

9. Gopikas and Gopalas

Etti Vidyalu Jagatini Eruganatti Pakshi Jaatulu Pashuvulu

Pramamaina Niyamamunu Booni Jeevincha Nerchiyunda,

Telivi Galigina Manujunaku Ee Telivi Lede!

Although devoid of knowledge or education, birds and beasts

Learn to live in accordance with the Divine Law.

But man, despite his intelligence, does not have this sense!

Students!

To take care of the body is our prime responsibility. An unhealthy body is a burden. A healthy body promotes healthy thoughts. An unsound mind cannot entertain sacred and elevating thoughts. Thus ancient people considered health as wealth and paid attention to the upkeep of the body. Even in the modern age, people have evolved various systems to ensure good health. The Romans and Greeks saw the body as a representation of the cosmos and worshipped it.

The body and the Indweller

The organs of the body cannot work or even exist, independently. Their unity alone allows the body to be complete and to perform useful functions. When we understand this unity, we can know the Indweller of the body. The *Vedas* say, *Deho Devaalayam Jeevo Devo Sanaatanah*—The body is a temple and the Indweller is the Eternal God. Ancient Indians recognized this truth and demonstrated it in their day-to-day lives. But the youth of today are preoccupied with the body and neglect the Indweller. Water does not need fish, but fish

need water. In the same way, the body cannot survive without the Indweller.

The body is a chariot. We must maintain it well and use it to tread the right path. Today man concerns himself only with decorating and painting this chariot. People do not make efforts to recognize the wonderful Charioteer. Keep the indwelling Divinity in view and engage the body in righteous actions.

The forest fire

As per their daily routine, Balarama and Krishna went to the forest with the *gopals*¹ and cows. After walking some distance, Krishna played His flute and the boys started singing, dancing and playing in the fields. The *gopals* enjoyed themselves immensely in Krishna's company every day, forgetting their bodies, losing themselves in the melodious notes of His flute. This day they were so engrossed in His music that they forgot the cows and calves. When they came to their senses, the animals were nowhere to be seen.

Each *gopala* ran in a different direction. All the surroundings were searched but the cows were not found. In panic, they ran deep into the forest. Finally they saw the cows grazing at a distance, surrounded by a huge forest fire. Smoke belled out of everywhere and nothing was visible clearly. The *gopals* shouted, "Krishna! Krishna! Krishna!" Balarama and Krishna ran there. By then the fire had engulfed them all. The *gopals* were afraid for their lives. They couldn't tell what might happen the very next moment. Krishna called out to the cows by their names, one by one. The cows heard His voice

and responded, “Ambaa, Ambaa.” These cows had recognized *Sabda Brahman*.² The cows had no knowledge or education. But identifying Krishna’s voice as the sound of Divinity, they bolted in His direction.

The *gopalas* were troubled by the fear of death. Krishna and Balarama went to them and said, “Do not fear. Why fear when we are here? You have walked long distances in search of the cows. You left familiar territory behind and ventured into the dense forest. You are tired. Close your eyes. Do not open them till we tell you.” The fire was very near them and the *gopalas* could feel the hot draft. But placing complete faith in Krishna, they closed their eyes. This was not new to *gopalas*. Their greatest virtue was to obey Krishna always. Not even once did the *gopalas* ever question or disobey Krishna. If Krishna said “do,” they did. If He said “go,” they went. No questions, no hesitation. That is why they lived in Krishna’s permanent protection.

After a few moments Krishna asked them to open their eyes. The *gopalas* felt a cool, refreshing breeze. “Where did the fire go?” they wondered. They saw their cows around them, safe and sound. They were back in the fields where they were last playing, singing and dancing. They thought deeply about this undeniable miracle. Unable to fathom the mystery, they said to Krishna, “O Lord Narayana! Beginning-less and Endless One! Protector of the helpless! You are the Supreme Lord. We are fortunate to experience Your *leelas* and wondrous powers.” Saying so, they fell at Krishna’s Feet.

But for how long? Only for a few minutes. Then they forgot the miracles. They asked their “dear friend” to join them in games! They stopped addressing Him as “Lord”. Notice, how bodily attachment is ready to spring on us every moment. When people see miracles, they think, “He is powerful.” The next minute, yielding to body attachment, they say, “He is an ordinary man.” In every *Avatar*’s life, people alternate between human and divine perceptions of Him. Why? Men spend their lives in body-consciousness. Their goal is worldly life and they are incapable of understanding the Divinity that transcends their mundane existence. The *gopals* also used to appreciate Krishna’s strength and intellect, but not His Divinity.

Krishna teaches Atma Vidya

As they passed days in this manner, Krishna decided to teach *Atma Vidya* to the *gopals*. “Their thoughts are limited to the world. They are not able to recognize Me as beyond the body, mind and intellect,” thought Krishna. The rainy season has just began. The blue sky was dark, laden with clouds. In some time, thunder and lightning began. Krishna looked at this scene and said, “You can see the unity of three *gunas* in Nature today. O *Gopals*! God is omnipresent like the infinite, blue sky. This Divinity (sky) is covered by the dark clouds of your ignorance (*Thamo Guna*). Thunder (*Rajo Guna*) and the brilliant lightning (*Sathwa Guna*) accompany this ignorance. This is the inner meaning of the rainy season. You cannot perceive Divinity since it is concealed by these three *gunas*. The winds which brought the dark clouds will also scatter them in due time. Similarly, when your ignorance (*ajnana*) turns into wisdom (*prajana*), your darkness will be dispelled.”

*As lightning lies behind the screen of dark clouds,
Wisdom (jnaana) must underlie education.*

“Therefore, recognize the meanings of natural phenomena. Nature is your best teacher. As you observe Nature, realize that your body is also a part of it. Your vision is limited to the physical body but not the Divinity dwelling in it. The body is only the effect. Atma is the cause. Don’t be blinded by the effect. See the cause.”

You look at this tumbler, the effect. But you don’t inquire into its material, the cause. How can the tumbler exist without silver? The world is the effect and God is the cause.

“As is your sight, as is your aim, so the world will appear to you. Creation (*srishti*) is based on your vision (*drishti*). None can change creation. That is why I ask you to change your vision. Meaning, as long as you consider yourself to be the body, you cannot perceive My reality. You call me ‘*Gopala, Gopala*’ and experience Me as your dear friend. But the body is only an instrument. Understand the Divinity within the body.” The *gopalas* went back and shared their miraculous experiences and Krishna’s words of wisdom with everyone. In this manner, they experienced boundless bliss in Krishna’s company daily.

The priests and their wives

One day the boys went very deep into the forest, searching for fresh, green pastures for their cows. At midday, they weren’t able to walk any more. The *gopalas* cried, “We’re hungry, Krishna, really hungry! Please arrange for some food.”

Krishna smiled, “Foolish boys! When you have the All-Powerful Lord following your every step, why are you worried about hunger? Balarama and I are with you, don’t fear. Some priests are performing a *Yaga* nearby. Go there and tell them I sent you. Tell them you are hungry and they will feed you.”

The *gopalas* went to the priests and pleaded for food. The *brahmins* said, “How can we feed you before completion of the *yaga*? After the *yaga*, we will eat. Then we will feed all those who helped us in the ceremony. Only then, we can give you the leftovers. You must wait till then.” The *gopalas* waited for a long time and couldn’t bear their hunger any more. They grew weak and couldn’t walk. Dragging themselves, they somehow returned to Balarama and Krishna. They said, “Krishna! We told them that even You and Balarama were hungry, but they ignored us.”

Krishna laughed and asked them, “Friends, who did you ask?” They replied, “We asked the priests.” Krishna said, “O innocent ones! It is the mother who knows the hunger of her child, not the father. There is no use pleading with the priests. They are busy in *karma yoga*,³ without *bhakti yoga*.⁴ They only care about mantras and their meanings. They overlook God who is the embodiment of all mantras. Go to the wives of these *brahmins*, who are cooking food for the *yaga* right now.”

The *gopalas* said, “Impossible, Krishna! We have no energy to walk even a step.” Krishna replied, “You must go back. Get up, and I will give you the strength to walk.” The *gopalas* never disobeyed Krishna in anything, anyway. If He said “walk,” they walked. Owing to such total submission,

they never experienced sorrow in their lives and obtained the bliss of Krishna's daily company.

The gopalas went to the wives of the priests. These pure ladies had heard much of Balarama and Krishna, but had never seen the brothers.

The *brahmins* used to ridicule Krishna as a "cowherd" and never allowed their wives to visit Brindavan. The priests were limited to rituals, but their wives had great devotion. The gopalas said, "Mothers! We are *gopalas*, sent by Rama and Krishna."

The ladies were ecstatic, "The Lord Himself is here! Where are the divine Balarama and Krishna?" The *gopalas* said, "They are at some distance from here. They are tired and hungry, like us. They told us to ask you for food." As soon as they heard this, the ladies collected all their pots and filled them with food. They carried some vessels and handed some to the *gopalas*, and hurried toward the pastures. They didn't think of the *yaga* or their husbands' anger... nothing!

They came to Balarama and Krishna. They saw Him reclining and playing on the flute. The notes of the flute wafted into their hearts and awakened devotion. They forgot themselves and walked forward unmindful of their bodies. As they drank the divine darshan of Balarama and Krishna, their minds overflowed with bliss. The only word they uttered was "Krishna, Krishna, Krishna." They made everyone sit down and served food. Even the cows were served!

Meanwhile the priests completed the *yaga* and noticed the absence of their wives—and the food! The priests were hungry also. They ran in search of their wives. They came upon the *gopals* eating food along with Balarama and Krishna. And they saw their own wives gazing at Balarama and Krishna with unblinking eyes. The *brahmins* rushed there and started slapping and pulling at their wives. But the ladies were oblivious to their husbands. They did not feel any physical pain. They were totally immersed in the Bliss of the Lord’s company.

Soon Balarama and Krishna let their divine effulgence shine on the priests also. The priests recognized the brothers’ Reality and fell at their feet: “For whose Grace we initiated this *yagna*, the goal of this *yagna*, that Divine Lord is in front of us in human form! *Yagnovaih Vishnuh*—You are the Vishnu who is the fruit of all *yagnas*. But we are indeed the greatest sinners. We performed this *yagna* for You but we were not able to dedicate it to You.”

Every action must first be offered to God. Therefore, we chant *Brahmaarpanam Brahmahavir Brahmaagnau Brahmanaahutam*⁵ before meals.

“Even during normal meals, we offer food to You. But today, in a sacred *yagna*, we attempted to eat after refusing You! We are the most abject sinners, the most unfortunate people. Krishna and Balarama consoled the *brahmins* and blessed them and their wives profusely. Then, while the *gopals* stood watching, Krishna gave *darshan* to the *brahmins* and their wives as Lord Narayana.

Conquer attachment

It is difficult for worldly people to recognize God in human form. Of what use are education, scholarship in *Vedas* or the merit of *yagnas*? Those who do not grasp the truth, behave foolishly in spite of learning. We should find ways to purify our minds. When does the mind become pure? When attachment (*abhimaana*) and ego (*ahamkaara*) are uprooted. How can we give up attachment and ego? Attachment presents never-ending attraction towards objects. But it is very easy to renounce! Simply think: "Everything belongs to God. Nothing is mine." This is the way to transcend attachment.

A small example. In your science courses you go to the laboratory. After conducting experiments, both students and teachers return home. You don't say, "I work in this lab, so this equipment is mine." You know that everything belongs to the school. But no one would object if you used the equipment. The world is like a laboratory. You may use and experience. But you have no right over anything.

A manager in a bank is the highest authority over millions in the bank. But can he take even a single coin home? The money is in his control, but it belongs to others and to the Government.

We can experience sensory objects and joys. But how? With what attitude should we acquire material objects? Realize this one point and you become worthy of all worldly accomplishments. You may enjoy, but without feeling "This is mine."

Another example. The principal is the highest authority in a school. He has the keys to cupboards, which have valuable equipment. He may feel, "I am in charge, all this belongs to me." But if he is transferred to another school, all he can take with him are the clothes he is wearing! Why? He can only use the objects, not own them. Why not? The school really belongs to the Government.

Yes, you can say, "My home, my land, my wife, my child, my wealth, my cattle, my cars" and so on, but keep in mind: They are for use only, not for ownership. They are God's property. You must part with everything at death. That is why the *Gita* says: Responsibility is yours, not the right. People forget responsibilities and fight for rights. No one has a right in this world. When you do your duty, rights follow automatically. So, gradually decrease the idea of "mine."

Yes, you say "mine." What is yours? Nothing. What you perceive to be yours can change the next moment. A man held a currency note and thought, "This is mine." The note laughed at him: "Yes, now I'm in your hands. But by evening I will have changed over ten hands! How am I yours, you mad-man?" Worldly objects change from moment to moment. How can you claim ownership over such temporary articles?

"Everything belongs to God." With this attitude, yes, you may experience the world. There is nothing wrong with that. But while experiencing, you must inquire: "Everything belongs to God. How should the property of God be used by me?" Experience the world with your power of discrimination.

If you use objects as you please, you could misuse God's property. Use the world to engage in constructive actions, to walk the path of Truth. God's command (*bhagavat vaakya*) is that God's property should not be misused.

Today we misuse everything, deluded by the ideas of "I" and "Mine". Misuse and wastage causes sorrow. What is the cause of sorrow? The idea of "mine". God does not cause either joy or sorrow to you, nor does anyone else. You alone are responsible. To blame someone else for your suffering is a sin. Students should promote such expansive feelings in their hearts.

The devotion of gopikas

Krishna was always surrounded in Brindavan by the *gopikas* and the *gopalas*. Of these, the *gopikas* were slightly mad! What kind of madness? Divine madness! But people attribute wrong intentions to their love and distort the meaning of the *Bhagavatham*. When Krishna left Brindavan for good, He was five years old. Some say that Krishna and the *gopikas* engaged in amorous sports. Is it possible for such meaningless stories to be true? The *gopikas* said: "O Krishna! Your flute is most enchanting. Your words are life to us. Sing for us, talk to us!"

Paata Paadu Maa Krishna!

Paluku Teneloluku Natula

Maatalaadu Maa Mukunda

Manasu Teeraga!

Sing for us, our Krishna!

With your words sweet as honey.

Talk to us, our Mukund,
Till our hearts are full!

*Veda Saaramanta Teerchi,
Nada Brahmamuganu Maarchi,
Venuvandu Tirugabosi,
Gaanaroopamuganu Maarchi.
Paata Paadu Maa Krishna!*

Take the essence of the Vedas,
Change it into Sabda-Brahman,
Fill your flute with this sound,
And convey it to our hearts as music.
Sing for us, our Krishna!

What Divine feelings! Is this worldly? No, no. *Anantovai Vedah*—The *Vedas* are infinite. The *gopikas* prayed: “How can we read the *Vedas*? We are women and illiterate, at that. Give us the essence of the *Vedas* through your music.” Now, in this Summer Course, after the guest lecturers speak in the morning, the students summarize those speeches in the evening. In the same way, the *gopikas* wanted a summary of the *Vedas* from Krishna!

Why song and sound? God is described as: *Sabda Brahma Mayi, Charaachara Mayi, Jyotir Mayi, Vaang Mayi, Nityananda Mayi, Paroatpara Mayi, Maaya Mayi, Srimayi.*

Therefore, Brahman is the very form of *sabda* (sound).

The *gopikas* pined for Krishna for many years, for their entire lives. Krishna knew their pain of separation, their yearning. He sent Uddhava⁶ to convey His message of consola-

tion to them. All the *gopikas* collected around Uddhava to listen to Krishna's message. "What does Krishna say? When is He coming to give us His *darshan*?" they asked.

Uddhava said, "Mothers! Krishna has sent a letter for you." Students should clearly understand the pure and divine feelings of the *gopikas*. "Here is the letter sent by Krishna. One of you please read it aloud to the others," said Uddhava. *Gopikas* had no education. In those days women were not sent to school. Only one of them knew a little bit of reading. When asked to read it, she declined. When students listen to her reply, they can imagine her sacred devotion.

She said, "Uddhava! I cannot read that letter. Our bodies and minds are burning in the fire of separation. If I touch that letter, it might catch fire. It is not proper for us to burn the words written by God." Another *gopika* said, "We have been crying endlessly. When I set eyes on the words written by our dear Krishna, all our agony will emerge as tears. The tears will fall on the paper and smear the words. So I cannot read it, either."

What intense devotion they had! Uddhava himself read Krishna's letter aloud. "O *gopikas*! Don't feel sad. I am in you, with you, around you all the time. I am not separate from you. I am not an outsider, I am your *Hridayavaasi*—Resident of your heart. I am your very own. My messenger Uddhava will tell you about *jnana* and yoga. Listen to Uddhava and practice his teachings."

The *gopikas* heard Uddhava's teachings and said, "We do not need your *yoga*. We need merger (*samyoga*) with Krishna! Your *yoga* will not quench our thirst of separation (*viyoga*)! We cannot absorb your words. We have only one mind, not multiple minds like clever people. Our mind followed Krishna to Mathura." Uddhava recognized their one-pointedness.

When Uddhava got ready to depart from Brindavan, each *gopika* came to him and gave heart-rending messages for Krishna:

"All of Brindavan is parched dry! Come back and make the flowers bloom again!

"The sky of our hearts is dark, clouded by separation. Scatter these clouds and let us bask in Your company!

"Our life is like a garland bereft of flowers. Come back, collect us as flowers and wear us around Your neck!"

If scholars paid attention to the sanctity and depth of *gopikas'* feelings, they would not relegate them to a worldly level. *Gopikas* were actually perfected rishis. They had attained absolute control over the senses and purity of mind in past births. To accuse them of bad character is nothing short of a crime. The hearts of students are polluted by cheap movies. No, do not allow such impressions to form. The hearts of the *gopikas* and *gopalas* were immaculate. They did not desire anything worldly at all! Uddhava recognized this truth. When he returned, he extolled their virtues to Krishna without end.

*Attalu Mottukunna, Mari Bhartalu Kattulu
Nooruchunna Norettaru Kopagincharu Etakegaru,
Bheetilaboru Gopikal Pottamulandu Chittaruvula
Reeti Vaarilonunde Krishnudu*

Their mother-in-laws may scream, husbands may threaten,

They do not answer back, get angry, go away or become afraid.

Like a portrait on paper,

Krishna is imprinted in their hearts.

Uddhava said, “Krishna, You are imprinted in the consciousness of the *gopikas*. It is not possible for anyone to separate You from their hearts. I have not seen devotees like them anywhere in the world. I went to teach them wisdom but instead, they taught me devotion! Krishna, all of us are deluded by Your physical form, but it is the *gopikas* alone who have realized Your Divinity.”

Once upon a time, Narada went to the *gopikas* and *gopalas* and said, “How fortunate you all are! You obtained Lord Narayana, who is beyond the reach of *yogis* and sages. The sacred proximity that you enjoyed is unattainable even after countless *yagnas* and good deeds. You played with Him and sang with Him as friends for many years and earned His Grace. Truly, you are blessed! You are not ordinary souls. You are *Devas*—Do not forget this truth.

Do not lose Sai

When God assumes a human form, He does not become limited or lower in any sense. Do not be deluded by such doubts. Think about the golden opportunity at hand and make all possible efforts to earn His Grace and Blessings. This chance will never come again.

*Chikkina Sai Ni Vakkaleyaka Chakka Chesukondi,
Poyina Chikkadu ee Partheesuni Paada Seva Yandi,
Bhaktini Icchi Sakti Lo Munchi Mukti Jerchunandi,
Eka Manasu To Nammi Sai Ni Enchi Koluvabondi,
Itarula Maatalanimpuga Nammi Kompa Teeya-kandi.*

You have found Sai. Now bring Him near, do not neglect Him.

Once lost, the chance to serve the Feet of the Lord of Parthi will never come again.

He bestows devotion, immerses you in strength and takes you to Liberation.

With a one-pointed mind, have faith in Sai and worship Him.

Do not ruin your destiny by giving ear to others' words.

You obtained this rare opportunity. Now use it well. Follow the path prescribed by God, engage in actions that are dear to God. God seeks unwavering, pure and unselfish Love alone. In return, He will grant anything and go to any extent to please you.

But you should not love with any expectation in mind. Prayer with expectation is like a business deal. Do not pray with conditions: "Lord, I will break two coconuts for You if

You fulfill my wish!” Strive to experience at least one-thousandth of the devotion of the *gopikas* and *gopalas*.

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1. Cowherd boys.
 2. Sound as a manifestation of God.
 3. The path of action.
 4. The path of devotion.
 5. *Bhagavad Gita* (IV:24).
 6. A cousin and great devotee of Krishna.