

10. Krishna and Balarama In Mathura

Prema Roopambu Brahmambu Prema Mayamu

Premanu Prema To Sandhimpā Neemamagunu

Kaana Prema Nu Poortiga Kaligiyunna

Adviteeyamu Pondaga Arhudagunu

Brahman is full of Love, the embodiment of Love.

To merge that Love with your Love is the right approach.

One who cultivates such selfless, divine Love

Becomes worthy of the state of non-duality

(*Adwaita*).

Students! Embodiments of love!

Every being, without exception, is a storehouse of Prema. But there is not even one who has recognized this principle of Prema! It appears as though everyone expresses Prema. Many in the world declare their love for other people, for material objects, for wealth, for sensual pleasures. But if we ask, "For whose sake is this love?" There is no satisfactory answer.

Worldly love is selfish

It appears as if the mother loves the child and the child loves the mother. It seems as though the husband and wife love each other. It even appears that today's devotees love God. But for whose sake do these people cultivate love? Who is loving whom? There are no right answers forthcoming to these questions. Why?

Everyone loves for his own sake. No one loves for another's sake. The reason: selfishness. Man loves objects in his own interest, not for the sake of those objects. He loves money

for his own enjoyment, not for money's sake. People also love God for their own petty ends, not for God. Truly, if we search the world over, there is no person who loves God for God's sake. There is only selfishness, selfishness, selfishness.

Sva + artham = svaartham, selfishness. *Sva* means self. *artham* means "for the sake of". That which is in one's own interest is *svaartham*. Selfish love has three states: love in the waking state, love in the dream state, and love in the deep sleep state. While awake, one lives in the world and loves with one's mind and senses. One is able to love only with the combination of mind and senses. Second, the dream state. In this state, senses are forgotten and everything is created by the mind alone. Objects, people, joys and sorrows are all conceived by his mind. He creates even himself by his mind. Next, in deep sleep, one experiences bliss by merging in oneself. If we inquire along the path of *jnana*, none of these three states provides perception of the *Atma*.

Today we undertake many spiritual practices. But we are not able to progress by even a "millimeter." Why? Selfishness. Where is selfishness born? Man is the combination of mind and senses. Without the mind and senses, humanness cannot exist. Humanness is characterized by the three *gunas*: *sathwa*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. *Tamas* is characterized by the rule of the mind and senses, which gives birth to ego and attachment and leads to the joys and sorrows in human life. Next, experiencing and observing the mind and senses and making every effort to limit attachment and ego—this is *rajas*. Ignoring the prompting of the mind and the senses, with no expectation of the fruits of one's actions, engaging in activity with the spirit

of sacrifice and duty, considering all as God's work, doing everything with the view to earning God's Love—these are *sathwic* traits.

Akrura comes to Brindavan

Such a *sathwic* person was Akrura. Akrura had persevered for countless lives to achieve Divinity. He had waited patiently for the right time and the right place to meet God. He knew that Narayana had incarnated in Brindavan and was playing there as a cowherd boy. But for every desired objective, the factors of time, cause, and *karma* must unite. It takes time for a fruit to ripen and detach from its branch. Akrura was a man of great wisdom and looked forward to the right moment to meet Lord Narayana.

Meanwhile, Narada went to meet Balarama and Krishna in Brindavan. “*Narayana, Adishesha!* I’ve waited long for Your *darshan*. *Vinaasa Kaale Vipareeta Buddhih*—A contorted intellect heralds the doom of man. With a view to destroying You, Your maternal uncle Kamsa devised various plans. But all his efforts have proved futile. Now his end is imminent.”

This is also total selfishness. The idea of taking another person's life in order to protect one's own life is a sign of an unripe intellect. One who lets selfishness grow within invites such demonic tendencies.

Narada said, “Kamsa's death is near. You are all-knowing, all-powerful. You are Narayana, which I recognized long ago. Still, some facts must be protected without being expressed. Men are not able to recognize You. This depends on

the *karma* and deservedness of each person. With whatever attitude people think of You, You assume that form for them. This is a truth not known to everyone. You fulfill whatever they desire of You. As is a person's mind, so is the result they experience. So Lord, give me leave now. Tomorrow, Your magnificent power will be known the world over. I will see You again during the coronation of your grandfather, Ugrasena." With beautiful smiles, Balarama and Krishna bid Narada farewell.

The very next day, Akrura proceeded to Brindavan in his chariot. Akrura was a great devotee. "No matter how demonic Kamsa may be, he granted me this chance of meeting the Divine Krishna. I am grateful to Kamsa," thought Akrura to himself. Akrura entertained pure feelings even toward demons. He reached Brindavan at dusk. His chariot came to a halt in front of Nanda's house. He went inside but found that Balarama and Krishna were not home. They had gone to the forest with their cows.

Balarama and Krishna returned in a few minutes. Akrura's eyes rested on them. He was spellbound. This was his first time seeing them. He was mesmerized by their brilliance, lotus eyes, and bewitching smiles. He felt an instant attraction to them. He contemplated on Narayana within himself and couldn't find words to greet Krishna. Krishna, the all-knowing One, asked him many times, "Akrura, O Akrura! For what reason have you come?"

Akrura said, "Krishna! Kamsa has initiated a *yaga* called *Dhanur Yaga*. He has sent me to fetch You. This is the

partial truth. To speak the whole truth in front of God is my bounden duty. *Dhanur Yaga* is an excuse for Kamsa to summon You to Mathura. Kamsa plans to kill You there and rule undisputed forever after. Each person has a different feeling toward You.”

The saint Annamacharya sang, *Enta Maatramuna Evaru Talachira Anta Maatrame Neevu*—Whatever form and attitude You are pictured with, You assume that form.

“If people think of You as a man, You behave as a man. If they consider You divine, You appear as God. This multiplicity is not in You but in human attitudes. Krishna, get ready to go to Mathura.” Then Akrura turned to Nanda and invited him also. Kamsa had invited Nanda and other village chiefs for the *Dhanur Yaga* also.

Some texts say that Nanda and Yasoda were fearful about sending Krishna to Mathura. This is not true. Nanda and Yasoda had witnessed countless instances of Krishna’s Divinity. They had seen Krishna destroy Kamsa’s mighty demons. They were present when He danced on the hood of the serpent Kaliya and subdued it. They knew that Balarama and Krishna could never face danger. All victories wed only God, and they knew Krishna was God.

Nanda had an announcement made in Brindavan that evening: “King Kamsa is conducting a *Dhanur Yaga* in Mathura. Those who wish to witness the festivities may accompany me.” Many families got ready with chariots, horses

and carts, as per their capacity. It was a joyous occasion for everyone—everyone except the *gopikas*.

The grief of *gopikas* and *gopalas*

Of course, no one can harm Krishna, the Lord Himself. This wasn't the concern of the *gopikas*. Their worry was: Will Krishna return to Brindavan once He leaves? All the *gopikas* and *gopalas* convened a meeting to prevent Krishna from leaving! They made a human chain circling Nanda's house. Nanda, and Yasoda pleaded with them not to obstruct the plans, but the *gopikas* and *gopalas* could only cry piteously in justification. "Krishna! Rama! You cannot go to Mathura! What will become of us? Brindavan will become a barren wasteland. Everyone here will become lifeless. The green beauty of Brindavan will be lost forever. Don't leave!"

This was also selfishness! In the interest of keeping Krishna's company, they did not mind foiling Krishna's plans! Balarama and Krishna smiled and told them, "We also have some selfishness of our own! Our Will must be fulfilled. The objective for which we assumed human forms must be attained, O *gopikas* and *gopalas*! It is every man's duty to fulfill the purpose for which the body is given. We must go to Mathura. There is no other way." The *gopikas* and *gopalas* were drowned in sorrow. They had to admit that keeping Krishna in Brindavan was an act of selfishness on their part.

The *gopikas* said, "We do not desire any worldly ends. We want You for our mental satisfaction. People desire various things from You. We pray to You for You." Then Krishna began to teach them *jnana*. "You say 'my' satisfaction. Who is

this 'I' ? Are you the body? Or the mind? No, no. You are neither the body nor the mind. The body is inert, a collection of the five elements. The mind is fickle. The Indweller, *Atma*, makes the body and mind function.

A director pulls on the strings of puppets. He makes the puppets play together for a while and then separates them. Who are these puppets? Mind and senses. The mind and senses function together. Then the mind leaves the senses, and the senses leave the mind. And finally, both of them leave the body. What is that which never leaves, never perishes? The *Atma* alone. That is the real 'I'. Man is able to say 'I' by the prompting of the *Atma*, but he identifies it with the body. This submerges him in ego and attachment. Therefore, the One who exists in you is 'I'. The One in me is 'I' also. *Ekovasi Sarva Bhoota Antar-aatma*—The One God exists in all beings. So, do not feel sad. Recognize these truths about the *Atma*, which will reveal all secrets.

In this world, results of past actions must be experienced. The body may collapse at any moment. But it is man's duty to strive for well-being when disease attacks the body. Similarly, the world is plunged in disease today. Men's bad thoughts and actions are the cause. To destroy this pervasive unrighteousness, we must go to Mathura."

Explaining to the *gopikas* and *gopalas* in this manner, Krishna and Balarama entered their house. They collected their luggage for the journey and came out. They had packed all their articles the previous day. Akrura sat behind the horses, holding the reins of the chariot. Despite the *jnana* they had just heard,

gopikas and *gopalas* could not transcend their ego and attachment. They blocked the path to the chariot. Akrura was their elder and elders should not be disrespected. The *gopikas* and *gopalas* knew that. But their love for Krishna overpowered such formalities.

They saw Krishna and Balarama emerge from the house with luggage. They panicked and cried loudly, "Please don't leave! How can we live? Take us with You!" They pleaded in many ways, even using harsh words on Akrura. Balarama and Krishna did not want to prolong their agony. They walked slowly to the chariot, smiling, blessing and consoling all the time. This incident caused a few hours of delay. They could not reach Mathura at the intended time.

Akrura experiences Krishna's omnipresence

By dusk they reached the banks of River Yamuna. Akrura had to perform *Sandhya Vandanam*.¹ He instructed Balarama and Krishna to wait in the chariot and went to the river. While praying, when Akrura dipped his head into the water, he saw a vision of Lord Narayana reclining on Adishesha. He perceived the forms of Krishna and Balarama as Narayana and Adishesha. He was confused and lifted his head out of the water. Krishna and Balarama were in the chariot, conversing animatedly. Akrura told himself, "What a fool I am! How can I limit the Lord? Is He not everywhere?" This was the Grace earned by him. Until the devotee reaches a lofty state, he cannot appreciate God's omnipresence.

Akrura silently returned to the chariot and took his place. Krishna asked him most unassumingly, "Akrura, your

face is so radiant! What happened? Did you see or experience anything extraordinary? Tell us!” Akrura said, “Krishna, My Lord, don’t You know? I saw You.” Krishna casually responded, “I see, you have recognized Me at least now,” and instructed that the chariot proceed to Mathura.

On the streets of Mathura

They reached Mathura at night. Balarama and Krishna told Akrura, “Tomorrow is the *Dhanur Yaga*. So we will not come to your house tonight.” Akrura pleaded, “Where else will you spend the night, Swami? Please be gracious enough to accept my invitation.” Krishna said, “It is not right for us to come now. You are the messenger of Kamsa today. It is not proper for Me to accept the hospitality of a messenger. This is contrary to the guidelines of diplomacy.”

By that time, all the Brindavan people had gathered in Mathura with Krishna and Balarama. They wanted to visit the poor couple, Devaki and Vasudeva, who were still in jail. Krishna and Balarama could have gone to see them. But they did not. They had to set an example to the world and teach the ideal: *Maatru Devo Bhava, Pitru Devo Bhava*—Mother and father are equal to God. This is God’s primary teaching in all ages. People might wonder: Why did Krishna not go to see His parents soon after arriving in Mathura? No. Balarama and Krishna had resolved to kill Kamsa and only then see their parents—not just see them, but free them from prison. Krishna spent the night in the same house where Nanda and others camped.

At dawn, Krishna and Balarama roamed around Mathura. They looked like lion cubs—beautiful and majestic. The entire city came to know of their presence in a matter of moments. As the two brothers walked the streets of Mathura, men, women and children drank their *darshan* from rooftops, windows—everywhere. Everybody thought, “Our lives are redeemed. What more can we ask for? Since long we desired to behold Balarama and Krishna. We are indebted to Kamsa.” Krishna and Balarama did not even go home till evening.

The washerman and the perfume woman

Krishna and Balarama reached the main gate of Kamsa’s palace. The *yaga* was to begin the following day. A washerman was about to enter the gate. He had a load of Kamsa’s best silks, cleaned specially for the function. Balarama asked him, “Hey, what is that bundle you have?” Krishna said, “Why ask? Go see for yourself.” The washerman said, “These are the King’s costly silks. You seem to be villagers. You are not fit to even touch these clothes! Be gone!” Krishna heard this and gave a tight-fisted blow to the washerman. Both the washerman and his bundle fell down. Krishna opened the bundle and collected clothes for Himself and for His elder brother. The soldiers at the gate witnessed this scene and informed Kamsa.

Meanwhile, as Balarama and Krishna were about to proceed after adorning themselves in these silks, a lady approached the gate. Her name was Kubja. Her face was beautiful but her body was crooked in three places. She was carrying perfumes and pastes. She raised her head and saw the brothers. She thought, “Are these the sons of Devaki and Vasudeva? They appear to be *Avatars* of Lord Narayana. Truly, that de-

mon Kamsa is not worthy of my perfumes. How nice it would be if these children accepted them!”

With a full heart, she humbly went to Krishna, “Son, here are my perfumes and rose water, prepared with care. No one knows the secrets of these preparations besides me. There are many people selling perfumes in Mathura but the King accepts only mine. Please accept these perfumes.” Krishna dipped His hand into her boxes and dabbed His clothes here and there, only for Kubja’s satisfaction. Kubja said, “For having lived this long, for having taken up this profession, my life is redeemed today. All these years I offered my perfumes to the demon Kamsa. Today I served the Lord.” Shedding copious tears, Kubja expressed gratitude to them. Then she stepped aside with the intention of going her way. Krishna stopped her. “You have granted us these perfumes. In return, I am bound to give you something. I never take anything from anyone without reason. But whatever I take, I return a thousand-fold.”

Offer something to God

God never asks anything from anyone. But when people give to Him with a full heart, He returns a thousand-fold. You know the story of Kuchela. For the gift of a fistful of dry rice, Krishna granted him lifelong prosperity.² Rukmini Devi was able to win Krishna for herself by offering Him just a single tulasi leaf.³ So, whenever God accepts anything from anyone, He grants unending bounty in return.

That is why it is said, *Patram Pushpam Phalam Toyam*⁴—a leaf, a flower, a fruit, or some water. At least these must be offered to God. Why? Only when we offer, we be-

come eligible to receive. If you go to a bank and simply ask for your money, they will not give it to you although you have every right over it. You need to fill a withdrawal slip and sign it. Only then can you claim your money. So, you must give something first, in order to receive. This is Divine Law. Even if it is tiny or insignificant, it must be offered to God.

So Krishna said, “O Kubja! Wait, wait. For your perfumes gifted to us with a pure heart, I must return the favor.” Krishna went close to her and she could not fathom His intentions. Krishna pressed Kubja’s feet with His tiny Feet. He put His hand under her chin and lifted her. The bends in her body became straight! Kubja thought, “He has granted me a beautiful body in keeping with my beautiful face. He is Lord Narayana!” She offered all her perfumes to Krishna and said, “Lord, please come to my house and let me serve Your Lotus Feet.” Krishna gave His word, “After I fulfill My task in Mathura, I shall certainly visit your house.”

The end of Kamsa

The next day, these two lions strode along the streets. As they approached the *Dhanur Yaga*, the grandeur of the cosmos seemed to be reflected in their faces. Whoever set their eyes on them could not stop looking at them. People forgot themselves, gazing at the beautiful forms of Krishna and Balarama.

Balarama and Krishna reached the main gate. A mad elephant was stationed there, specially to stop them. All watched with bated breath. They were anxious that the ele-

phant might trample upon the boys any moment. Trumpeting ferociously, the elephant charged at Balarama and Krishna. It lifted its huge feet off the ground and attempted to crush them. Krishna and Balarama were tiny, only five years old! They ran between the elephant's legs and confused it. Then Balarama caught one leg and Krishna, another. They whirled the elephant around and dashed it against the ground, much like a washerman beats clothes on a rock. The elephant gave up its life. Kamsa was informed that his most ferocious elephant had failed to stop Krishna. His fear increased from moment to moment.

As Krishna and Balarama proceeded into the grounds, two men accosted them. They were Chanura and Mushtika, Kamsa's prize wrestlers, under orders to do away with the two boys. Krishna and Balarama looked at them and said, "Are YOU going to fight us? O foolish men, you are like mosquitoes desiring combat with an elephant! Mosquitoes!" Chanura and Mushtika could not bear this insult. They jumped upon the tiny boys in fury. Krishna and Balarama gave them just one blow with their fists and the wrestlers were rendered lifeless. However, they recognized the brothers as divine and had Lord Narayana's *darshan* just before they died.

Krishna and Rama proceeded forward. The *Dhanur Yaga* was in progress. Many kings, chiefs, and citizens had gathered to witness it. Kamsa was seated on a vast, raised platform built especially for him. Balarama and Krishna walked to the center of the grounds fearlessly, with the gait of lions. Kamsa appeared strong outwardly but his heart became weaker as Krishna got closer. Kamsa's body began shivering and

shaking. Many people thought, “Look at the King! He is so angry that his body shakes in fury!” In reality, Kamsa’s body was shaking not out of anger but out of fear! *Yat Bhavam Thath Bhavati*—as is the feeling, so is the result. Kamsa’s wickedness alone made him experience fear now. This is also called “guilty conscience”.

Kamsa’s entire army was arrayed around him to guard him against Krishna’s approach. But Balarama and Krishna ignored Kamsa. They walked straight towards the *Dhanus*—the Divine Bow—kept at the center of the enclosure. No one could budge the Bow, what to talk of lifting it. Krishna casually held it with his left hand and lifted it as if it was a feather. As He bent the bow to tie its string, the bow snapped in His arms. The sound was deafening, like a bomb. All were terrified.

At that time, Nanda was approaching Kamsa to pay taxes collected from Brindavan. Other village chiefs were doing the same. Nanda’s eyes followed Krishna’s every action. He looked forward to more of His exploits. He was not worried because he knew that the brothers were divine. The divine Bow, the focus of the *yaga*, was broken. Kamsa rose from his throne, and the whole assembly rose with him. Kamsa ordered his army to destroy Krishna and Balarama.

Kamsa was heavily built. Krishna and Balarama were tiny and agile. Like baby deer, they ran between the legs of the intervening soldiers! Reaching the dais, both of them jumped upon Kamsa. They caught hold of Kamsa’s hair, pulled him to the ground and put an end to him. It was all over in moments. Everyone was stunned speechless. Of course, the heavenly

prophecy was bound to come true. They recognized Krishna as Narayana and bowed down with folded hands.

The reunion with parents

Without wasting any time, Krishna and Balarama hurried to Kamsa's dungeons. They fell at the feet of Devaki and Vasudeva. They freed them from shackles and brought them out into the open. Then they went to the cell where Ugrasena had been imprisoned by Kamsa. They freed him also and brought him to the *yaga* hall. With his son's dead body lying there, Ugrasena was crowned as King of Mathura.

After the coronation, Yasoda, Nanda, Devaki, Vasudeva, and Rohini—all hugged Balarama and Krishna. All three mothers were there. All of Brindavan was there, except the gopikas. There was no limit to their happiness and excitement. Devaki took Krishna and Balarama into the palace and said, "Sons, I could not witness Your childhood, but only hear of Your exploits and pranks from others. How unfortunate I am! I could not see You kill the demoness Putana. When Yasoda wanted to tie You to a rock, no length of rope was enough to go around Your stomach—so I have heard. I gave You birth, but all the fun and frolic with You belonged to Yasoda. You are called 'son of Yasoda'. How blessed she is! Though I have children, I am as good as childless."

Balarama and Krishna consoled their parents and granted them unlimited happiness through loving words. "Past is past. Do not grieve. From now, we are always with you. You will experience all possible bliss in our company. You

know we are not ordinary boys. We will bring the whole world within our control. I gave you *darshan* soon after My birth—Preserve that vision in your heart. Visualize it outside you also. *Antar Bahischa Thath Sarva Vyaapya Narayana Sthitah*—God is inside, outside, everywhere. Decrease your attachment to the body. Strengthen your bond to the *Atma*. Attachment is the root cause of sorrow. You suffered in prison because you were attached to your sons. Understand that we are not ordinary, that we are God. Recognize the reality of your sons.” In this manner, Krishna and Balarama consoled their mother tenderly and taught her the Truth.

Akrura’s devotion

After Kamsa’s death, Krishna went to Akrura’s house. He had given His word. The Lord never goes back on His promise. Akrura told Krishna, “Swami! I doubted if You had pity on me. You killed Kamsa without any leniency, although he was Your uncle. You have no trace of attachment. We are attached to You, but You are attached to no one. All are equal to You, all are Your relatives. I have recognized this truth about You today.

You killed Tataki,⁵ although she was a woman. You asked King Bali⁶ for alms. He surrendered everything to You. And look what You did. You pressed him into the nether worlds with Your Feet! My mind was confused. How could such a strict Lord ever feel kindness and pity toward me? After all, who am I?”

In this manner, Akrura ran to Krishna and embraced Him tightly as soon as He entered his house. Akrura was a

highly purified soul. He was completely sathwic in character. Kamsa also knew this truth. That is why Kamsa hand-picked Akrura for the task of inviting Krishna to Mathura. Kamsa realized that Krishna and Balarama would never come to Mathura if they were invited by anyone besides Akrura. Akrura's heart was so pure that God could never refuse him anything.

People who are not familiar with the *Bhagavatham* consider Akrura to be an ordinary man, or a cruel man. No, no. Akrura was the embodiment of purity. He had no bodily attachment. He considered everything as God's property and acted as per the Divine command. He had no trace of attachment, even to his wife and children. He contemplated incessantly on Lord Narayana. Understand the character of such pure devotees and acquire their qualities.

[Bhagavan concluded with the *bhajan* "Govinda Krishna Jai, Gopala Krishna Jai, Gopala Bala Bala Radha Krishna Jai!"]

¹. Daily prayers done at sunrise, noon and sunset.

². Kuchela (or Sudama) was Krishna's friend at school. Years later, as a householder, Kuchela was very poor. He visited Krishna and took a fistful of dry rice, recalling His childhood liking for it. However, awed by Krishna's royal stature, Kuchela hid his humble gift. Krishna, the All-knowing, grabbed the soiled bundle and ate the plain rice with relish. When Kuchela returned home, he found that his hut had become a palace, and his family was living in abundance.

³. Sathyabhama, a wife of Krishna, wanted to "buy" Him for herself with her wealth. However, no matter how much gold she heaped on one pan of a

weighing balance, Lord Krishna, sitting in the other pan, proved heavier. Then, Rukmini, Krishna's first wife, put a single tulasi leaf on one side of the balance, with devotion. The leaf balanced Krishna's weight, thereby humbling Sathyabhama's pride.

4. *Bhagavad Gita* (IX:26).

5. A demoness killed by Rama *Avatar*.

6. The King of demons, humbled by Vamana *Avatar*.