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura notes that he feels free from all anxiety, seeing only joy everywhere.

Scriptural Affirmations of Devotional Bliss

Skeptics may think these are the words of a dreamer, but Vedic literature contains many descriptions that corroborate Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura's statements.

For instance, Dhruva Mahārāja prays:

> My Lord, the transcendental bliss derived from meditating upon Your lotus feet or hearing about Your glories from pure devotees is so unlimited that it is far beyond the stage of *brahmānanda*, wherein one thinks himself merged in the impersonal Brahman as one with the Supreme. Since *brahmānanda* is also defeated by the transcendental bliss derived from devotional service, then what to speak of the temporary blissfulness of elevating oneself to the heavenly planets, which is ended by the separating sword of time? Although one may be elevated to the heavenly planets, he falls down in due course of time.

The Unique Nectar of Kṛṣṇa's Lotus Feet

In the second stanza, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura describes the unique quality of Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet as a source of exquisite nectar. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes in the purport to SB 1.11.26:

> The essence of everything is the Supreme Lord: He is called the *sāram*. And those who sing and talk about Him are called the *sārańgas*, or the pure devotees. The pure devotees are always hankering after the lotus feet of the Lord. The lotus has a kind of honey that is transcendentally relished by the devotees. They are like the bees who are always after the honey. Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī, the great devotee *ācārya* of the Gauḍīya-Vaiṣṇava-sampradāya, has sung a song about this lotus honey, comparing himself to the bee: "O my Lord Kṛṣṇa, I beg to offer

> my prayers unto You. My mind is like a bee, and it is after some honey. Kindly, therefore, give my bee-mind a place at Your lotus feet, which are the resources for all transcendental honey."

Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet are not only the source of transcendental honey but also offer protection from fear and sorrow, as perfectly expressed in Govinda dāsa's song *Bhajahū re mana (Free From Fear)*. Taking shelter under these lotus feet is a common theme in the prayers of devotees throughout history.

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura has expressed his desire to take shelter in many of the songs included in this collection, and now he describes the result he is experiencing when actually taking shelter: lasting peace and no more anxiety in worldly existence. His testimony should encourage devotees who are still in the process of taking shelter and are still waiting for the promised results to manifest. The Lord reciprocates according to the degree of surrender, and as long as our surrender is partial, we can hardly expect the full result in the form of freedom from all anxiety, and lasting peace. This is illustrated by the example of Draupadī, who received Kṛṣṇa's full protection only after she completely surrendered, throwing her arms in the air and putting herself at His mercy to supply an endless *sari* and thus prevent her from being stripped naked by the evil Kurus.

Unalloyed Devotional Service

The third stanza explores unmotivated devotional service, as explained by Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu to Rūpa Gosvāmī (Cc. Madhya 19.167):

anyābhilāṣitā-śūnyaṁ jñāna-karmādy-anāvṛtam
ānukūlyena kṛṣṇānu-śīlanaṁ bhaktir uttamā

> When first-class devotional service develops, one must be devoid of all material desires, knowledge obtained by monistic

> philosophy, and fruitive action. The devotee must constantly serve Kṛṣṇa favorably, as Kṛṣṇa desires.

Prabhupāda elaborates in the purport:

> A pure devotee has no plans other than those for the Lord's service. He is not interested in attaining success in mundane activities. He simply wants success in the progress of devotional service. [...] He is interested only in satisfying Kṛṣṇa. If one lives only for the satisfaction of Kṛṣṇa, it does not matter whether he belongs to this order of life or that order of life. One's only business should be to satisfy Kṛṣṇa.

Seeing Calamities as Blessings

In the next stanza, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura addresses a topic that often perplexes neophyte devotees: seeing calamities and adversities as blessings in disguise. A devotee who has surrendered to the Lord's lotus feet remains confident in His protection under all circumstances, even in seemingly adverse situations. Bali Māhārāja is again a perfect example, praised by Vāmanadeva for his unwavering dependence on the Lord's mercy (SB 8.22.28-30):

> Bali Mahārāja has become the most famous among the demons and nonbelievers, for in spite of being bereft of all material opulences, he is fixed in his devotional service.
>
> Although bereft of his riches, fallen from his original position, defeated and arrested by his enemies, rebuked and deserted by his relatives and friends, although suffering the pain of being bound and although rebuked and cursed by his spiritual master, Bali Mahārāja, being fixed in his vow, did not give up his truthfulness. It was certainly with pretension that I spoke about religious principles, but he did not give up religious principles, for he is true to his word."

Prabhupāda's purport elaborates on these verses:

> Bali Mahārāja passed the severe test put before him by the Supreme Personality of Godhead. This is further proof of the Lord's mercy toward His devotee. The Supreme Personality of Godhead sometimes puts a devotee to severe tests that are almost unbearable. One could hardly even live under the conditions forced upon Bali Mahārāja. That Bali Mahārāja endured all these severe tests and austerities is the mercy of the Supreme Lord. The Lord certainly appreciates the devotee's forbearance, and it is recorded for the future glorification of the devotee. This was not an ordinary test. As described in this verse, hardly anyone could survive such a test, but for the future glorification of Bali Mahārāja, one of the *mahājanas*, the Supreme Personality of Godhead not only tested him but also gave him the strength to tolerate such adversity. The Lord is so kind to His devotee that when severely testing him the Lord gives him the necessary strength to be tolerant and continue to remain a glorious devotee.

The conclusion is that true devotees do not feel resentment for being put into difficulties or experiencing hardship. Rather, they see any bitter fruits they may taste as a natural result of their own actions—the harvest of what they have sown in the past. Thus, they will exercise tolerance and, at the same time, patiently await the mercy of the Lord.

This attitude is expressed in a famous verse found in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (10.14.8), where Brahmā prays:

> My dear Lord, one who earnestly waits for You to bestow Your causeless mercy upon him, all the while patiently suffering the reactions of his past misdeeds and offering You respectful obeisances with his heart, words and body, is surely eligible for liberation, for it has become his rightful claim.

Another example is Queen Kuntī, who even prayed for calamities to happen again and again, considering them blessings that allowed her to see the Lord again and again. In other words, the absence of difficulties may lull us into a false sense of comfort and security, which generally results in forgetfulness of the Lord, whereas troubling circumstances push us to remember the Lord as our only protector and maintainer.

Embracing Both Joy and Sorrow

As Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura expresses in this song, a devotee can appreciate both joy and sorrow as equally beneficial. In the next stanza, he declares that whatever misfortune may have happened in the past is now history and pales in the presence of the elated feelings he is experiencing in the Lord's service. In this collection, songs like *My Tale of Misery* and *Shadow Theater* demonstrate the realization of one's miserable condition in material existence. However, engaging in devotional service purifies the heart, frees it from the influence of *rajas* and *tamas*, and enlivens the mind.

The Intimacy of Mutual Possessiveness

In the perfected stage, the loving relationship between the Lord and His devotee becomes very intimate, culminating in the conception of mutual possessiveness. Śrīla Prabhupāda explains in the purport to SB 6.9.45:

> A devotee who has sacrificed everything for the service of Kṛṣṇa and whose only source of relief is the Lord is known as *akiñcana*. As expressed in Queen Kuntī's prayers, the Lord is *akiñcana-vitta*, the property of such a devotee.

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura sums this up with the simple statement*: āmi to' tomāra, tumi to' āmāra*—"I am Yours, and You are mine." This confidential exchange of pure love is so enjoyable that Bhaktivinoda

compares it to diving into an ocean of bliss, producing endless waves of ecstasy.

Conclusion

Thus concludes this cycle of songs which often express sorrow and despair but ultimately lead us to the shore of the ever-increasing ocean of the boundless bliss of transcendence.

The Original Song

Ātma-nivedana

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura

1

ātma-nivedana, tuyā pade kari',
hoinu parama sukhī
duḥkha dūre gela, cintā nā rahila,
caudike ānanda dekhi

ātma-nivedana—surrender; *tuyā*—your; *pade*—unto the lotus feet; *kari'*—offering; *hoinu*—became; *parama*—supremely; *sukhī*—happy; *duḥkha*—unhappiness; *dūre*—far away; *gela*—has gone; *cintā*—anxiety; *nā*—not; *rahila*—remained; *caudike*—in all directions; *ānanda*—pleasures derived from them; *dekhi*—seeing.

I have become supremely happy by surrendering myself unto Your lotus feet. Sorrow has gone far away, and there are no more cares. All I see is joy in the four directions.

2

aśoka-abhaya, amṛta-ādhāra,
tomāra caraṇa-dvaya
tāhāte ekhana, viśrāma labhiyā
chārinu bhavera bhaya

aśoka—free from grief; *abhaya*—free from fear; *amṛta-ādhāra*—the nectar from His lips; *tomāra*—Your; *caraṇa*—lotus feet; *dvaya*—both; *tāhāte*—by that; *ekhana*—now; *viśrāma*—rest; *labhiyā*—having attained; *chārinu*—I have given up; *bhavera*—of wordly existence; *bhaya*—fear.

Your two lotus feet are reservoirs of immortal nectar that grant freedom from both sorrow and fear. Resting in them I have found peace, and have completely given up the fear of worldly existence.

3

tomāra saṁsāre, kariba sevana,
nāhiba phalera bhāgī
tava sukha jāhe, kariba yatana,
ha' ye pade anurāgī

tomāra—your; *saṁsāre*—in the cycle of birth and death; *kariba*—I shall do; *sevana*—service; *nāhiba*—I shall never be; *phalera*—fruit; *bhāgī*—enjoyer; *tava*—your; *sukha*—happiness; *jāhe*—of which; *kariba-yatana*—I shall diligently attend; *ha' ye*—having become; *pade*—Your feet; *anurāgī*—attached to.

I shall render service in Your household and never endeavor to enjoy the fruits of that service. Rather, I shall strive for whatever pleases You, being fully enamored by Your lotus feet.

4

tomāra sevāya, duḥkha haya yata,
se-o to' parama sukha
sevā-sukha-duḥkha, parama sampada,
nāśaye avidyā-duḥkha

tomāra—Your; *sevāya*—by service; *duḥkha*—unhappiness; *haya*—are; *yata—having arisen; se-o*—that; *to'*—indeed; *parama*—supreme; *sukha*—happiness; *sevā—service; sukha*—happiness; *duḥkha*—unhappiness; *parama*—supreme *sampada*—opulences; *nāśaye*—they destroy; *avidyā*—nescience; *duḥkha*—misery.

All the troubles encountered in Your service shall be the cause of great happiness, for in Your devotional service joy and sorrow are equally great riches. Both destroy the misery of ignorance.

5

pūrva itihāsa, bhulinu sakala,
sevā-sukha pe' ye mane
āmi to' tomāra, tumi to' āmāra,
ki kāja apara dhane

pūrva—former; *itihāsa*—history; *bhulinu*—I have forgotten; *sakala*—all; *sevā—service; sukha*—happiness; *pe' ye*—having attained; *mane*—within the mind; *āmi*—I; *to'*—indeed; *tomāra*—Your; *tumi*—You; *to'*—indeed; *āmāra*—My; *ki*—what; *kāja*—what is the need for; *apara*—another; *dhane*—treasure.

I have completely forgotten all of my past history by feeling in my mind the great joy of Your service. I am indeed Yours, and You are truly mine. What need is there of any other treasure?

6

bhakativinoda, ānande ḍubiyā,
tomāra sevāra tare
saba ceṣṭā kare, tava icchā-mata,
thākiyā tomāra ghare

bhakativinoda—Bhaktivinoda; *ānande*—in happiness; *ḍubiyā*—sinking; *tomāra*—your; *sevāra*—to serve him; *tare*—him; *saba*—all; *ceṣṭā*—endeavor; *kare*—makes; *tava*—Your; *icchā*—wishes; *mato*—according to; *thākiyā*—having stayed; *tomāra*—Your; *ghare*—at the home.

Bhaktivinoda sinks deeply into the ocean of pure bliss by engaging in Your service. He devotes all his efforts according to Your wishes while living in Your house.

Epilogue

In reflecting on this collection of songs, we witness a transformative journey that begins in deep self-examination and ends in the boundless joy of divine connection. The words of Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura, Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura, Locana dāsa Ṭhākura, Govinda dāsa Kavirāja and Vidyāpati Ṭhākura guide us through the heart's intimate experiences—the sorrows of attachment, the burdens of illusion, and ultimately, the bliss of surrender. Together, these poetic expressions carry us from the somber awareness of life's fleeting nature to the jubilant realization of our eternal identity as servants of Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personaliy of Godhead.

In the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition, poetry and song are much more than simply artistic forms; they are sacred vehicles for transcendental experience. The words are chosen not only for the joy of expression but for their power to awaken spiritual insight. Whether in the original Bengali verses or the English renderings presented here, these compositions resonate with the struggles and aspirations that characterize the human search for meaning and fulfillment. Through their simplicity and depth, these songs help bridge the vast chasm between material illusion and spiritual reality. They reflect the lives of individuals who have felt the weight of the world's entanglements and, through devotion, have transcended them.

This collection reminds us that surrender is not a passive act but a profound engagement of the real self, culminating in the complete offering of mind, body, and soul. Just as our *ācāryas* found solace and fulfillment through their dedication to Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet, these songs invite each of us to follow in their footsteps and come to the same experience. They show us that life's adversities and disappointments are not mere obstacles to our journey but can rather be milestones on the path to a deeper, more resilient realization.

The ultimate aim of *Introspection* is to elevate the listener and reader beyond intellectual understanding and bring them to the realm of the heart, where devotion lives. As Śrīla Prabhupāda says, even those who may not understand every word can experience the purifying effects of sacred vibrations. Music and poetry have a unique way of penetrating our defenses, speaking to us on a level that transcends language, culture, and time. Through this collection, may we find not only solace in times of difficulty but also a spark that ignites the desire to live in the light of devotion.

Glossary

Ācārya — A spiritual teacher, or *guru*, particularly one who teaches by example and holds a prominent position in a religious tradition. In the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition, *ācāryas* play a crucial role in guiding the spiritual development of devotees.

Asat-saṅga — The association with materialistic or worldly-minded people. Such association is considered detrimental to spiritual advancement as it draws the mind away from devotion and leads to entanglement in sense gratification.

Bhagavad-gītā — The *Bhagavad-gītā* (The Song of Bhagavān) presents a dialogue between Lord Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, offering profound insights into the nature of the soul, the Supreme Lord, material nature, the law of *karma* and time.

Bhagavān — The Supreme Personality of Godhead who is full in six opulences: wealth, strength, fame, beauty, knowledge and renunciation.

Bhakti — Loving devotion. In the context of Vaiṣṇavism, it refers to pure devotional service to the Supreme Lord, which is the constitutional function of the spirit soul.

Bhakti-yoga — The process of cultivating *bhakti*.

Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura — A 19th-century Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava saint and reformer who wrote extensively on Kṛṣṇa consciousness. He is known for his books and songs on *bhakti*, and his efforts to revive the pure teachings of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu.

Brahmā — The demigod responsible for the creation of the material universe.

Brahmānanda — The bliss experienced by realization of Brahman, the impersonal aspect of the Absolute Truth.

Caitanya Mahāprabhu — An incarnation of Lord Kṛṣṇa who appeared in the 15th century to inaugurate the *saṅkīrtana* movement, the congregational chanting of the holy names of God as the primary

method for attaining spiritual enlightenment and love of God in the age of Kali.

Caitanya-caritāmṛta — A key text in the *bhakti*-tradition, written by Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī, documenting the life and teachings of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu.

Dainya — Humility, the first principle of surrender, referring to the feeling of lowliness and self-awareness of one's fallen condition. Vaiṣṇava songs often emphasize the need for humility on the path of spiritual progress.

Devahūti — The mother of Kapiladeva, an incarnation of Lord Viṣṇu, who explained to her the nature of material existence and the process of devotional service.

Gaura/Gorā/Gaurāṅga/Gauracandra/Gaurasundara — Names for Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu.

Gopīs — The cowherd girls of Vṛndāvana who are deeply devoted to Lord Kṛṣṇa and are famous for their loving exchanges with Him, particularly their spiritual relationship with Kṛṣṇa in His *rāsa-līlā* (divine dance).

Govinda dāsa Kavirāja — A 17th century poet-saint and disciple of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, renowned for his devotional songs that inspire surrender to the Lord and the chanting of His holy names.

Guru-paramparā — a lineage of teachers and disciples tracing back to Kṛṣṇa Himself.

Hari-nāma mahā-mantra — The "Great Mantra" of the holy names of Kṛṣṇa, consisting of the repeated chanting of "Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare; Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare." This *mantra* is the essence of the *saṅkīrtana* movement initiated by Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu.

ISKCON — The International Society for Krishna Consciousness, founded by HDG A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda in 1966. ISKCON aims to spread the teachings of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, particularly those found in the *Bhagavad-gītā* and *Śrīmad-*

Bhāgavatam, and emphasizes the congregational chanting of the holy names, associating with devotees, and engaging in devotional service.

Jñāna — Knowledge, particularly in reference to philosophical or spiritual understanding. In comparison to *bhakti*, it generally refers to the pursuit of speculative knowledge without devotion, which can still entrap the soul in material existence.

Jagai and Madhai —Two notorious brothers from Navadvīpa who were transformed into pure devotees through the mercy of Lord Nityānanda and Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. Their story demonstrates the redeeming power of Kṛṣṇa's holy name and divine forgiveness.

Jīva — The individual soul, an eternal part and parcel of Kṛṣṇa. In the conditioned state, the *jīva* becomes entangled in material existence and forgets its true spiritual identity. The goal of spiritual practice is for the *jīva* to realize its eternal relationship with Kṛṣṇa and return to its original state of pure devotion.

Kali-yuga — The Age of Kali, our present time period in history, characterized by quarrel and strife.

Kapiladeva — An incarnation of Lord Viṣṇu who appears in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. His teachings to His mother Devahūti focus on devotional service, material nature and the nature of the soul's entanglement in the material world.

Karma — Actions or deeds, especially those performed with the expectation of enjoying their results. In this context, it refers to fruitive activities that bind the soul to the material world.

Kāma-krodha-lobha-moha-mada-mātsarya — The six enemies of the conditioned soul: lust, anger, greed, illusion, pride, and envy. These emotions lead to suffering and are obstacles to spiritual progress.

Kṛṣṇa — The Supreme Personality of Godhead. He is the central figure in *bhakti* (devotional service) and is worshiped as the source of all joy and the ultimate object of love and surrender.

Kṛṣṇa-prema — Love of Kṛṣṇa. It is the highest goal in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, representing pure, selfless love for the Supreme Lord. Achieving *kṛṣṇa-prema* is the ultimate objective of a devotee's life.

Kṛṣṇa Caitanya — See: Caitanya Mahāprabhu.

Kuntī (Queen Kuntī) — The mother of the Pāṇḍavas, known for her famous prayers in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, where she expresses her desire to face calamities so that she can continuously remember Kṛṣṇa.

Locana dāsa Ṭhākura — A 16th-century Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava saint and poet. He is the author of *Caitanya-maṅgala*, which narrates the life and teachings of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. His songs express deep devotion and surrender to Kṛṣṇa.

Lotus Feet — A common term in *bhakti* literature referring to the divine feet of the Supreme Lord or His pure devotee, which are the ultimate shelter for devotees. The term emphasizes the Lord's purity and the devotee's desire for a humble position in relation to Him.

Mādhava — A name of Kṛṣṇa, often used in devotional songs and scriptures, highlighting His association with divine sweetness and love. It is also used to address Him as the husband of the goddess of fortune, Lakṣmī.

Mahājanas — Great spiritual authorities or saints. In Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, following the path set by the *mahājanas* is considered crucial for attaining spiritual success.

Mahā-mantra — The Hare Kṛṣṇa *mantra*: "Hare Kṛṣṇa, Hare Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa, Hare Hare; Hare Rāma, Hare Rāma, Rāma Rāma, Hare Hare." This is the central chant in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition. It purifies the heart and brings the chanter closer to Kṛṣṇa.

Mahā-Viṣṇu — An expansion of Kṛṣṇa who generates the universes.

Māyā — The illusory energy that covers the living entity's spiritual nature and keeps it bound to the material world. It creates a false perception of reality and distracts the soul from its eternal relationship with Kṛṣṇa.

Mukunda — A name of Kṛṣṇa, meaning "the bestower of liberation" (*mukti*). Kṛṣṇa as Mukunda grants freedom from the cycle of birth and death to those who take shelter under His lotus feet.

Nanda (Māhārāja) — Kṛṣṇa's foster father.

Nanda-nandana — Kṛṣṇa, the son of Nanda.

Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura — A 16th-century Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava saint and poet, famous for his deeply introspective devotional songs, describing the fleeting nature of material pleasures and emphasizing surrender to Kṛṣṇa.

Nṛsiṁha(deva) — A half-man, half-lion incarnation of Lord Viṣṇu, who appeared to protect His devotee Prahlāda Mahārāja and defeat the demon Hiraṇyakaśipu. Prahlāda is famous for praying to Nṛsiṁhadeva for the deliverance of all conditioned souls suffering in material existence.

Nityānanda — An incarnation of Lord Balarāma and a close associate of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. Nityānanda is known for His boundless mercy in delivering even the most fallen souls.

Nitya-siddha — An eternally liberated soul.

Paramātmā — The Supersoul, who resides in the hearts of all living beings, overseeing and guiding their movements and activities. It is a manifestation of the Supreme Lord, present with every soul, witnessing and permitting their actions.

Prahlāda Mahārāja — A great devotee of Lord Viṣṇu and one of the central figures in the Nṛsiṁhadeva pastime. Despite being persecuted by his father, Hiraṇyakaśipu, Prahlāda remained steadfast in his devotion, which led to his protection by Lord Nṛsiṁhadeva.

Prasādam — Sanctified food, spiritualized by offering it to the Lord.

Rādhā/ Rādhārāṇī — The internal potency of the Lord.

Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa — The divine couple in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. Rādhā represents the highest form of devotional love, while Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Lord.

Rāmānanda Rāya — An intimite associate of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu.

Rūpa Gosvāmī — A principal disciple of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu and a leading figure in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition. His works, particularly *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* (The Nectar of Devotion), are foundational texts for the practitioners of *bhakti-yoga*.

Sādhana-bhakti — Devotional service according to rules and regulations.

Śaraṇāgati — The process of surrender to Kṛṣṇa, involving six essential principles: accepting anything favorable for devotional service, rejecting anything unfavorable, depending on the Lord's protection, accepting the Lord as one's maintainer, becoming humble and dedicating everything to the Lord's service.

Sādhaka — A practitioner of *bhakti-yoga.*

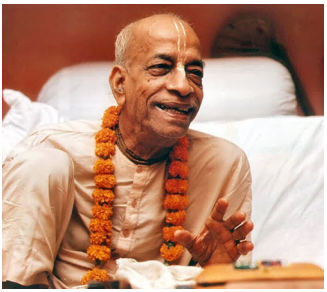
Sādhu-saṅga — Association with devotees or saintly people. It is considered an essential factor for advancing in spiritual life. Through *sādhu-saṅga*, one becomes inspired and guided in the practice of *bhakti-yoga*.

Śāstra — The Vedic scriptures, like the four *Vedas*, the *Upaṇiṣads*, the *Purāṇas*, *Bhagavad-gītā* and *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*.

Śrīla Prabhupāda — An affectionate honorific title used to address or refer to His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, the founder-ācārya of ISKCON. His translations, commentaries, and teachings are unparalleled in spreading the practice of bhakti-yoga on a global scale.

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam — A central scripture in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition, containing 18,000 verses that describe the pastimes and teachings of Kṛṣṇa and His devotees. It is regarded as the essence of Vedic wisdom.

The Founder-Ācārya



Bhakti, or loving devotional service, is not an imaginary or sentimental state of delusional adepts. The *bhakti-yoga* process is a science of spiritual development based on the teachings of self-realized souls who have come—and continue to come—to this world to help conditioned souls free themselves from their entanglement in material existence.

Even God Himself comes from time to time to spread the spiritual knowledge of *bhakti*, for example through the *Bhagavad-gītā*, spoken by Kṛṣṇa Himself over 5,000 years ago. The latest *avatāra* of Kṛṣṇa, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, appeared about 500 years ago in Bengal to teach the process of *bhakti* by chanting the holy name of the Lord. His devotees and followers have written many books on the science of *bhakti-yoga*, and they continue to spread this same knowledge through the *guru-paramparā*, a lineage of teachers and disciples tracing back to Kṛṣṇa Himself.

Today, there are hundreds of thousands of followers of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu all over the world who teach the path of *bhakti* through their example.

The most prominent follower in recent times was the founder of the International Society for Kṛṣṇa consciousness (ISKCON), His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda. Śrīla Prabhupāda came to the West in 1965, at the age of 69, and propagated the process of *bhakti-yoga*, demonstrating it through his exemplary life as a pure devotee of Kṛṣṇa. Until his departure from this world in 1977, he traveled around the world 14 times on lecture tours, bringing the teachings of Lord Kṛṣṇa to hundreds and

thousands of people on six continents. Men and women of all walks of life accepted his message and, with their help, Prabhupāda established ISKCON centers and projects all over the world.

Under his inspiration, Kṛṣṇa devotees established temples, rural communities, and educational institutions. Prabhupāda returned to India on several occasions, eager to nurture the roots of Kṛṣṇa consciousness in his home country, where he sparked a revival of the *bhakti* tradition. In India, he opened dozens of temples, including large centers at the holy sites of Vṛndāvana and Māyāpura.

However, Śrīla Prabhupāda's most significant contribution is undoubtedly his books. He authored more than 70 volumes of philosophical works in the *kṛṣṇa-bhakti* tradition, offering translations of revered scriptures that are highly respected by scholars for their authority, depth, fidelity to the original text, and clarity of meaning. Several of his works are used as textbooks in university courses. His writings have been translated into more than 100 languages.

The most prominent titles are *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (published in 30 volumes), and *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta* (published in 17 volumes).

As of 2024, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness has over 600 centers around the world, welcoming anyone who wishes to hear about Kṛṣṇa and participate in the spiritual practices of *bhakti-yoga*.

We invite the reader to contact their nearest ISKCON center to deepen their knowledge and experience of the teachings presented in this essay.

Pronunciation Guide

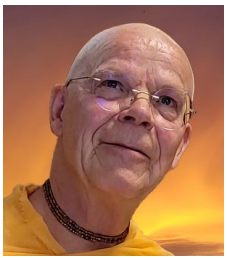
How to pronounce transliterated Sanskrit words

Vocals are pronounced like in English,
except for those that have a line on top,
like **ā, ī** and **ū**, which are pronounced twice as long.

Consonants are pronounced like in English,
with the following exceptions:

c is pronounced like the **ch** in charity
ś and **ṣ** are pronounced like the **sh** in show
ṛ is pronounced like the **ri** in ring
ṅ and **ṁ** are pronounced with a nasal sound like the **ng** in song

The Author



Bhakti Gauravani Goswami, born in Germany in 1951, first encountered devotees in Hamburg in the summer of 1971 while fulfilling his mandatory military service. After reading Śrīla Prabhupāda's translation and commentary on the *Śrī Īśopaniṣad* and receiving guidance from devotees at ISKCON's Hamburg temple, he became a vegetarian, shaved his head, and lived a devotional life to the extent circumstances allowed while still in the army. To help him focus, devotees encouraged him to translate the Second Canto of the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* into German. Shortly after his discharge, he traveled to Paris in July 1972 to meet Śrīla Prabhupāda, who accepted him as a disciple and gave him the spiritual name Vedavyas Das.

For the next eight years, Vedavyas translated his spiritual master's books into German and managed the German branch of the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust (BBT), the publisher of Prabhupāda's works.

In 1981, Vedavyas moved to Spain and assisted in the administration of the Spanish temples. In 1982, he met his future wife, Rasāmṛta devī dāsī, with whom he would raise four children.
In 1985, he established the European office of the Spanish BBT and organized the translation and production of Prabhupāda's books in Spanish.

In 1996, for Śrīla Prabhupāda's centennial celebration, Vedavyas published *Śrīla Prabhupāda and His Disciples in Germany*, a book that recounts Prabhupāda's visits to Germany and other temples in Europe, the history of ISKCON Germany from 1969 to 1977, and memories from Prabhupāda's disciples. In honor of his spiritual

master's 125th anniversary, a revised and expanded edition was published in 2021.

In 2007, he and his wife entered the *vānaprastha* (retired) order of life. Seven years later, on the auspicious day of Gaura Pūrṇimā, Vedavyās Dās accepted *sannyāsa* (the renounced order of life) and has since been known as Bhakti Gauravani Goswami.

In 2020, he published *Sacred Song Symphony*, a compilation of 108 Bengali and Sanskrit songs and prayers by Vaiṣṇava *ācāryas* and other *mahājanas*, accompanied by commentaries. He also recorded all the songs and made them available on his website, www.spiritualsoundspace.com.

In 2025, he presented *Introspection—Life in the Shadow of Time*, a collection featuring 18 of those songs, adapted into English poetry. Available in both print and e-book formats, this work includes 150 color illustrations and an analytical commentary for each song. The recordings of these timeless reflective poems are reimagined within a modern soundscape, preserving their essence while designed to resonate with a global audience.

Currently, Bhakti Gauravani Goswami continues his work in translation, writing, and recording, while traveling and preaching across Europe, South America, and India.

For more information, visit:

www.spiritualsoundspace.com

https://harekrishna.es

www.bbt.info

https://vedabase.io/en/library/

Acknowledgements

My gratitude goes to Antonio Núnez, from the Spanish Bhajan Group *Mystical Vraja*, who contributed bass lines to the songs, except for *Wake-up Call, Burning Hot Sand, Sad Story,* and *Jewels on Rags*.

For more information, visit:
https://harekrishna.es/templos/guadalajara-nueva-vraja-mandala

My gratitude also goes to Sundara Govinda dāsa from *Nilambary Music Project* for his contribution of piano, bass and drums on *Burning Hot Sand*.

For more information, visit: https://bnd.lc/Nilambary