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*Adapted from Mahābhārata*

## NO IMPEDIMENTS

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Krishna says *man-manā bhava mad-bhakto mad-yājī māṁ namaskuru* — "Always think of me, become my devotee, worship me and offer obeisances unto me." [Bg. 18.65]. He does not say any big, bombastic thing.

It's very simple. It doesn't require an M.A. or Ph.D. education to learn these four things. Anyone, even a child, can do it. It is very easy. If you daily see the deity in the temple, or if you have got a deity at home, even a child will become habituated to think of Krishna. It is not at all difficult. And if you chant the Hare Krishna *mahā-mantra*, that is also thinking of Krishna.

If you continue this then you can become his devotee. Is it very expensive? No. *patraṁ puṣpaṁ phalaṁ toyāṁ yo me bhaktyā prayacchati*, you can offer Krishna a little water or a *tulasī* leaf [Bg. 9.26]. Or if *tulasī* leaf is not available, any leaf will do. He does not say it must be a *tulasī* leaf. So what is the difficulty to secure a little water, a leaf, or a small flower? The real thing is bhakti. Even if you are the poorest of the poor you can become a devotee. If you want to become a devotee of Krishna, there is no impediment in all the three worlds. You can become a devotee; it is so easy. If you want to be a rich man it requires so much trouble. So long as you do not desire to become rich, then you are peaceful.

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And as soon as you desire to become a rich man, it will be all activities how to acquire money this way or that way. Everyone tries to become a rich man because they think that in my old age I'll have some income and I shall peacefully relax. You are already sitting down peacefully. Why take another means? ❀

— From a lecture in Bombay, 20 December 1975.

## "OFFER OBEISANCES TO HER"

*Sri Srimad Gour Govinda Swami Maharaja*

Srila Gour Kishore Das Babaji Maharaja had a follower whose name was Shambhu Babu. He later accepted a wife and married. Then he came to see Gour Kishore Das Babaji Maharaja, and offered his obeisances. Seeing him, one of the devotees said, "Maharaja, Shambhu Babu has come and he is now married".

"O, *bhālo helā, bhālo helā!*" Gour Kishore Das Babaji said. "It is very good that Shambhu Babu is married now". Then he gave an instruction to him. "Shambhu, you should understand that your wife is Krishna's maidservant. She will give pleasure to the senses of Krishna, not to your senses." You should see her as Krishna's maidservant, a *vaiṣṇavī*, and that she is meant to give pleasure to the senses of Krishna. So every day you should offer obeisances to her and take her remnants because she is a *vaiṣṇavī*."

This is the system for *vaiṣṇava* family. Early in the morning, both the husband and wife will get up and offer each other obeisances:



*vāñchā-kalpatarubhyaś ca kṛpā-sindhubhya eva ca patitānām pāvanebhyo vaiṣṇavebhyo namo namaḥ*

We have a similar system in our process of *vaiṣṇava* marriage. When the ceremony is finished then the husband and wife accept *prasāda* together for the first time. They sit together and they will take remnants of each other. The husband takes the remnants of the wife, and the wife takes the remnants of husband. This is our marriage system. There is no question of giving pleasure or enjoyment to one's own senses — everything is meant for Krishna's pleasure and enjoyment. That is very good. That is Krishna's *sambandha*, Krishna's family. Husband and wife relationship should be based on a relationship with Krishna, not on a temporary bodily relationship. Then there will be all happiness, all *ānanda*, blissfulness. Otherwise, material relationships mean unlimited suffering, distress, frictions, quarrelling and divorce. Someone divorces their husband and marries another man. A man divorces his wife and marries another woman. What is this? Like dogs and hogs! How can you expect happiness, peacefulness, and bliss? ❀

— From a lecture in Bristol, England. 11 August 1994.

## THE DEATH OF GAUTAMI'S SON OR "WHO IS REALLY TO BLAME?"

*Adapted from Mahābhārata  
Anuśāsana-parva, chapter one*

*Here, Bhishma responds to a question from  
Yudhisthir Maharaja.*

Since you are dependent on God, destiny, and time, why do you consider yourself to be the cause of your actions? There is an ancient story in this connection about a conversation between Mrityu (personified death), Kala (personified time), the sagacious lady Gautami, a hunter, and a snake.

There was once an old lady named Gautami, who possessed great patience and tranquility of mind. One day she found her son dead, having been bitten by a snake. An angry hunter named Arjunaka bound the serpent with a rope and brought it before her. He said to her, "O blessed lady, this wicked snake has killed your son. Tell me quickly how this wretch is to be destroyed. Shall I throw it into the fire or shall I hack it to pieces? This infamous destroyer of a child does not deserve to live any longer."

"Gautami replied, 'O Arjunaka of little understanding, release the snake. It does not deserve death at your hands. Who is so foolish as to disregard the inevitable fate that awaits him, and, burdening himself with folly, sink into sin? Those who have made themselves light by the practice of virtuous deeds manage to cross the sea of this world just as a ship crosses the ocean. But those who have made themselves heavy with sin sink to the bottom, like an arrow thrown into the water. By killing this serpent, my boy will not be restored to life, nor do I see that any other positive end will be attained by its death. Whereas, by letting it live, no harm will be caused to you.'

The hunter then said, "I know that great persons are afflicted by the sufferings of all creatures. But these words which you have spoken are meant only for a self-controlled person, not for one who is plunged in sorrow. Therefore, I must kill this snake. Those who value peace of mind consider time to be the cause of everything, but practical men quickly soothe their grief by revenge.

Gautami replied:

*na caivārtir vidyate 'smadvidhānām  
dharmārāmaḥ satataṁ sajjano hi  
nityāyasto bāla-jano na cāsti  
dharmo hy eṣa prābhavāmy asya nāham*

"People like us are never pained. Good men are always intent on virtue. The death of the boy was predestined. Therefore, I am unable to approve of the destruction of this snake. (1.19)

*na brāhmaṇānām kopo 'sti kutaḥ kopāc ca yātanā  
mārdavāt kṣamyatām sādho mucyatām eṣa pannagaḥ*

### Nāma-tattva

#### THE LION'S ROAR *Garuḍa Purāṇa, 1.232.12*

*avaśenāpi yan-nāmni kīrtite sarva-pātakaiḥ  
pumān vimucyate sadyaḥ sinha-trastair mṛgair iva*

The ominous roar of a lion sends the deer scampering helter-skelter for their lives. Similarly, *harināma* instantaneously disperses and extirpates all sins when chanted once, even unwittingly. ❀

— Quoted in Bhaktivinode Thakur's *Jaiva Dharma* chapter 23. Translated by Sri Sarvabhavana Das. Published by Brhat Mrdanga Press. Vrindavan. 2003.

“Brahmins do not harbor resentment because resentment leads to pain. O good man, out of compassion, forgive this serpent and release it.” (1.20)

The hunter replied, “Let us acquire great and inexhaustible merit in the next world by destroying this creature, just as a man gains great merit and confers it upon his victim by sacrificing it on the altar! Merit is won by killing an enemy; by killing this despicable creature, you will acquire great and true merit in this world.”

Gautami replied:

*kārthaprāptir gṛhya śatruṃ nihatyā  
kā vā śāntiḥ prāpya śatruṃ na muktoā  
kasmāt saumyā bhūjage na kṣameyaṃ  
mokṣaṃ vā kiṃ kāraṇaṃ nāsyā kuryām*

“What good is there in torturing and destroying an enemy, and what good is acquired by not setting free an enemy that is in our power? O you with a kind face, therefore, why should we not forgive this serpent and try to acquire merit by setting it free?” (1.22)

The hunter replied, “Instead of this single creature being protected, a great number of others should be safeguarded against this one. Virtuous men leave the vicious. You should therefore destroy this wicked reptile.”

The hunter repeatedly urged Gautami to destroy the snake, but Gautami, not blaming the serpent for the death of her son, continued to dissuade him, and did not bend her mind to killing it.

At that time, the snake, which was painfully bound up with the rope, sighed a little, and then slowly spoke in a human voice, “O foolish Arjunaka, what fault is there of mine? I have no will of my own, nor am I independent. Mrityu, death, sent me on this errand. It was by his direction that I have bitten this child, and not out of any anger or choice on my part. I was not an independent cause in the child’s death, just as the officiating priests at a sacrifice don’t acquire the merit of the act of offering oblations of clarified butter to the fire [rather, it goes to the person who has arranged for the ceremony]. Therefore, if there is any sin in this, it is Mrityu’s.”

Mrityu then appeared there and said, “O serpent, I sent you on this errand guided by Kala, time. Neither you nor I are the cause of this child’s death. The modes of nature, *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*, are all evoked by Kala. All creatures, mobile or immobile, in heaven or earth, as well as all acts and all abstentions in this world, are influenced by time. O snake, the whole universe is under the influence of Kala. Knowing this, why do you consider me to be guilty? Neither of us are

free agents. Dependent on Kala, we are ordained to do our appointed work.”

Then Kala arrived at that scene of dispute and said, “Neither Mrityu, nor this serpent, nor I, O hunter, are guilty of the death of any creature. We are merely the immediate causes of events. O Arjunaka, it was the karma of this child that formed the cause of our action in this matter. There was no other cause by which this child came to its death. It was killed as a result of its own past karma.

“We are all subject to the influence of our respective karma. Karma is an aid to salvation, just as sons are, and karma is also an indicator of virtue and vice in man. As men make whatever they wish from a lump of clay, similarly they attain various results because of their karma. Therefore, neither you, nor I, nor Mrityu, nor the serpent, nor this old brahmin lady, were the cause of this child’s death. He himself was the cause.”

Hearing Kala’s words, Gautami said to Arjunaka, “This child has met with death as the result of its own karma. I too acted in the past in such a way that as its consequence my son has died. Let Kala and Mrityu depart from this place, and you, O Arjunaka, should release this serpent.”

Kala, Mrityu and the serpent then all went to their respective destinations and both Gautami and the hunter became consoled in mind.

Bhishmadev then said, “O Yudhisthir, give up your grief and attain peace of mind. Men attain heaven or hell as the result of their own karma. This war was neither your creation nor Duryodhan’s. All of the kings slain in this war have died as a result of the action of time.” Having heard all this, the powerful and virtuous Yudhisthir became peaceful.

\* \* \*

Mature seekers of the absolute tolerate and accept whatever sufferings come as the fruit of their own past misdeeds. They don’t try to avoid the lessons of life by cheaply blaming other living entities, or even time or death personified. Such acceptance is a fundamentally important step in spiritual life. Srila Prabhupada writes in his purport to *Gītā* 12.13-14:

In the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* (10.14.8) it is stated: *ta te ’nukampāṃ su-samīkṣamāṇo bhūñjana evātma-kṛtaṃ vipākam*. Whenever a devotee is in distress or has fallen into difficulty, he thinks that it is the Lord’s mercy upon him. He thinks, “Thanks to my past misdeeds I should suffer far, far greater than I am suffering now. So it is by the mercy of

the Supreme Lord that I am not getting all the punishment I am due. I am just getting a little, by the mercy of the Supreme Personality of Godhead.” Therefore he is always calm, quiet and patient, despite many distressful conditions. A devotee is also always kind to everyone, even to his enemy.

This point is nicely illustrated in the seventeenth chapter of the first canto of *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*. Therein it is described that Maharaja Parikshit came across Dharma in the form of a bull being tortured by Kali personified. Kali had broken three of Dharma’s legs and was beating him, but when Parikshit asked Dharma who the perpetrator of the crime was, Dharma refused to blame Kali and stated that it was difficult to ascertain who was the real cause of his suffering. His wise comments deeply impressed Maharaja Parikshit, who then told Dharma:

*dharmam bravīṣi dharmajña dharmo ‘si vṛṣa-rūpa-dhṛk yad adharma-kṛtaḥ sthānam sūcakasyāpi tad bhavet*

“O you who are in the form of a bull! You know the truth of religion, and you are speaking according to the principle that the destination intended for the perpetrator of irreligious acts is also intended for one who identifies the perpetrator. You are none other than the personality of religion.” (*Bhāg.* 1.17.22)



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Srila Prabhupada comments in his purport:

A devotee’s conclusion is that no one is directly responsible for being a benefactor or mischief-monger without the sanction of the Lord; therefore he does not consider anyone to be directly responsible for such action. But in both the cases he takes it for granted that either benefit or loss is God-sent, and thus it is his grace. In case of benefit, no one will deny that it is God-sent, but in case of loss or reverses one becomes doubtful about how the Lord could be so unkind to his devotee as to put him in great difficulty. Jesus Christ was seemingly put into such great difficulty, being crucified by the ignorant, but he was never angry at the mischief-mongers. That is the way of accepting a thing, either favorable or unfavorable. Thus, for a devotee, the identifier is equally a sinner, like the mischief-monger. By God’s grace, the devotee tolerates all reverses.

Tolerance is an essential qualification for spiritual life. Prabhupada Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur writes in his purport to *Bhāgavatam* 11.23.5:

“Often those who give up the materialistic path and devote themselves to renunciation are attacked by impious persons. This analysis, however, is superficial, since the punishment is actually the cumulative result of one’s past karma. Some renunciants show lack of tolerance when presented with the remnants of their previous sins, and thus are forced to enter again onto the path of impious life.”

A devotee who is serious about making advancement thus doesn’t try to blame others, but rather tolerates adverse situations as being mercifully sent by the Lord for instruction. Those who refuse to accept the reactions of their misdeeds and try to blame their suffering on others only attain more misery for their critical words and lack of tolerance. [See also *Critics Take the Karma* in Bindu 92.] — Md 

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