

Reality & the Transcendental Body of a Vaiṣṇava

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The 5th Canto of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (also called *Bhagavat Purāṇa*) contains a description of a meeting between the great sage Jaḍa Bharata and King Rahūgaṇa.

One day King Rahūgaṇa went to see Sage Kapila to take spiritual instructions from him. It was customary at that time for kings to travel on chariots or elephants with many servants in tow. However, as the King was going to visit a sage, he decided to travel by palanquin without the normal fanfare.

While travelling, one of the King's carriers became ill with fever. The remaining carriers began searching for a replacement and happened to see Jaḍa Bharata who looked stout and healthy. Taking him to be an ordinary man, they asked him to assist them. Jaḍa Bharata was wandering carefree and absorbed in thought of Kṛṣṇa and did not object. He joined the team, even though he could have easily refused.

While carrying the palanquin, the other carriers noticed that Jaḍa Bharata was not keeping pace with them. There were two reasons for this:

First of all, he had not been trained to carry a palanquin and in fact had not received any training for anything in his life. He purposefully never did anything right in his life. This may seem strange, but Jaḍa Bharata, from his very childhood, could clearly remember his past two births as a deer and as the emperor Bharata, and so he avoided any material entanglements, for fear that such entanglements would lead him to take another birth. To protect himself, he behaved as if he were deaf, dumb and dull-headed when in fact he was a spiritually enlightened person.

Sage Jaḍa Bharata Begins his Instructions

His second reason for not walking in harmony with his co-carriers was that he did not want to step on ants or insects on the ground. Whenever he saw any living entity on the ground, he would evade trampling on them by jumping up or restricting his pace.

Jaḍa Bharata's behavior caused much discomfort to King Rahūgaṇa who sternly warned the carriers to walk properly. This warning scared the other carriers but had no effect on Bharata. When the King realized that his warnings were in vain, he lost his temper and shouted at the carriers. Terrified, they informed him that it was the new person who was unable to walk with them and that it was impossible for them to function with him.

The King then directly ridiculed Jaḍa Bharata, with no success. Finally, the king was furious and threatened to punish him. At this last threat, Bharata, who had been quiet all the time, decided to respond to the King. Upon hearing the philosophical response, the king was unable to comprehend its meaning, but immediately understood that Bharata was no ordinary man. Thinking that he had committed a great offense by engaging such an elevated sage in carrying him, and desiring to ask for forgiveness, he jumped down from the palanquin and fell at the feet of sage Bharata, beseeching him to forgive him.

Noting the King's response, Bharata assumed the role of a teacher and began instructing the King. Since the King had a materialistic view of the world, Bharata first had to prove to the King that the world is not real, although this was not exactly what Bharata truly believed. Bharata wanted to awaken and uplift the King's awareness by instilling renunciation in him and making him understand the Absolute Reality.

Description of the Ultimate Reality

In verse 11 of the 12th chapter of the 5th Canto of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, Jaḍa Bharata describes this Ultimate Reality:

jñānam viśuddham paramārtham ekam

anantaram tv abahir brahma satyam

pratyak praśāntam bhagavac-chabda-samjñam

yad vāsudevam kavayo vadanti

The learned scholars say that the Absolute Truth is pure consciousness. It is the ultimate object of attainment, one without a second, devoid of any divisions of inside and outside. It is beyond the material guṇas, ever present and directly perceived. It is all-pervading and known as Brahman, Paramātmā and Bhagavān.

Śrī Viśvanāth Cakravārtī Ṭhākura wrote an elaborate commentary on this verse. What follows is a translation, with explanation blended in.

Viśvanāth Cakravārtī Ṭhākura begins his commentary with a question, as if posed by King Rahūgaṇa to Bharata after hearing his previous statement that the world is made of *māyā* and not real: "If the world is not real, then what indeed is reality?" Viśvanāth Cakravārtī Ṭhākura explains this verse in the following as if Bharata was replying to this question.

Three Names of the Absolute

Reality is known only through revealed scriptures and was described previously by Sūta Gosvāmī, in the famous “*vadanti*” verse (SB 1.2.11): “Knowers of Reality call it nondual consciousness, naming it as Brahman, as Paramātmā, and as Bhagavān.” Bharata’s statement in the current verse elaborates on this.

Bharata describes Reality as “pure consciousness;” meaning that it is not touched by the *guṇas* of material nature. He says Reality is the supreme goal of life, which means that all other desirable objects or results including *mokṣa* emanate from it.

He explains the Truth to be “one.” This means that there is nothing equal to, superior to, or independent of it. Everything exists in and is supported by it. There is nothing which can be called inside or outside of it because it has no boundaries. It is therefore all-pervading. All-pervading implies that it not only pervades in space, but also in time. It exists everywhere at all times.

Sūta Gosvāmī’s previous statement adds that this non-dual conscious reality is known by three names: Brahman, Paramātmā and Bhagavān. These terms are implicit in Bharata’s current statement, as well.

The word Brahman here refers to the indeterminate reality without any qualities or form. It is the goal of those who follow *jñāna marga*, popularly known as Advaita-vādīs. They understand Brahman to be the Ultimate Reality. Brahman, although non-different from Bhagavān, does not manifest any qualities or form. The word “indeterminate” (*nirvikalpaka*) means that it is not a qualified object. All our perceptions are determinate. Whenever we perceive an object, we always perceive it with qualities, such as form and color. We have no experience of perceiving anything without qualities. Brahman realization however is devoid of any variety or qualities. Therefore it is called indeterminate. There is nothing which can be said about it. The *jñānīs* who have no interest in the material world and are completely detached, aim to achieve Brahman.

The two words *pratyak* and *praśānta* in the verse under discussion (SB 5.12.11) refer to Paramātmā, who is an expansion of Bhagavān to control and manage the phenomenal world. Paramātmā manifests as the Immanent Being in everyone’s heart. Yogīs meditate on Him. The word *pratyak* (the innermost being) is used for both the *jīvātmā* and the Paramātmā. The word *praśānta* (peaceful, undisturbed by anything) in the verse is used to distinguish Paramātmā from the *jīvātmā*, the individual being who is always disturbed.

Bhagavān, or the supreme personal manifestation of the Absolute Reality, is the worshipable object of the devotees. He has the other two aspects (Brahman and Paramātmā) within Himself. Bharata says that learned scholar address Bhagavān as Vāsudeva - “son of Vasudeva,” i.e. Kṛṣṇa.

Śāstric Evidence about Kṛṣṇa

Next, Viśvanāth Cakravārtī Ṭhākura cites several scriptural evidences from *Bhagavat Purāṇa* to substantiate Bharata's claim that Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa is Brahman, Paramātmā and Bhagavān simultaneously:

- In his prayers to Kṛṣṇa, as part of *brahma-mohan-līlā*, Lord Brahmā says that Kṛṣṇa is the eternal, complete Brahman (SB 10.14.32).
- In the story of the killing of Pūtanā, Śrī Śukadeva refers to Kṛṣṇa as Paramātmā (SB 10.6.36).
- While relating the childhood activities of Kṛṣṇa, Śrī Śukadeva calls Kṛṣṇa Bhagavān (SB 10.8.27).
- In *Bhagavad Gītā* (14.27), Kṛṣṇa says that He is the support of Brahman.
- Similarly, in the concluding part of His *vibhūti* or opulence, He says that He has entered the universe by one part of His, which means the Paramātmā feature (Gītā 10.42).
- Similarly, while describing His opulence to Uddhava in *Bhagavat Purāṇa*, He says that among the various form of Bhagavān, He is Vāsudeva (SB 11.16.21).

From these statements it is clear that Kṛṣṇa, son of Vasudeva, has all three aspects of Reality, i.e. Brahman, Paramātmā and Bhagavān and is thus the most complete manifestation of the Absolute Reality.

The word *bhaga* as part of the term Bhagavān means *aiśvarya* - the controlling potency. It implies that there must be something to control, which encompasses the material as well as the spiritual world. The material world is a manifestation of *māyā* and according to the previous instruction of Bharata to Rahūgaṇa, it is *mithyā* (not eternally existent). Therefore, the real objects of Bhagavān's control are the devotees living in His abode, which is an eternal place.¹

Transcendent and Mundane Activity

Next, Viśvanāth Cakravārtī Ṭhākura explains Jaḍa Bharata's full message. He describes Bharata as saying, "O King, although you can directly perceive your worldly activities, they are all illusions - coming in and out of existence. They are perishable, limited by time and space.

¹ The first Canto of *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* established that the Lord's devotees and His abode exist eternally. Then, in the 11th Canto, Kṛṣṇa establishes that anything that is related to His devotion is eternal. This is expressed in statements such as, "My devotional service is *nirguṇa* (SB 11.25.27) and, "My temple is *nirguṇa* (SB 11.25.25)."

“This implies that there is another type of activity of an altogether different class, beyond the *guṇas* and thus not bound by time and space. These are activities related to the Supremely Conscious Being and His devotees. I am trying to inform you about this, but being influenced by ignorance you have been unable to grasp it.

“Some scholars [Advaita-vādīs] call the world and all its activities *mithyā* - illusory. Giving this same philosophy I have called the world illusory, although in my opinion it is not exactly so. I call it illusory to help you become detached from your material experience and give you a glimpse of the Absolute Reality, in which I am situated.

“You think that I belong to the worldly illusion, but I do not. Therefore your logic does not comprehend me. You called me “fat”, “tired” and a “carrier of your palanquin” - but I told you I am not fat, nor am I tired, nor am I the carrier of your palanquin. I am not a part of these illusions because I do not identify with the material body and I am constantly situated in devotion to Kṛṣṇa. Even the Advaita-vādīs will not disagree with me on this.”

Two Opposing Schools of Thought

Viśvanāth Cakravārtī Ṭhākura describes that the King raises a doubt upon hearing this. He asks, “Bhakti is defined as the function of body, senses and mind only for the sake of Lord Kṛṣṇa. Yet, Lord Kapila states (in SB 3.29.12) that *bhakti* is *nirguṇa* - beyond matter.

“Some people (Śakti Parināma-vādīs) say that the material world is a real transformation of the Lord’s external energy: that the effect retains the nature of the cause. If this is the case, I can see how it is possible for matter to become spiritualized by the power of bhakti - so I can understand how the activities of body, senses and mind of a devotee can be become spiritualized just as a touchstone can turn iron into gold.

“However another school of thought (Vivarta-vāda a.k.a. Advaita-vāda) says that the material world is only an illusion of reality: that the effect of the cause does not retain its qualities - and thus Reality can produce something wholly illusory. If this school of thought is adopted, *bhakti* must also be an illusion - since it is an activity done with the unreal body, mind and senses. It cannot be *nirguṇa*, as Lord Kapila claims. It does not even exist. If it does not exist, it cannot be given by the guru at the time of *dikṣa* (initiation); its *sādhana* is as meaningless and unreal as sowing a seed in the sky; Kṛṣṇa *bhakti*, its practice, and its perfection - love which can even control Bhagavān - must all be illusory.”

Jaḍa Bharata responds (from the *Pariṇāma-vāda* point of view, which is accepted by *Bhagavat Purāṇa*):

What you say is true, but nothing is impossible for Bhagavān who has trans-logical supreme power. Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself says (SB 11.29.22):

*eṣā buddhimatām buddhir
manīṣā ca manīṣiṇām
yat satyam anṛteneha
martyenāpnoti māmṛtam*

“This is the wisdom of the wise, and cleverness of the clever: one can use the illusory, temporary body to attain Me, who am real and immortal.”

The meaning of this verse is: By that (*yat*) which is not real (*anṛtena*) - the mortal body (*martyena*) - one attains Me (*mām*), who is real (*ṛtam*).

The full sense of the verse is: Even by a false (*anṛta*) [because of being temporary] mortal body (*martyena*), one can attain Me, the Absolute Truth (*ṛtam*), who has a supremely blissful nature (*satyam*). Thus one can use the mortal material body to express devotion to Krishna by offering a leaf, flower, fragrance, incense, lamps, etc. This is the wisdom of the wise and the realization of those who are expert in deliberation.

Creation of a Transcendental Body

Viśvanāth Cakravārti Ṭhākura further elaborates on this as follows.

Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself has explained how a mortal being can attain Him (SB 11.29.34):

*martyo yadā tyakta-samasta-karmā
niveditātmā vicikīṛṣito me
tadāmṛtatvaṁ pratipadyamāno
mayātma-bhūyāya ca kalpate vai*

“When a mortal being has renounced all material activities and is totally surrendered to Me, then by My desire he is granted immortality and becomes situated in the self.”

The meaning of this verse is: Taking initiation from a qualified guru, a mortal being gives up all material activities (renounces all desire that can be fulfilled through *varṇāśrama-dharma*) and surrenders the *ātmā* (the sense of “I, me, mine”) to Me (represented by the guru).

An example of surrendering the *ātmā*: “O Lord, whatever I am and whatever I possess, here in this world and after death, I offer at Your feet.”

When a person surrenders in this way, then although his mind, body, and senses are *mithyā* - illusory - I desire to make him special (*vicikīrṣita*). Thus, as I have said (SB 11.25.26), one who takes shelter of Me becomes *nirguṇa*. This is how My devotee becomes free from the *guṇas* of material nature. He is not perishable as a product of *māyā* (Pariṇāma-vāda), nor is he illusory as an outcome of ignorance (Vivarta-vāda). Being a product of My own special attention, he becomes situated in his *svarūpa* - his own nature.

Moreover, instead of saying that he is “made special,” the word used in the above verse is *vicikīrṣita*, which is formed by applying the desiderative suffix *-san* on the root *kr* (*to do*), the implication of which is as follows: When the Lord begins to make him *nirguṇa*, then slowly by the practice of *bhakti* he attains the stages of *niṣṭhā*, *ruci*, *asakti* and *rati*, and thus becomes completely *nirguṇa*. After that he has no dealings with any illusory objects. But before he attains this stage, he continues to deal with the material objects as needed by him in the service of the Lord.

The verse therefore indicates: “Already at the time of initiation, by My trans-logical power, I invisibly create the transcendental body, mind and senses of such a person, to demonstrate the greatness of devotion.”

Material Nature Dissolved through Devotion

In SB 5.1.35 also, Śukadeva Gosvami explains that the mind, body, senses of a devotee are not only freed from material bondage, but literally destroyed, yet the body remains visible. He refers to the wonderful act of King Priyavrata who once followed the sun in his chariot, so that there would always be light, and thus created seven oceans:

naivam-vidhaḥ puruṣa-kāra urukramasya
punṣām tad-aṅghri-rajāsā jita-śaḍ-guṇānām
citraṁ vidūra-vigataḥ sakṛd ādadīta
yan-nāmadheyam adhunā sa jahāti bandham

“Indeed such an achievement is not wonderful for those who have controlled the six enemies by the power of the dust of the feet of Lord Urukrama (Kṛṣṇa), who performs wonderful deeds. But what is wonderful indeed is that a person born as an outcast, e.g. not qualified for any Vedic rituals, becomes free from the material body immediately, just by chanting the name of the Lord once.”

The meaning of the verse is as follows:

Even a deed like creating seven oceans, as King Priyavrata had done, does not seem wonderful in comparison to the effect of *bhakti*: That even a *vidūra-vigataḥ* - the lowest born person - by chanting the name of Lord Urukrama even once, immediately at that very moment (*adhunā*), becomes free from the material body, (*tanvam*). Although his body remains visible, it is no longer material. The material body which was produced by *prārabdha karma* has fallen away.

This taken together with the previously cited SB 11.29.34, indicates: At that very moment (*tadā*), becoming freed from mortality (*amṛtatvam*) - acquiring a spiritual body, he or she becomes situated with Me (*māyā, atma-bhavaya*).

This means that wherever Krishna is situated, the devotee is also situated there, for the sole purpose of serving Krishna. In this way, whatever material objects he comes into contact with in this world, their material nature is dissolved by the Supreme Lord because of their contact with devotion. At that very moment, He creates supremely real objects according to the desire of His devotee. What is impossible for the Lord who has trans-logical powers?

Therefore, the statements of Kṛṣṇa, cited earlier, such as “My devotion is *nirguṇa*” and “My temple is *nirguṇa*,” are very appropriate.

The following verse from the *Udyama Parva* of *Mahābhārata* has been cited even by Bhāṣyakāra (Śaṅkarācārya), who believes that the world is not real, God is not real and *śāstra* is not real:

*acintyāḥ khalu ye bhāvā
na tāms tarkeṇa yojayet.*

“One should not apply logic to trans-logical objects.”

In this context, we can also refer to the following verse of Sanātana Gosvāmī (from *Bṛhad Bhāgavatāmṛitam*, 1.3.61):

*kṛṣṇa-bhakti-sudhā-pānād
deha-daihika-vismṛteḥ
teṣāṁ bhautika-dehe 'pi
sac-cid-ānanda-rūpatā*

“After drinking the nectar of devotion to Kṛṣṇa, devotees forget about their material bodies and all things related to them. Even in their material bodies, the transcendental qualities of eternity, knowledge and bliss become manifest.”

Similarly, in *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, *Antya* 4.191 – 93, Lord Caitanya says:

*prabhu kahe,—“vaiṣṇava-deha ‘prākṛta’ kabhu naya
'aprākṛta' deha bhaktera 'cid-ānanda-māyā'*

The Lord said, “The body of a Vaiṣṇava is never material. His body is transcendental, made of *cit* and *ānanda*. When a person surrenders oneself at the time of *dikṣā*, at that very moment, Kṛṣṇa makes him just like Himself.”

Watch: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-9v1ZRYc-LY>