

Bhakti Prevails

by Satya Narayana Dasa

The confrontation between the four Kumaras and the gatekeepers of Vaikuntha is analyzed very wonderfully in Srila Jiva Gosvami's Bhagavat-sandarbha. The episode appears in the fifteenth chapter of the Third Canto of Srimad Bhagavatam. Once the four Kumaras went to Vaikuntha and in their eagerness to see Lord Vishnu they successfully passed through six gates but were stopped at the seventh. These seven gates are like the stages one passes through while developing devotion (*adau sraddha tatah sadhusanga tha bhajana kriya*). As the Kumaras had not attained the stage of pure devotion they were stopped by Jaya and Vijaya.

Though the Kumaras are the senior sons of Lord Brahma, they refused to enter household life and by their mystic power have not allowed their bodies to reach adulthood. Thus they appear just like five-year-old children. They were completely absorbed in *brahmananda*, and being unconcerned about their dress, only wore their birthday suit. They are called *digambaras*—those whose only garments are the four directions.

When the guards saw the four naked tykes approaching the Lord's personal quarters, they blocked their entry though the Kumaras were worthy of all respect. Since it is not appropriate to appear naked before the Lord or any respectable person, the gatekeepers did not allow them to enter. The Kumaras were incensed as their desire to meet the Lord was obstructed. Since Vaikuntha is a place free of dualities, the Kumaras were surprised to see that the doorkeepers lacked equal vision. Being brahmajnanis, the Kumaras did not understand that having equal vision does not mean treating everyone equally. Considering Jaya and Vijaya unfit to reside in Vaikuntha, the Kumaras cursed them to enter the material world.

Mistakes by subordinates implicate the master

The background of this incident is as follows: Once the Lord desired to take rest, and ordered Jaya and Vijaya to prevent anyone from disturbing Him. In doing so they forbade Laksmidevi to enter the Lord's chamber and she became upset. Being very cultured, however, she retaliated only by later lodging a complaint with Lord Vishnu hoping that He would chastise them. But the Lord was not inclined to do so as Jaya and Vijaya had acted in the line of duty and were very dear to Him. Lord Vishnu was also not inclined to chastise them just for the sake of placating Laksmidevi as this would make Him appear hen-pecked. The Lord knew, however, that the goddess of fortune would not be satisfied until Jaya and Vijaya were punished, so He arranged the confrontation with the Kumaras to accomplish this. The Lord also wished to engage in battle, and as no one is qualified to fight with Him, He chose to disguise His own devotees as demons and duel with them.

When the Kumaras were confronted at the gate, the Lord immediately understood Jaya and Vijaya's offense and rushed to the scene. Lord Vishnu was not confused as to who was in the wrong, and though externally He sided with His guests, the Kumaras, internally He favored His devotee gatekeepers. He is thus called *aryahrdayah*—one who is pleasing to the followers of religion.

When speaking to the Kumaras, the Lord referred to the gatekeepers with the term *svanam*, which means 'My own people'. This indirectly indicates that the Lord did not consider the Kumaras His own, and that Jaya and Vijaya were more dear to Him than they. Srila Jiva Gosvami points out that *svanam* is the plural case and refers to more than two people. Had the Lord referred only to Jaya and Vijaya as 'His own' He would have used the dual case, *svayoh*. Srila Jiva Gosvami explains that the Lord's use of the plural case implies that He considered all the residents of Vaikuntha implicated in the offense. This demonstrates the intense loving relations among the devotees who reside all there like one happy family. Thus the Lord ran to the scene out of concern as mistakes committed by subordinates implicate the master.

The Lord's subtle intelligence

The Lord went outside the gate on foot to deal with the conflict accompanied by Laksmidevi, Garuda, and other associates. He had to support Jaya and Vijaya for having checked unqualified persons from entering Vaikuntha, and yet He was obliged to chastise them owing to the presence of the goddess of fortune. Simultaneously He had to honor the Kumaras as guests, quell their anger, and encourage them for having come in search of His lotus feet. It was a complicated predicament.

The questions arise, "Why did the Lord come outside the gate? And why did He travel on foot since Garuda was by His side?" Srila Jiva Gosvami answers: By coming outside the gate on foot the Lord simultaneously accomplished two things—He stopped the Kumaras from entering Vaikuntha, upholding the decision of Jaya and Vijaya, and He satisfied the purpose of the Kumaras by showing them His precious feet in action. The Kumaras were flattered that the Lord came out to greet them while Jaya and Vijaya understood the Lord's gesture to support their action. Proper Vedic etiquette dictates that one should receive a guest at the gate. In this way the Lord demonstrated His subtle intelligence by satisfying all concerned and avoided transgressing etiquette.

The next question that arises is why the Lord brought the goddess of fortune with Him. Srila Visvanatha Cakravarti Thakura says that the Lord brought Sri thinking it would be easier for her to placate the angry Kumaras since the mother is more affectionate and expert in dealing with boys. Or Sri followed being curious to know how the Lord would deal with such a complex situation. Sri Vamsidhara says the Lord brought Sri because the Kumaras are *naisthika brahmacaris* (who never had contact with women) and would control their anger in the presence of Laksmi. Generally it is seen that men are better behaved in the presence of women. In due course the Lord chastised the guards and thus the goddess of fortune was satisfied.

The beautiful form of the Lord

When the Kumaras saw the majestic gait of the Lord they completely abandoned their anger. They glued their eyes on Him as they had never experienced such exquisite beauty and magnificence. The bliss derived from *brahmananda* (pleasure which comes from realization of Brahman) was eclipsed by the beautiful form of the Lord.

Lord Visnu's broad hips were covered by a fine silk dhoti which was supported by a beautiful belt. He wore a *vanamala*—a garland swarming with bumblebees which hung down to His feet. Srila Visvanatha Chakravarti Thakura explains that the Lord's dhoti considered the Lord's hips her exclusive residence. The belt imposed her supremacy on the dhoti and the garland reigned above both. But the humming bumblebees considered the *vanamala* their property, thus it appeared that the Lord awarded supremacy to the bumblebees. Thus it is no wonder that the bees hummed in excessive delight.

The Lord rested His left hand on the shoulder of Garuda and was playfully twirling a lotus flower with His right. Srila Visvanatha Chakravarti Thakura says that by twirling the lotus flower the Lord diverted the lotus-like hearts of the Kumaras from *brahmananda*. It was as though the Lord jokingly said to them, "O sages, you have concluded that My unqualified impersonal feature is the supreme reality. Why are you now agitated? Why don't you remain fixed in Brahman realization!"

Forcibly submerged in a whirlpool of bliss

Not only the Lord's body attracted the hearts of the Kumaras but the air in contact with the Tulasi and saffron touching the Lord's feet created turmoil in their hearts. Srila Visvanatha Chakravarti Thakura says that this air did not even directly contact the Lord's body. It merely came in touch with an object on only one of the Lord's limbs and still it created such a wonder and drowned the Kumaras in bliss. What then can be said regarding the sweetness of contacting the Lord's body?

The air carrying the aroma of Tulasi and saffron lorded over the hearts of the Kumaras. Visvanatha Chakravarti Thakura raises the question, "Just as it was improper for the Kumaras to intrude into Vaikuntha, is it not similarly improper for that air to trespass into the inner chambers of their heart?" His answer: No. Because Srimad Bhagavatam 3.15.43 says *sva-vivarena*—the air travelled by its own path. Since the nostrils are the natural gateways for air, permission is not required for entrance. Upon entering, it churned the hearts of the Kumaras and forcibly submerged them in a whirlpool of bliss. It shook their bodies and manifested loving symptoms such as *kampa*, *asru*, *romanca* and *sveda*. In the same way that an enemy first captures the capital city of a kingdom and then ransacks it, similarly the air first captured the hearts of the Kumaras and then churned their bodies with ecstasy.

While their hearts were thus imbued with love, they tried to assimilate the Lord's beauty, and thus gazed at His beautiful lotus feet which had ruby-like nails. They then raised their vision and marveled at the sweetness of the Lord's face. Still they were unable to capture the complete beauty of the Lord's body though they anxiously tried to.

Spiritual emotions manifest

Srila Jiva Gosvami says that the term *nidadhyuh* (S.Bhag. 3.15.44) indicates the Kumaras manifested a vyabhacari-bhava called *cinta*, (anxiety) which is described by Srila Rupa Gosvami (B.R.S. 2.4.136):

dhyanam cinta bhavedistanaptyanistaptirnirmitam

svasadho-mukha-bhulekha-vaivarnyornnidnata iha

vilapottapa-krsata-vasa-dainyadayo'pi ca

The thoughts which arise owing to not obtaining the desired object, or attaining an undesired one, are called *cinta*, or anxiety. The effects are deep breathing, lowering of the head, scratching the earth, change of bodily hue, loss of sleep, crying, feeling a burning sensation, weakness, tears and pity.”

After beholding the beautiful form of the Lord, the Kumaras declared, “O Lord, we have committed a great offense by cursing your servants. Let us be born in Hell for this grievous sin but we pray that our hearts and minds be always engaged in the service of Your lotus feet, our words be made beautiful (by speaking of Your activities) just as Tulasi leaves are beautified when offered to Your lotus feet, and our ears be always filled with the chanting of Your transcendental qualities.” (S.Bhag. 3.15.49)

Change of heart

This prayer reveals how the hearts of the Kumaras had changed and heralds a significant difference between the jnani and the bhakta. As jnanis, the Kumaras had become angry simply because their movements had been checked but having attained bhakti, they are prepared to tolerate the sufferings of hell provided they can hear and chant about the Lord. This unique devotional attitude is praised by Lord Rudra:

narayana-parah sarve na kutascana bibhyati

svargapavarga-narakesv api tulyartha-darsinah

“Devotees solely engaged in the devotional service of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Narayana, never fear any condition of life. For them the heavenly planets, liberation and the hellish planets are all the same, for such devotees are interested only in the service of the Lord.” (S.Bhag. 6.17.28)

The Kumaras’ prayer implies the following: That they prefer to be devotees in hell than to have impersonal liberation in Vaikuntha; in order to safeguard their devotion, they are willing to go to hell where there is less chance of committing offenses to devotees; and they understand that suffering in hell will intensify their remembrance of the Lord.

The root cause of all problems

One can conclude that the Kumaras have realized that having an unfavorable attitude towards the Lord is the root cause of all problems. Devotees fear only one thing—having their devotion covered by offenses. The Kumaras would rather be devotees in hell rather than offenders in Vaikuntha. Srila Visvanatha Cakravarti Thakura points out that though often pierced by thorns, the bumblebee never relinquishes attachment to flowers, and similarly the Kumaras are determined to serve the Lord's lotus feet despite all impediments. This indicates they have attained *prema* (spiritual love).

In their final prayer the Kumaras marvel at the mercy of the Lord for having shown His beautiful form even to offenders who can never approach Him. Thus they simply offer obeisances. To appease the Lord, they also acknowledge having received the mercy of their father, Lord Brahma, who is a great devotee. Since the Kumaras were *brahmajnanis* who now pray for devotional service, it indicates that *bhakti*, or loving devotional service, is the *pancama-purusartha*—the fifth and topmost goal to be acquired. And it surpasses the bliss of impersonal realization.

The most confidential secret

This unique paradigm is found only in Gaudiya Vaisnava philosophy. Before the advent of Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu the majority of philosophers considered liberation (*moksa*) the ultimate goal of life. Nevertheless, Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu said that Srimad-Bhagavatam takes one beyond mukti and reveals the most confidential secret—love of Krishna (*rahasya*). Srila Jiva Gosvami systematically divulges this secret in his analysis of Srimad Bhagavatam which is pregnant with pertinent philosophical conclusions. This description of the Kumaras' attempt to enter Vaikuntha is especially included by Srila Vyasadeva to completely deride impersonalism. It is very significant that Lord Brahma sent his own sons, the best of impersonalists, to Vaikuntha and arranged for them to experience the superiority of bhaktyananda over brahmananda.

Keeping this foremost in his mind, Srila Jiva Gosvami recounts the experience of the Kumaras and with his brilliant analysis completely demolishes the dazzling Mayavada (Impersonalist) edifice to its very foundation. In contrast, this section is like soothing moonlight for the *kumudini*-like hearts of the Vaishnavas.