

Don't be a Butcher-bandhu

by Kurma Rupa Das

My mother has been kidnapped by terrorists and is being tortured. The miscreants allowed her one phone call and she pleads that I do something to help.

I respond, “Don’t worry Mom. I’ll go to your home and offer all the food in your kitchen to Krsna and distribute the remnants to my family and friends. Krsna will be soooo pleased with you for this.”

She responds, “But my dear son, isn’t there any thing else you can do? These devils are causing me so much pain!”

I answer, “OK Mom. Don’t worry. We’ll use your savings to purchase Bhagavad-Gita’s and your car to distribute them on sankirtana! Be assured that Srila Prabhupada and Lord Caitanya will bless you for this!”

She sobs...

To console her, I say, “ Don’t worry Mom. You’re not that body... and remember, we love you soooo much!”

It rings hollow doesn’t it?

Do you think attending to ones spiritual wellbeing while completely ignoring their material plight indicates compassion, concern and love?

I don’t.

The above scenario parallels the attitude some devotees have towards serving those cows imprisoned and tortured by the commercial dairy industry. They think that to purchase commercial dairy products and offer them to Krsna serves the spiritual well-being of those cows, and perhaps it does... if offered with sincere devotion. But offering the milk of those cows to Krsna is the very LEAST one can do. Offering their milk without making any effort to relieve their suffering leads one to ask, “Are such people actually serving the cows, or are they just serving their tongue? Does satisfying their palate take priority over cow protection?”

The above attitude announces an unwillingness to do more than the minimum. It indicates that avoiding personal inconvenience and staying within one’s comfort zone takes priority over protecting Mother Cow.

What I find uglier still is the insidious attempt to pass off this complacency and indolence as the virtue of compassion. Some propose that the tortured cows’ only hope is that we continue purchasing their milk mixed with pus, blood and anxiety to offer to Lord Krsna for if we stop, those cows are doomed.

But purchasing commercial dairy products only fuels the slaughterhouse industry and keeps those horrible works alive. We become “butcher-bandhus” (friends of butchers). It assures that the female calves of the tortured cows will soon meet the same fate and the bull calves will end up in the veal crate.

What such people propose is a perfect survival formula for the slaughterhouse industry as it inspires both those who favor and oppose the cruelty to purchase their products! And the bloody butchers cheer and encourage this indolence masquerading as compassion.

You will remind me that Srila Prabhupada allowed us to offer commercial milk to Krsna. Yes, he did. But simultaneously he told us to start farm communities where we could obtain milk from protected cows and grow our own vegetables and grains to offer to Krsna. It's clear that his allowing us to offer commercial dairy products is a temporary concession much like that made by Narada Muni to Mrgrari the hunter. Narada told Mrgrari that instead of half-killing forest animals, he should kill them fully. Narada did not advocate or sanction animal killing; rather he gave an incremental instruction meant to bring Mrgrari one step closer to Vaisnava behavior. Similarly, forty years ago when Srila Prabhupada told us savages we should offer milk to Krsna, he wanted us to take one short step towards serving Krsna. As service to Krsna must be favorable (anukulyena) he ordered us to establish farms for protecting cows and offer their milk as the next step.

Narada ultimately told Mrgrari to break his bow and desist from animal killing — that was his intent from the start. Similarly, as there was nothing else, Srila Prabhupada allowed us to offer commercial milk but simultaneously ordered us to establish farm communities to protect cows and offer their milk to Krsna. We are too lazy and attached to follow his full instruction and we rationalize obedience by following only half of it. Shame on us!

One may shrug and say, “I don't have the power to stop the monstrous dairy industry.” And it may be that no individual has that power. But each of us does have the power to control our tongue... and if enough of us do, and refuse to purchase slaughterhouse products, it will have a detrimental affect on the industry.

By following Srila Prabhupada's order to establish farms to produce and offer milk, vegetables and grains to Krsna we automatically boycott commercial dairy products and all junk foods which are tailored to reduce longevity. Then we will have the potency to preach with conviction and influence others to do the same, and by our united effort, the commercial dairies will dry up!

If we are too entrenched in the urban lifestyle and require more dairy products than our farms produce, then we should find alternative whole milk obtained with minimum violence and be willing to pay more for it. Moreover, we should be honest and admit our weakness and attachment and, instead of shunning those who do control their tongue, support them and seek their blessings so we can develop the strength and conviction to follow.

By imagining that tortured commercial dairy cows are pacified when we offer their milk to Krsna, we indulge in the first of the five nescient activities created by Lord Brahma — self deception (SB 3.12.2).