

KR̥ṢṆĀ'S DĀMODARA-LĪLĀ

Rendering based on passages from
Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, *Gopāla-Campūḥ* and
Ānanda-Vṛndāvana-Campūḥ

SVĀMĪ SADĀNANDA DĀSA

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Introduction

God's form consists of eternal Being, eternal Knowledge and eternal Joy [sat-cit-ānanda]. He is in every way and in all respects infinite. Through all eternity, He experiences Himself as eternal being, pure knowledge and true joy. Through all eternity, He does not come to the end of His Own being, does not know Himself to the ultimate limit and does not exhaust the joy that He Himself is.

His being knows no "why". He is Fullness, which cannot be in want of anything. He is His Own object of knowledge and experience. He Himself is the One Who knows and He Himself is the One Who is known, the One Who loves and the One Who is loved. He is the infinite unity of the "I" and the "You".

The "I" is He Himself. The "You" are His beloved eternal companions, in whom He knows, experiences, realises and loves Himself, and expresses Himself as joy.

He Himself is the fullness of glory, grandeur and majesty. He Himself is the fullness of beauty, loveliness and unbounded exuberance. He is Nārāyaṇa. He is Kṛṣṇa of Vraja. He Himself *is* always play [līlā]: grave and dignified, cheerful and carefree. To realise, express and experience Himself is His nature. There is no purpose beyond Himself, because He Himself *is* fullness. Fullness itself is the eternal play.

His Own potency [svarūpa-śakti] is the power that forms His Own being. Through this potency He realises Himself and experiences Himself as Joy. This same potency also forms the being of His beloved ones. Through this potency they know Him, through this power they experience Him as joy. He is the centre. For the sake of God, for the sake of His joy, His beloved ones realise and experience Him. They do not have an I, which separate from Him could desire a realisation and a joy that were not His realisation and His joy. Their joy is His joy, and His joy is their joy, as He and they are nothing else than He Himself. He loves them and they love Him. The love emanating from Him is the power of pure knowledge, which in the form of love returns to its source, to Himself.

He and His realm know no limits of time and space. Nevertheless, when He knows and experiences Himself as the fullness of beauty, loveliness and unrestricted exuberance – in and together with His beloved ones, His Own eternal co-players – then the fullness of glory, grandeur and majesty is revealed only on rare occasions, although it is ever present. When this happens, however, the experience of the second kind of fullness intensifies the experience of the first kind of fullness. The wondrous secret of the beloved ones' love for Kṛṣṇa as the fullness of beauty is revealed in their experience of the fullness of majesty, which, in spite

of its distinct and unambiguous manifestation, they certainly *experience*, but not realise as *such*.

One example of how this wondrous secret is revealed and enacted is the Dāmodara-līlā of Kṛṣṇa of Vraja.

Man could not know anything of the inner secret that God is, if not the divine play, which is God Himself, became manifest in our world from time to time. Kṛṣṇa's līlā, unbounded by time and space, shone forth a little more than five thousand years ago. At that time, He, His Own eternal associates and His realm became manifest on earth. This is His mercy. But the bestowing of mercy was not the purpose of the manifestation of this līlā. The play becomes visible in an eternal rhythm, because He and His Own eternal associates love and experience Him and each other in a particular way in this manifest līlā. In this play He, the eternally youthful Kṛṣṇa, appears as a child and seems to grow from infancy to youth, just like a human child, although He never *is* a growing child but merely manifests the characteristics of growing. Without ever ceasing to be the fullness of majesty, He is now so fully absorbed in Himself as the fullness of charming beauty that He is only occasionally aware of the fact that He is also the fullness of majesty. His Own eternal companions are so deeply absorbed in the marvel of the fullness of beauty of this divine form that they are barely able to experience His majesty.

They find themselves in a world of time and space and *believe* themselves to be mere human beings, although they *are* not.

In this way, He and His Own eternal co-players experience themselves in a particular manner. But it is not so that the wish suddenly arises to experience themselves in this līlā. This līlā and every single phase of it is eternal, is one of the ways in which He experiences Himself through eternity. This is why those who have received God's Own potency of pure consciousness, the bhakta-s, in blessed moments and with the help of this power are able to perceive this līlā in the mirror of their ātmā, because then their ātmā is free from the limitations of time and space.

The great seers knew about this līlā of Kṛṣṇa long before it became visible on earth. The eternal Revelation in the form of the eternal Word is ever present. It is perceived in the ears of the great bhakta-s, who impart it to worthy listeners. The divine Word appears in this world, veiled in the raiment of the Sanskrit language, but only those who have received God's Own potency of pure knowledge – because they have pure love for Him – are able to perceive His Word in that language.

Although this līlā became manifest in the world of time and space, and those who were not His Own eternal associates could “see” something of it at that time, they did not understand anything, because this līlā is enacted as if it were a matter

of ordinary occurrences in the lives of quite ordinary persons in a district of India.

God's eternal Word, His Revelation in the form of the Words of the Śāstram-s or the sacred Scriptures, has laid down the paths for man to follow if he wants to acquire true knowledge of the nature of the world, of his own ātmā and of God. These Śāstram-s speak of the love of God, i.e. how to serve Him lovingly through His Own potency of pure knowledge, which can touch a person and seize him if he is willing to let himself be enlightened by the Words of His līlā, which are flowing from the lips of those who have received this power of pure knowledge and loving service.

Some of those who followed this path of eternal loving service of God, imbued with His Own power of unadulterated knowledge, were allowed to directly participate in God's play in Vraja. Some did so as independent individuals, others entered and merged into the being of one or other of Kṛṣṇa's beloved ones during the appearance of this līlā on earth, i.e. when the divine play for a certain period of time became visible in the district of Vraja. Droṇa and Dharā from the hoary past had entered and merged into the beings of Nanda and Yaśodā, Kṛṣṇa's beloved ones, who through all eternity know themselves to be the parents of the divine Child.

In the līlā that becomes visible on earth, Yaśodā, the mother, and Nanda, the father, believe that they are mortal human beings. The beauty, sweetness and unbounded exuberance enchant both of them. They know, they realise and they experience the joy that the fullness of beauty *is*, and they exhaust themselves completely in their love for this divine Child.

Kṛṣṇa, too, is enchanted by this boundless love, which flows from Him and, through His beloved companions, flows back to Him. Like all of His Own eternal associates, who play with Him in Vraja, they live only for His sake: "They consider their home, their property, their family and friends, their own body, all their mind and energies, their life force and their hearts to be His property and they accept them only for His sake." [Bhā. X.14.35] As He is the Be-all and End-all to *them*, they are the Be-all and End-all to *Him*.

We as human beings may at best have a faint idea of this secret from afar. Can we even imagine what stirs the heart of those who through eternity, day and night, play with Him in His capacity as the fullness of beauty, charming loveliness and unbounded exuberance, and who in this revealed līlā consider themselves to be human beings, although they are not? Can we understand, at all, that this serving, loving realisation of this fullness of charming beauty is a realisation infinitely deeper than that of the fullness of grandeur, omnipotence and omniscience? We are

barely – and only with some hesitation – able to believe that the unfolding and dissolution of countless universes is something rather insignificant, produced by Viṣṇu’s occasional glance; Viṣṇu, who is nothing more than a partial aspect of God in His capacity as the fullness of majesty, glory and grandeur.

Considering that the mere realisation of Viṣṇu frees the ātmā from all ignorance of the nature of the world, of God, of himself and of their interrelation, and leads to a clear and pure experience of the *true* reality – can there be any doubt that Kṛṣṇa’s co-players in Vraja could never be even lightly touched by even a distant breath of māyā, the fundamental ignorance?

“Lust, hate and all passions are thieves that deprive man of the possibility to bear God in his mind. Man’s home is a prison. To be affected to the degree of self-oblivion is a shackle on the feet. But only as long as man has not become totally Yours, i.e. as long as he has not whole-heartedly dedicated everything he has and himself to You.” (*Bhā.* X.14.36) “Since eternity, the inhabitants of Vraja have dedicated themselves and everything they have to Him.” (*Bhā.* X.14.35) “Fullness, the Absolute, Brahma¹, which is the very highest joy, is their Beloved, their Friend and their Kinsman since eternity.” (*Bhā.* X.14.32) Those to whom He is everything have their homes, passions and self-oblivion not as a result of selfishness like humans; their passions, their homes, their self-oblivion consist entirely of the power of pure knowledge, are *Joy*, because they *are* for Kṛṣṇa’s sake. “Nanda and the other cowherds were totally unaware of the suffering and ignorance of the world of incessant change [saṁsāra].” (*Bhā.* X.11.58) “There can be no question of the women of Vraja, who eternally regard Kṛṣṇa with motherly love, ever being part of the world of incessant change, because the world of incessant change is rooted in ignorance.” (*Bhā.* X.6.40)

It is God’s Own eternal potency of pure knowledge and true joy that forms the play [yogamāyā-śakti], not the deceptive, enchanting power of Māyā [mahāmāyā-śakti], and it is this supreme power that makes His Own eternal companions experience themselves as mere human beings. Māyā’s deceptive power keeps the enchanted ātmā, who out of his free will has chosen to turn his back on God, distant from Him. In order to give the ātmā the possibility to experience the world of ignorance, this power of Māyā makes him believe that he is the body, mind or individual soul, originating in this power.

God and those who are His Own eternal co-players have this special līlā in the manifest Vraja. Seemingly, He grows from infancy to youth and undergoes change; in reality, however, He only manifests the different stages of growth, being – eternally – *the youth*. Those who are His Own eternal associates appear as

¹ Used here in the original sense as the Absolute in its fullness, not in its later restricted sense as the formless Brahma.

parents of this world, consumed with anxiety and love for Him, as if He were a helpless child in need of his parents.

He and His play are always transcendental, even when He acts as if He were of this world. He and those who belong to Him always consist of eternal existence, unadulterated knowledge and true joy and never become humans of flesh and blood. Only misguided fools believe that Kṛṣṇa has a body consisting of māyā, that He is born like a human child and is like a slave, subjected to the laws of our world.

He and His play with His Own eternal associates are not an idealization of the world of ignorance; His play becomes like an insult to the world and human relationships, bringing them into derision. Man's love for his children is like a travesty of the divine parents' genuine love for the divine Child. When He and His Own eternal associates play [on earth], in forms of which the māyā-begotten human beings of this world are only distorted shadows, then He and His Own associates experience a particular, intensified form of joy. Just like His Own eternal eternal co-players only breathe and are for His sake, He is and plays only for their sake and for their joy. Their joy and consequently His Own joy intensify in the līlā that becomes visible in the world.

The Śāstram-s narrate this līlā, thereby giving an insight into God's inner life. But just like no one, except those who are His Own eternal co-players, is able to experience the actual līlā, because appearances and man's aversion to God conceal it, no one is able to understand the statements of the Śāstram-s, who is not at least willing to let himself be enlightened by the Words of these Śāstram-s, surrendering himself to God's Own potency of pure knowledge and serving love. The purpose of listening to the Dāmodara-līlā is not to satisfy man's craving for knowledge. In the heart of those who want to serve, listening can awaken the desire to become, in a future life – through the mercy of God and those who are His Own – a particle of dust under the feet of those who are His Own eternal associates (*Bhā. X.14.34*), or to one day be allowed to serve those who already serve Him since eternity (*Bhā. X.87.23*).

The Dāmodara-līlā is deeply reflected upon by all those who are filled with unshakeable confidence that the serving love for Kṛṣṇa, carried by true knowledge, is the path as well as the goal, the eternal purpose of the ātmā in the eternal realm of God.

For one whole month a year, the bhakta-s, those who are dedicated to the service of God, reflect upon, celebrate and discuss this Dāmodara-līlā. This is why this month is called "Dāmodara". Those who have turned their back on God call

this month “Kārttika²”.

The following rendering of the Dāmodara-līlā is based on the accounts of this līlā in the *Bhāgavatam*, *Gopāla-Campūḥ* and *Ānanda-Vṛndāvana-Campūḥ*. This introduction to the rendering must be thoroughly reflected upon, understood and unceasingly kept in mind. The greatest possible danger is to regard this Dāmodara-līlā with the eyes of a mother or a father of this human world or, in dismal abandonment of God, even want to place oneself in the role of a Nanda or a Yaśodā, be it mentally or emotionally. Man as such, however noble and good, must never believe – not even in his most pious imagination – that he could force his way to Krishna’s Own eternal companions, let alone to Kṛṣṇa Himself, with his individual I, his personality. Man’s highest purpose is his surrender in the transition from rejection of God to dedication to the power of the serving love of pure knowledge. This love prays for the gift to be allowed, through one’s ears, heart and thoughts, to serve the eternal parents by intent *listening* and a *versatile mind*.

² More or less corresponding to the month of November.

First Part

When the Dāmodara-līlā takes place, Kṛṣṇa manifests the characteristics of a child at the age of two years and a little less than two months. His father Nanda (joy) is the king of the cowherds in the cowherd land Vraja. His mother Yaśodā (the one who is giving glory and praise) is the highly respected administrator of the opulent household of the cowherds. Nanda's and Yaśodā's brothers and relatives live at different places in the neighbourhood. Nanda's abode with its spacious courtyards and gardens are situated at the centre of the village Gokula. Nearby flows the river Yamunā, deep-blue in colour.

The spacious courtyard of Nanda's abode is surrounded by four buildings.

To the south, towards the large flower garden, which almost reaches the house, is the dwelling house of the parents. In its western part is the spacious room where Yaśodā lives with Kṛṣṇa. Nanda, His father, lives in its eastern part.

An elongated veranda connects the dwelling house with the courtyard.

To the west is the spacious storehouse: granaries in its southern part, the room for storage of soured milk [dahi]³, fresh butter and ghī, i.e. clarified, melted butter, in its northern part. This precious dairy produce hangs in large earthenware jars in strong loops of rope, hooked onto the ceiling of the rooms.

To the north is Rohiṇī's dwelling, where she usually stays together with Balarāma, Kṛṣṇa's elder brother.

To the east is Nārāyaṇa's temple, where God's four-armed form, His glorious and majestic manifestation, is regularly worshipped by Brahmins in the course of the day.

In the south-western corner of this square of buildings is the elongated kitchen, with passages to the inner courtyard, to the storehouse and to Yaśodā's room. From the south-eastern corner of the courtyard, a well-kept path leads to the south, connecting the house to the village road. On this spot, somewhat off the road, there are two large trees, whose trunks form a mighty "V" and almost seem to touch each other at the ground; a distinctive mark of the residence of the king of the cowherds, which can be seen from a great distance. They are called Yamala-Arjuna, the well-known twin trees.

The rainy season is over, it is a few days before the day of the new moon in the month of Dāmodara. The great feast arranged by the worshippers of Indra, the god of the clouds and the rain, is approaching. The wives of the cowherds, who usually find time to slip along to have a chat with Yaśodā, are now busy in their

³ Dahi, home-made yoghurt. In Indian English it is called curd to mark the difference to industrial yoghurt. Butter can be made directly from dahi by churning. The rest product is buttermilk. (Wikipedia)

own homes with the preparations for this feast. Today, in spite of their great yearning, they cannot come and let their ears and eyes rejoice at the amusing games of the ever exuberant Child.

Rohiṇī together with Balarāma had been invited to Upānanda, Nanda's eldest brother. They had gone to Upānanda's neighbouring village, escorted by Nanda, who then went to look after the cows.

Yaśodā has many maids, old and young, who are always ready to render service to her and want to relieve her of all kinds of domestic duties, not only because she is their beloved mistress, but in this way they also serve Kṛṣṇa, Whose transcendental beauty and charm enchants them all. For Kṛṣṇa's sake they do not feel any fatigue. Kṛṣṇa is their life, their strength and their joy. In the first light of dawn they had come rushing over in order to make butter from the soured milk, and to boil the milk from the noble cow Padmagandha (scent of lotus) for Kṛṣṇa, because this milk is meant for Him. Could there be a greater joy than to churn for Him and to relieve His noble mother of her duties, so she can dedicate herself entirely to her Child? They are all well acquainted with every aspect of the art of housekeeping. Could it be any other way? It is the serving love of pure knowledge that flows out from Him, and through their hearts and hands flows back to Him. But today – in spite of the joyful requests of the maids – Yaśodā is not willing to let herself be deprived of the joy of churning and preparing the milk for her Child. Today she is firm. Today, against her better judgement, the thought suddenly crossed her mind that the skilful and attentive maids could by no means do the work for Him as well as she can. With kind but firm words she has sent the maids off, to attend to other duties in the houses, the gardens and the kitchens.

They found this a bit difficult. They felt defeated by Yaśodā's command. But the serving, loving power of pure knowledge gives them the understanding that it is more precious to be allowed to serve *those* who serve Him directly, than to think that their purpose of life could be achieved by serving *Him* directly. This insight is not the result of reflection. It is their inner nature to think and feel in this way. But there is *one* thing that worries them. Yaśodā had made it clear to them that they were not allowed even to be nearby, and had sent them away to do some work far away. And they know why. Yaśodā will exert herself and tire herself out. If they were close at hand, they would come rushing and with gentle force remove the churning rod from her hands. Yaśodā's intention to do and complete everything for Him herself would be thwarted. She has sent them far away. She will exert herself to the utmost. This gives the maids pain, but they are obliged to obey the beloved Child's loving mother. Yaśodā's words are unusually firm, but the maids know that they are only the armour behind which Yaśodā's soft heart is hiding. She wants to protect herself from falling prey to the affectionate words of the maids,

their wish to relieve her of her duties.

The mysterious power that forms Kṛṣṇa's and His associates' plays, i.e. the līlā-śakti, has given Yaśodā the impulse – almost against her will – to send away all the maids. And so it happened that she and her Child are now alone in the house.

Softly she tiptoes up to His bed. The Child is resting on a shimmering white cloud-bed, sturdy and yet more tender than the tender petals of a blue lotus. – A brightly shining treasure. His body shines like the first sunlit cloud of the rainy season, in a light blue colour mixed with green and grey; like a blue pearl, whose brilliance wholly radiates from its centre. His lotus eyes have not yet blossomed. Breathing calmly, He is still asleep. She fondles Him gently and puts Him in the middle of the cloud-bed, so He will not fall out of the bed onto the floor, should He suddenly wake up and move around restlessly, the vivacious Child.

He is asleep. Without worrying, she can attend to her first duty. On the veranda the large earthenware jar, well filled up with soured milk, is already prepared. She walks out and begins churning. From where she is, she can keep an eye on the sleeping Child quite well. She sets the large churning rod in rotating movement while humming short, festive songs to herself, about Him and His childish, yet amazing heroic deeds; songs that the women of Vraja use to sing and songs that spontaneously take form in her mouth. She sings, because she wishes the ever restless Child – for His Own good – to remain fast asleep a little longer than usual today, so that He will be fully recovered from the exhaustion caused by His exuberant pranks. While singing these songs, the enchanting plays of the Child ever since His birth come to her mind:

Oh You, ornament of the lord of Gokula's family [Nanda],
You, wealth and fruit of joy,
You, virtue of the people of Vraja.
Your being, Your play are the joy of our eyes,
because of You, the whole of Vraja is in the state of joy!
Your birth is feasts full of bliss, full of joy.
Your playful breath was the death of Pūtanā,
and a blessing for us all in Vraja.
The demons "Whirlwind" and "Ox-cart load"
were destroyed, but You were saved by God.
You, Who so cleverly crawl about
on Your hands and knees on the yard,

to the joy, to the rejoicing of those who are Yours.
 Your dancing in the play, oh,
 what skilful art You manifest,
 oh You, foremost of all dancers!
 The wondrous rosy small hands of Yours
 holding on to the playful short tails of the calves,
 in the merry dance – where You run in the dust.
 Really witty in squabbling, lying and in hiding Yourself,
 when the women are cross with You, because of your pranks.
 As they love You, they come to me, complaining.
 Oh Kṛṣṇa, oh Kṛṣṇa, be forever Your mother's joy,
 be, Kṛṣṇa, my happiness forever!
 See that You grow to greater plays, to greater deeds,
 to the delight of Your mother.
 A very peculiar sight – of cosmic worlds,
 like through the force of Viṣṇu – You showed me.
 May joy and well-being fall to us,
 through the worship of Nārāyaṇa.
 May Your body be immortal,
 free from sickness and pain,
 Oh Kṛṣṇa, You treasure, You refuge of my love!

She sings while churning. Cautiously peering, pretending to be asleep, He watches her from a distance. – His mother! A woman of late middle age, of medium height, her dress mildly shining like a pale rainbow. Her complexion is similar to His, only a little matter in its lustre. Her garment is tied round her sturdy hips with a silk cord. She wears a flower garland interlaced in her hair, which is tied up with fine ribbons. In her hands, she is holding a soft but strong piece of rope, by means of which she keeps the big churning rod in motion. The bangles around her arms are ringing. The bracelets around her wrists are humming like intoxicated bees, around her deft, emerald green lotus hands. Softly, her earrings are dancing, in pace with her swinging body. Making butter is hard work, but untiringly her arms and hands are pulling the rope. She is almost a bit tired already. But can there be fatigue when she churns fresh butter for Him? Light beads of perspiration glisten at her forehead and cheeks. The white jasmin flowers in her hair begin to loosen. Her necklace is dancing on her breast, which is full and heavy with gifts for her beloved Child. Her neck and nape are glistening from the heat of her movements, and her sturdy hips are trembling a little.

One moment she is keeping an eye on the work, the next on her Child. In their

foolishness, heavy drops of soured milk have fled the earthenware jar and landed on her garment. But what does it matter? For His sake, every effort is a joy and every stain an ornament. She would have been very angry at these stains, had it not been for the fact that she is churning for Kṛṣṇa's sake, for the sake of His joy.

Yaśodā is churning the soured milk for Him, Kṛṣṇa, Who through His nature, His charm and His līlā churns and excites the heart and mind of those who see Him or hear about Him.

For a long time, He is furtively watching her from a distance. He knows it is her joy to exert herself for His sake and He does not want to deprive her of this joy. But is she not exerting herself too much? As a joyful token of her love, some flowers have already fallen from her hair to the ground, as if stars had fallen from heaven and kissed the sanctified earth, where the divine Mother, the personification or embodiment, the eternal form of eternal motherly love, in her untiring service of Kṛṣṇa is exhausting herself to the point of self-oblivion.

But Kṛṣṇa has a compassionate heart. God hastens to the spot whenever one of His Own co-players – enduring all hardships, yet unaware of them – exerts himself for His sake. And besides – reflecting and pondering upon Him, has she really not noticed that He is already awake?

Pretending to cry a little, He sobs and leaves His bed, quickly running forward to her. Short of breath, still caught in His sleep, He stretches His limbs and rubs His eyes with His little hands, and is suddenly standing at her side. She knows how much He likes that fresh butter. She exerts herself for His sake, and thinks that only she can make it good enough. But is all this more important than He is? Imploringly, He looks at His mother. He must draw her attention to Himself. He stands there, looking as if He were weakened by hunger.

Finally, He seizes the churning rod, checking its movement. “Mā, now! Do not make Me sad. Give Me some milk, let Me drink from your breast. Otherwise – I will smash all the jars in the storage room to pieces!” He must threaten her – she is overstraining herself – and must she not serve Him as He wants to? Could someone believe that he could serve Him and do what is best for Him at his own discretion, thereby ignoring His immediate wish?

Is it really possible that she can forget Him, for the butter intended for Him? She does so. She is fully absorbed in her service for Kṛṣṇa, but not even this is enough to make Him satisfied. He has come to her Himself, she must give Him what He wants!

She cannot do anything else. The sight of Him, His captivating words have enchanted her. With His little feet He stamps lightly on the ground. The fine

bangles around His tender ankles tinkle. He really looks very sleepy and hungry. His face is so thin, the black locks of hair hang imploringly on His bright forehead. She complies and lets the churning ropes rest. She takes Him on her lap and offers Him her overflowing breast. Like the cātaka bird eats its fill of the drops from the heavy clouds in the rainy season, Kṛṣṇa lies at His mother's rich breast.

Her reason for complying is not that she has perceived Bhagavān's majesty and grandeur. It is His charm, His sweetness and His roguish play, acting as if He was starving, which she experiences so profoundly that she cannot do anything but conform to His wishes. It is so wondrous that with His little hands He can check the quickly rotating churning rod in its revolving movement. It is so charming when He even threatens to smash the earthenware jars into pieces. She is completely under the spell of experiencing God as the fullness of charming beauty, loveliness and unrestricted exuberance. But from a distance, she now catches sight of *His* milk over the fire. A breath of air has kindled the low fire, making it burst into a blaze. The steaming milk is rising threateningly. His milk will boil over and be spoiled. She cannot take Him along, so close to the fire. There is nothing to be done about it, even if He is still drinking the coveted milk from her breast, she must leave Him here and rush. "Oh Kṛṣṇa, You dear Child! Have patience for just a moment. Keep an eye on the jar with the soured milk. I will quickly take care of Your milk and be back in a moment!" And she hastens away, leaving the disappointed Boy behind.

Second Part

Her heart is fully absorbed in Him. Out of motherly love, heavy drops are running from her overfull breast, drops that fulfil their being in Kṛṣṇa's lotus mouth, close to His flower-white teeth. Helplessly, the milk now runs on Yaśodā's noble garment.

How is it possible that she leaves Him again? Does she not know that He can never have enough when He is lying at her breast – and today she leaves Him when He is not even partly satisfied? Why does she proudly exclaim that she can do the work better than the maids? There is not one of them who would not instantly be on the spot like lightning at the slightest request of their mistress. Why does she forget that it is more important to fulfil His immediate wishes than to worry about things which in her opinion are meant for Him only later. The fire is dangerous, that is why she did not take Him along. But today He had come to her on His own initiative, and she should not have run out on Him on any account!

And yet, what is her fault? She must take the displeasure of the Child upon herself. He is still too small to understand the importance of the household duties – for His sake. Kṛṣṇa knows quite well that her conduct is an expression of great love, like all the scolding and threatening by His elders, when in His merry plays He transgresses the bounds they set up for Him – for His sake. But today He has asked for something which is very dear and precious to *Him*. Deprived of that, He becomes angry.

Tears of rage fill His eyes. Biting His trembling lips with His little teeth, He picks up a stone from the ground and smashes the jar with the soured milk, but to His great disappointment, no trace of butter is to be seen. Yaśodā had been churning for so long and with such great effort, and for this reason she had forgotten even Him, Who had been lying on His little bed waiting, in the hope that she would come and offer Him her breast. Can the endeavours of the bhakta-s please Him when they do not bear any fruit? What then is the use of all efforts?

The jar as an instrument for the efforts for His sake becomes completely destroyed. With the stone He smashes the big pieces into small shards. Let the bhakta start all over again, with better tools, and next time achieve a better result of his efforts.

The soured milk flows along the floor of the veranda in long streams, viscous like the feeble, futile efforts of someone who wanted to serve God but, without being at fault, was unable to do so.

The sight of the outcome of His anger cannot calm Him down. But there is some fear in this anger. As we know, He is God in His capacity as the Child.

Yaśodā's motherly love keeps them both completely under its spell. To *Him*, the Child, it is an experience of joy to subordinate Himself to her, the divine Mother. He is fully absorbed in the role of being the Child. What will she say when she sees the mess He has now brought about? Fear and worry have crept into His heart. But the experience of fear cannot appease His anger. When the result of the service for Him does not come to Him in that way, He must get it Himself, and steal it!

Circumspectly and quickly He goes to a place where no one can observe Him – to the storeroom, where the fresh, clarified butter (ghī) is stored. Through a small window, which He opens cleverly, He climbs into the room and helps Himself properly. Hey, this mitigates His anger. Although not the fruit of today's effort, the butter is the result of the effort from some previous day. He knows that His Own eternal companions keep the fruit of their labour for His sake in a very hidden place. No one shall know where it is hidden, and no one – except for Him – shall enjoy it. When from within, through the power of His līlā, He has made His Own co-players serve in some other way, and when the bhakta does not in the least expect it, then He will come Himself and rob what is His and what the bhakta prepares for His sake. He loves to taste this fruit of serving love of pure knowledge when the bhakta is unaware of it. The fruit is sweet, the result of the bhakta's efforts is abundant. This *must* mitigate even His great anger.

His anger is mitigated. But the fear, which has crept into His heart out of love for His mother, has neither reached its full maturity, nor has it seen its object, the mother, face to face. His noble deeds are misdeeds in the eyes of His mother. He must flee. He, Whom everyone in all the worlds fears when He is in His capacity as the fullness of majesty, glory and grandeur, He, Whom time and all beings urged by time *flee* and in Whose field of vision Māyā, the cause of all the universes in the form of their efficient and material cause, only dares to make her appearance ashamed and from afar, *He* flees for fear of His mother!

When He wants something, everything must become His friend. Again, a window on the next wall becomes a friend. What a sight! “What will I say if mother catches Me here?” The mere thought of it makes His eyes roll and flee, as if they sought shelter in His ears. “Is she coming? No, not a sign.” Carefully, He closes the little wooden window behind Him.

How wonderful! A mortar is standing there. And outside, in front of the high window, the merry young monkeys are swinging in the tall trees. He turns the mortar upside-down; now it offers a comfortable seat. Seated here He can easily reach the ghī in the jar and feed the monkeys at pleasure.

Khala, the mortar, is a villain. But when He turns a villain upside-down, 180 degrees, even the villain can be engaged in His service. In this way He has turned the mortar, Udū-khala, into His seat. And the monkeys? They are muni-s, great

seers, who are in charge of specific profound parts of the Vedas or Śruti-s. As a result of their asceticism, practised for Kṛṣṇa's sake, and their bhakti, they may now participate as monkeys in this divine līlā of the fullness of beauty and charm, see the Absolute Truth with their own eyes, and please Him with their amusing pranks. Kṛṣṇa of Vraja, the most profound mystery, Who was inaccessible to them as wise muni-s, is now sitting before them on the mortar handing out the clarified butter to them. He cannot help it; He must share the fruit of His Own co-players' endeavours for His sake with those who serve Him so faithfully. Could there be greater mercy than to be allowed to partake of *that* which He Himself has tasted with such great relish and distributes to them so generously?

What He distributes is all His. The joy of handing out the clarified butter to His merry monkey friends has almost made Him forget that His mother is probably already on His track.

Third Part

Yaśodā has removed the milk from the fire and hurried back to the place where she left Kṛṣṇa. She looks at the scene of His deeds: the small shards from the jar, the revealing piece of stone, the Child's footprints – she knows Who has given vent to His anger here. She smiles. How thoroughly He has worked! How sad and angry He must have been when she left Him. It had been hard for her, too, not to let Him drink from her breast when He was still hungry. And yet – she must be angry with Him. He must learn to handle His Own sourmilk-butter jar and soured milk cautiously. He must learn that anger must not go so far that He destroys what belongs to Him. There were anger and laughter in her heart, just like there had been anger and fear in His heart. He is *my* Child. When He is not *willing* to understand, I must be strict with Him. He must learn to obey. She takes a stick in her hand; not that she could ever think of wanting to beat Him, but because this time, by infusing fear, she wants to give more weight to her words.

But while she is standing there pondering, ready to set off and follow His footprints, it is as if she hears a voice from an invisible source in the sky: “The little child Honeythroat was thirsty and has destroyed this lotusbud, not yet moistened with ripe honey. At its bottom the Child found no honey. Then Honeythroat went to another lotus and found plenty of honey there. And now Honeythroat is busy generously handing out the most delicious honey. You are very skilful and have appeased the wildly upset boiling milk, but only when you know how to appease the anger of the Child, you will be really worthy of glory and praise.”

Smiling, she sets off, attentively following His footprints of soured milk. Cautiously, without causing any noise, she opens and shuts the doors until she sees the peaceful picture from afar: sitting on the mortar, He is now feeding the young monkeys with the clarified butter, which had been so carefully prepared and stored!

Her name is Yaśodā. Through her, Kṛṣṇa's greatness becomes known. Through her, it becomes evident that He, Kṛṣṇa, God in His capacity as the fullness of charming beauty, is so under the spell of her unselfish, eternal motherly love that, for her sake, He fully knows Himself as the Child, and now, while sitting on the mortar, over and over again, He is anxiously looking out for His mother, to see if she is on His track. Cautiously, she sneaks up on Him from behind. But a thief has a hundred eyes, a follower only two. When the monkeys, who have already had enough to eat, perceive the mother equipped with the stick, they swing through the high window onto the branches hanging down from the trees, and

escape. Kṛṣṇa flees for dear life.

It had been hard enough for her to be without the sight of Him for the short moment she had to attend to the boiling milk. Is He going to escape from her again? He always loves to hide Himself. No one can truly love Him, serve Him selflessly through His Own power of pure realisation, without striving and searching with all his might. All that is noble requires maturity, inner strength and self-sacrificing perseverance. He has ingeniously hidden not only Himself, but also the path of serving love of true knowledge in the Revelation of the Sacred Eternal Words. What can a person understand of the mystery of the fullness of charming beauty that Kṛṣṇa is, if he is not even willing to learn that the slightest breath of unconscious thinking of himself and his own happiness is like an impervious layer of clouds, which totally obscures the tiny spark of light, the ātmā, and does not let through any light from the divine Sun of serving love of pure knowledge. Kṛṣṇa even tries to evade His Own co-players, those who from eternity live *through* that power of the divine Sun – whose nature *is* the power of the divine Sun – so that even greater dynamics of the search, carried by serving knowledge, and even greater joy will break through when they find Him. He, Who is the fullness of charm, is not to be found until He wants to. And when He is not willing to be found, He even escapes the serving, loving eyes of His Own co-players, eyes that are permeated by pure knowledge.

She knows that His deeds and misdeeds only make Him more dear to her heart. But outwardly, for His Own good, she expresses anger and disapproval, wanting to infuse fear into Him. Her only worry is that His reckless exuberance may one day do Him harm. But could He ever be the object of displeasure and indignation, even if it is just a pretence of displeasure and indignation? Until her displeasure and annoyance are exhausted, she must be searching and running, yet be unable to catch up with Him.

The manner in which He flees is so enchanting that she is barely able to maintain her pretence of anger. Quickly, she runs after Him. Her clothes are fluttering, the flowers in her hair are falling out. She calls out to Him: “Oh, You thief, where are You heading?” But He runs fast. The stick is still in her hand; that is too much for Him. The stick is an insult to His self-esteem and His honour. It looks as if a heavy cloud, slowly drifting westward, is trying to catch up with a small fleeing cloud, drifting eastward by strong winds. He flees on a path where His mother cannot follow Him so quickly. But she hurries in a roundabout way in order to get hold of Him from another direction. As long as He keeps on running without looking about, she is unable to catch up with Him. But when He turns His head, roguishly and at the same time full of fear, He loses time, and by a hair’s breadth she almost catches hold of Him.

“Stop, stop!” she calls out, almost out of breath. But can He give in already? Can anyone give Him orders when He does not want to obey? And yet, what a joy! Yogi-s, who have prepared their mind in hard training during a long life of asceticism, self-discipline and study – from them God, in His capacity as the fullness of omnipotence and majesty, escapes, because He is quicker than the most nimble mind. When He is unwilling, neither thought nor word can reach Him. But she, the noble Yaśodā, the heavy cloud, may let herself be completely permeated by the sight of this fullness of beauty and charm and she may follow Him, this reckless, exuberant little cloud of loveliness, and almost catch up with Him!

He is clever. He knows how to make use of the terrain to His advantage. She is calling out: “King You are, oh Kṛṣṇa, King of the shrewd, the cunning and the deceivers!” Could there be a greater praise of God? Is there any ruse He does not use in order to challenge His associates to even greater self-sacrifice, driving them to despair and to the verge of breakdown? But does He not go too far now? Does He not exhaust her too much now? He quickly looks about. He cannot give in until her pretence of anger has vanished completely and she has put down the stick.

She will overstrain herself too much, His beloved mother. Absorbed in His līlā as the Child, seized with pity for His mother, He also loses His breath, as if He was already at the end of His strength. Her pity with Him must drive out the rest of her anger. She calls out to Him, begging Him to stop. Her heart is moved. But He makes a condition: she must put the stick aside. She is breathing heavily. He is weeping full of fear. She promises to put the stick aside. But has she not, just a moment ago, called out to Him: “If You are going to steal in the house, then have a close look at this stick!” Now He surrenders, still weeping and sobbing in fear. With His little hands He smears the black colour of His eyelids, mixed with tears, all over His moon-face, and His eyes are rolling, full of fear and helplessness.

Kṛṣṇa says in a piteous voice: “Mā, but you must not beat me!” How could she! His charming pleading and His nestling against her, His tender movements have won her over long ago. She knows that *He* will always triumph in the end. But poutingly she scolds Him: “Oh, You Thief of all thieves!” Oh, these are other words of praise! Yes, indeed, He *is* The Thief of all thieves. He steals the heart of all those who truly hear about Him. He steals the mind and senses of all those who see Him, He robs the reason of all those who only know Him as the fullness of majesty, glory and might. From all those who are to be seized by the mercy of His power of serving love of pure knowledge, He steals all those things, and the attachment to those things – when they obstruct the loving service of Him. From the sages, those who are totally free from ignorance of the nature of their own

ātmā, He steals the tranquillity and self-assurance, the peace in experiencing the ātmā's imperishable unity with the tranquil light of Brahma, and the peace in merging into this aura surrounding His transcendental form. From those who live in the awareness of the nature of the ātmā, He steals their revelling in the clarity of the joy that their own ātmā is. He robs them of the joy experienced when a true reflection of the Paramātmā is perceived in the mirror of their pure ātmā. He robs the bhakta-s and those who want to become bhakta-s not only of the attachment to the things of the world of incessant change, and consequently of the bitter disappointment that necessarily follows such attachment, but even of all interest in being freed from the agony of ignorance. He is HARI, the Thief of all thieves.

“If I am a thief, then all your ancestors are, too!” Yes, all her parents and relatives have long since stolen His heart through their paternal love for Him, and they steal the heart of all those who hear about this love, consisting of pure knowledge, and awaken the yearning to be allowed, sometime in the future, to serve those noble ancestors and relatives of Yaśodā.

“Tell me, how did the jar break?” – “By the punishment of the Almighty.” – “Who gave the monkeys ghī?” – “He, Who created the monkeys.”

Hearing the profound meaning of His answers, the mother smiles. But to her this is nothing but the sweet prattle of the Child. She continues to threaten and scold Him, saying that there is no use trying to speak nonsense. His misdeeds deserve a just punishment. She is scolding Him, to Whom – in His capacity as the fullness of glory and omnipotence – the sages sing their hymns from a distance, reverently praying with folded hands. Every word Yaśodā speaks bears evidence of the profundity of her experience of Him as the fullness of beauty and charm, and clearly shows that in her realisation of God, she is in no respect disturbed, neither by His deeds nor by His words – words and deeds that clearly and distinctly reveal that the fullness of omnipotence is present in Him at the same time. In Vraja, He experiences the fullness of His Own serving love of true knowledge for Himself, for God, not as the Lord, but as the Child. It is her unprecedented great fortune that, through her complete lack of reverence and submission, she only more and more intensifies His Self-experience of being God in His divine fullness of beauty, sweetness and unbounded exuberance.

What a great fortune for Dharā, who has now become *one* person with Yaśodā, and is allowed to serve Him as such! Fully absorbed in this mystery of Yaśodā's love for God, He can – He must – for her sake, be even more exuberant, be the Child even more.

“Mā, why am I to blame? Why are you so angry?” She is not angry any more, not since long – and she never was. She only tried to be, for His sake. But He weeps and sobs, and more and more, the fullness of beauty and charm breaks

through.

“Mā, you ran away so fast to save the milk. You don’t know that your anklets all of a sudden hit the jar so it broke into pieces. Why do you scold me? Is it my fault that God lets the monkeys come here to steal, is it? I have done My best. Every time I have tried to catch them.”

Furtively, He casts a quick glance at His hands – yes, they are quite clean. During His long flight He had cleverly wiped His hands on the walls. Not a trace of ghī to be found on His hands. “When I saw you with the stick in your hand, I ran away, full of fear. You had told Me to stay by the jar with the soured milk, and now you are angry because I did not stay there. But why are you threatening Me with the stick, Mā, why are you so merciless?”

He is still full of fear; His little body is trembling with fear; His little hand is shaking in her big hand. Oh, how terrified He was when she had caught up with Him from behind and seized Him. – Yes, it was quite impossible! He is far too small to smash the heavy jar filled with soured milk with a piece of stone all by Himself. Inattentively, she must have broken it herself in her hurry. And someone must have used the heavy mortar and left it upside-down. After all, He is still too small. Maybe, in His folly, He just wanted to catch the little monkeys. In my zeal, I have probably done Him wrong. But she must not admit this. He is *her* Child. He is always up to pranks, every day, every hour. He must learn to obey. A tight rein must be kept on Him. She must pretend to be thinking that everything is His fault and His misdeeds.

Dissemblance and falsehood for Kṛṣṇa’s sake, as an expression of unalloyed love and realisation of God as the fullness of beauty and charm; sincerity and truthfulness of the most noble-minded, as an expression of virtue in order to attain selfish peace and blissful salvation after death; or to please God as the fullness of majesty – these three are related to each other in the same way as the sun, a miserable oil lamp, and the moon.

“Your cheeky little mouth is like a king among all clever and shrewd excuses. You Thief of all thieves! You are a human child, but playing with the little monkeys, You have been affected by them and now You behave like a little monkey Yourself!”

That was too much! Were all His powers of persuasion in vain? Did the power of the play intend to initiate an even deeper experience of Himself as the fullness of beauty and charm?

Full of fear – and at the same time frightening her anew – He prattles: “Mā, then I will run into the woods like a little monkey, and stay there.”

Fourth Part

This gave her something to think about! “The Child has its own pride. It is quite possible that He runs off to the woods because I called Him a little monkey. And I have sent all my maids away, although they wanted to stay. But what is the use of calling them? No one can bring up a child better than its own mother. But there is plenty to do in the house. All my various duties are waiting now, for His sake. If I let Him loose, who knows, maybe He runs off to the woods, after all. I had better bind Him.”

She takes Him by the hand, and while striding across the courtyard she catches sight of a heavy mortar, lying on the ground, slim in its middle, massive and wide in its ends. This comes in handy for her, to bind the Child with a pliable, strong rope! Then He cannot hurt Himself and cannot run away!

“Now listen, You little thief! Your rolling eyes enchant everyone who sees You. But Your fear and your tears will not help You when it comes to Your mother! You do not listen to my words. I will bind You and go back to the house and quickly set about my duties. Bound to the mortar, You can show how strong You are and steal what you like!”

“Bind Me?” The mother seems to be fully determined. Looking around in anxiety and anger, and in a loud voice filled with tears, He calls out: “Mā, Mā Rohiṇī! Mā, where are you? Where is Balarāma? Come, come quickly!” But Rohiṇī and Balarāma are not in their house in the northern part of the courtyard. They have gone to Upānanda’s neighbouring village so His calling cannot reach their ears. Rohiṇī loves Him more than her own child. She would certainly have protected Him from being bound. If Balarāma had been there, the mother would have told *him*, who is a little older, to look after Kṛṣṇa, as she does quite often.

However, other women from the neighbouring houses hear His call. But only those upon whom the power of the play [līlā-śakti] bestows the gift to hear His call, because they are needed in the play that is to follow. One woman after another now hastens to Him. The sight of Him makes everyone both joyful and surprised at the same time. There He was, the little thief, who every now and then had come running to their houses, and when believing Himself to be unobserved had stolen butter and sweets, and had played dangerous, wild games with their children. How often had they come to Yaśodā, complaining. But each time Kṛṣṇa had played the role of the innocent so convincingly that Yaśodā, instead of chiding Kṛṣṇa, had only been disappointed with them. Actually, they had not wanted to complain, at all. Secretly, they had felt joy when He had stolen into their houses, playing His boyish pranks. Every now and then, they had secretly watched Him from a hiding

place. They could never get enough of seeing His captivating charm. Like one day, when He, hands and mouth filled with stolen sweet amusements, saw His reflection in a shiny pillar in the house, and took it for a mate, saying: “Pssst! Be quiet! Come, eat half of it, but you must not betray Me.” – Could they ever forget this? How sad they were when they heard that the day before He had been in the neighbouring house, playing this or that prank! Oh, why not in my house? They always thought this way, but outwardly they complained, calling Him “thief” or “rascal”. He is everything to them, and everything is His, and they are all His. This is a spontaneous realisation of the serving love, not some kind of consideration, not what we usually call, “to become aware of something”. The fullness of divine beauty keeps them under its spell. They are protected from the knowledge of omniscience and omnipotence, which are always present in this Child. Otherwise, the fullness of charming beauty would be repressed and covered up. Then the awareness of His omnipotence would force the women to stiff, dignified reverence. Since eternity, their ātmā, their heart, their body, their senses, everything they have, fully consists of eternal existence, unalloyed knowledge and true joy. Since eternity, it is their inherent nature to love Him in His capacity as the fullness of beauty and charm. With every word, every thought, every look and every deed they serve Him.

There He is crying now in His despair. He is calling for Rohiṇī. Then something very particular must have happened. He must have been up to something again! Curiosity is a musty vice in the world of incessant variability. But curiosity for Kṛṣṇa’s sake is an expression of the serving, knowledgeable love for God. His Own eternal companions are insatiable. At every moment, He *is* new and completely different. And moreover, even though His eternal associates see Him every day, every hour, all the time, again and again they experience Him as if they had never seen Him before. In their inner nature they are all inexhaustible: He, His associates and their realisation and love for Him. At every moment, He truly is new, different and unprecedented, and He is insatiable in experiencing Himself as inexhaustible beauty and charm in His Own co-players.

His repeated calling for Rohiṇī and Balarāma is such a wonderful pretext for the women of the neighbouring houses to be allowed to run over to Him. They know very well that Yaśodā is not in short of maids and female assistants. Without reason, they cannot, for His sake, over and over again leave their own chores and run over to Yaśodā’s house and disturb her with their visits. But today there is such a lovely pretext; they have heard and observed how one woman after the other in the surrounding houses has run over to Him. Each of them finds an excuse and a justification to go there, following their lead. Just as disgusting as the mass instinct of the world of continual change is, just as lovely is the contagion of curiosity,

pretext and self-justification for the sake of Kṛṣṇa's joy.

Close to the mortar, the mother is thus holding His hand tightly. His anxiety, His tears, His fear, His unwillingness, and His eyes rolling in anger, His helpless gaze, now pleadingly turned towards His mother, now seeking for help, and the firm determination in His mother's features arouse compassion in all the women. And yet, they also have the gratification of redress in their hearts, and full of mutual understanding they smile at each other: so the thief has been caught in his own house, at last! Looking at the mother, their eyes say: you did not want to believe us. And today, you yourself have caught Him red-handed!

But they also know: Yaśodā loves Him so immensely. It is her love that makes her so strict today. They understand that she cannot do otherwise – she must punish Him, regardless of the pain it may give herself and the great compassion they all have for the sobbing Child.

From her hair, already loosening, Yaśodā takes a fine silk ribbon to put it around His tender body and tie Him to the mortar. Surprisingly enough, the silk ribbon is too short. Quickly, she takes another piece of ribbon that is still in her hair, and ties it to the first one. But it is two fingers short. The women look at the Child in amazement. Both were exhausted from the wild running. But what is the use! She cannot allow herself to be influenced by His weeping, His helpless look, His childish unwillingness and obstinacy to be bound. She cannot yield to her fatigue. Everything for Kṛṣṇa's sake, even if it hurts Him in His lack of judgement – and herself infinitely more.

Her eyes fall on the women, whom she had not noticed at all until now. She asks them to bring fine, soft ropes from their houses, ropes for churning of soured milk, a large selection of which are always kept in every household.

One of the women brings one piece of rope – too short. Another one brings another piece of rope – still too short. They bring the most exquisite ropes, soft and yet strong. How wonderful, now they can serve Him and His mother at the same time! The most precious things they have in their homes are His. Yaśodā is very skilful in binding. Every single one of His Own co-players is unsurpassed in perfection and dexterity when it comes to rendering service to Him. The swift running and gathering of the women attracts other women who rush there with their small children, bringing new ropes, and they rejoice at the opportunity to have a close, thorough look at Him. The children gaze in open-eyed wonder at their Kṛṣṇa, their Leader, their Friend and Hero. They all feel deeply for Him. But they can hardly grasp what is happening. Who could?

Carefully and deftly, rope after rope are tied together, and yet they are two

fingers' breadth short, again and again. The wondrous Child! As long as He does *not* want to, could anyone bind Him? Any other woman would have given up long ago. The women look at each other and say to Yaśodā: “Give up! Something miraculous is taking place. There must be some mystery here. The long rope of joined pieces reaches around your house but not round the body of the Child!” He is the little Child. Nothing has changed in Him. They can all see that with their own eyes. The strong, long ropes cannot bind His tender body – just like dark, dense masses of clouds cannot rise above a bold mountain peak.

With a gentle smile, the women say to the mother: “You mistress of Vraja! The Thief’s charming beauty enchants everyone! His enchanting power even makes the thief of all thieves tremble. Have you fallen victim to His magic power?”

To the mother all this is still like a strange joke and she replies: “What are you talking about? I know quite well that you do not say what you think. You pretend to be indignant, but in your heart you are on Kṛṣṇa’s side. It is just pretence that you chide Him as a thief. You certainly have some secret magic power which you use in order to prevent me from binding Him!”

The women answer with a laugh: “No, certainly not! We do not know anything about such secret powers.”

The mother gives credence to their sincere words. It occurs to her that the sage Garga, who had held the little Child in his arms and given Him His name, had spoken of a great divine power that would always be near the Child. “It is probably this power that prevents me from binding Him. The Child does not know anything of all this. Looking at the down-hearted Child, who is still crying, she becomes more and more firm in her resolve. He is my *Child!* If I let Him triumph today, He will never obey and never learn how to behave with dignity, befitting a child of the king of Vraja. And in the end He will only harm Himself. By her glance she commands for still more ropes to be brought, and with even more eagerness she sets about her task.

He Himself is the only and true bond, the Friend of all. How can a bond bind the one who Himself is the bond of all. For His sake, everything is joined together. Since eternity, and through His Own power of supreme knowledge and experience of true joy [saṁvit- and hlādinī-śakti], He Himself as the fullness of beauty and charm has joined together everyone in Vraja to into a boundless, inseparable unity with Himself. In Vaikuṅṭha, His majestic realm, He Himself as the fullness of majesty has joined together all of His Own to into the same kind of unity. In a part manifestation of Himself, in His capacity as Viṣṇu, through a mere glance from afar, He has joined together all the universes in the bosom of Māyā to into an inseparable union with Himself. All the ātmā-s, who forgetful of God and their

own true self roam in the different universes, are inseparably connected to Him through the Paramātmā, the immanent God, who accompanies them all. And yet He, Kṛṣṇa, is the fullness of beauty and charm, is the Child, and she is His mother. She must be able to bind Him, she only has to endeavour in the proper way!

She sees that all the ropes are not sufficient. Even as the fullness of charming beauty, He never ceases to be the fullness of infinity, although it becomes manifest only occasionally. Here it becomes manifest, however, but the fullness of beauty and charm and the serving love of true knowledge for Him are too powerful, they enchant His mother. She does not experience the fullness of infinity and majesty. He is fully the Child. But even as the Child He is full infinity, unlimited by time and space, consisting of eternal being, pure consciousness and true joy. Child and infinity, both at the same time. Yaśodā under the spell of the serving, knowledgeable love for the fullness of beauty and charm, and He under the spell of this love – then there is no possibility of perceiving His infinity. When and as long as He does not *want* to let Himself be bound, His infinity is manifest, and this is the reason why she does not succeed in this very simple task of binding Him.

The women have given up all hope of seeing His mother being victorious. It is not out of fear that they obey the mistress of Vraja and quickly bring forth an ever greater amount of new ropes; no, they have been affected by Yaśodā's eagerness and are filled with excitement to see how the matter will end. It is serious. Dumbfounded and wide-eyed, the little boys look at the scene. It is their triumph! Their Kṛṣṇa, even when He weeps and is helpless, is always the great hero. The women look seriously at the pains their mistress takes, and yet they smile inwardly, deep within their hearts, because with their eyes they are drinking the Boy's charming sweetness, thereby fulfilling the meaning of their eyes. But they cannot laugh openly. For Kṛṣṇa's sake, they always have to respect His mother, their mistress.

Yaśodā is almost at the end of her strength. And yet, her enthusiasm and eagerness does not yield. Kṛṣṇa is sobbing, because the mother has still not abandoned the will to deprive Him of His freedom of play. Out of compassion for Him, His playmates also weep.

Since long, the flowers have fallen from Yaśodā's loosened hair. Because of the strain she is completely out of breath, her body is shivering, bathing in perspiration. She almost feels as if she were defeated by her Child. But she must not give in. Her eagerness grows more and more; yes, it is as though there was a divine enthusiasm in her. "Even if it costs me my life, I must do everything I can for Him and I must bind him!" The others stand there agape. How will it end?

With eyes suffused in tears, He takes a glance at His mother: the beloved mother, she has reached the limit of her capacity. Joyfully, she has taken on the most extreme effort for His sake, because she loves Him so much. One thought, a ray of His mercy – He gives His consent – She may bind Him. She did not hesitate to give *all* her strength. Only this kind of love can bind Him. To be bound by her is so easy, when He wants it. As long as He did not want to be bound, the fullness of infinity and majesty was manifest. It is present even now, but it has ceased to be effective.

Fifth Part

The ropes had been two fingers' breadth short. His unwillingness had induced the power of the *līlā* to make the infinity, the boundlessness of time and space, which the Child always is, manifest. His willingness induced the power of the *līlā* to make the infinity, which the Child always is, unmanifest. He was not willing to let Himself be bound, until His mother, exerting herself to the utmost, was at the end of her strength. Only such exertion evokes His mercy.

Such is the life and endeavour of all those who, seized by the serving love of pure realisation, want to serve those who are His Own and Him – *endeavour to the utmost, and His mercy*. Without these two conditions, all service of God and thereby all will to know and all will to love are in vain. This is not only valid for those who are His Own on the highest level, those who play with Him eternally in the realm of the fullness of charming sweetness and carefree exuberance, but on every level.

It is the mother's joy to be allowed to completely exhaust herself for the sake of His joy, in incessantly increasing eagerness be allowed to lavishly spend herself for the sake of Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa's joy is to experience the strength of His Own co-players' serving love of true knowledge for His sake. Through them He experiences the inexhaustible depth in Himself as the fullness of beauty, sweetness and carefree exuberance to the highest possible degree when, in spite of the manifestation of the full infinity, which He as the Child always is, this infinity is not perceived at all, due to the spell and influence of the realisation of God as the fullness of charm. Could there be a greater joy than to be bound by His mother?

She bound Him to the mortar, Him, Who has neither inside nor outside, around Whom a rope could never be bound. To Him there is no before and no after, no past and no future. In relation to time and space and to His substance He is unlimited, endless eternity. He is *all* there is, because He is unlimited being, knowledge and joy. Indeed, His realm, His Own associates, the love, all is He Himself. The shadow, i.e. all that is in our world, *never* touches Him or His Own or anything at all in His realm. Even the ropes He is bound with, the houses, the flowers and the animals fully consist of pure knowledge and joy, and it is for this reason they can finally bind Him.

All being is founded in Him. Hence He is called: "That Being, which is not dependent on anything, which never needs anything beyond its Own Self." He is *the One without a second* (*advaya*). Human thinking and striving can never grasp Him, thus He is called "Adhokṣaja". His being, His form never consist of the same substance as that of which the universes are created; thus He is called "Avyakta".

He is called “Martyaliṅga”, since He, as the fullness of charm and beauty, is two-armed, i.e. has the characteristics of a human, although He never *is* a human or has a human, mortal body. The expression “He has the form of a human being” implies that the human form resembles *Him*, as the shadow resembles the light. But He does not *have* a human form. – Since eternity, Yaśodā has the eternal maternal love for Him, although she never *is* His mother. She originates in *Him*; nevertheless, she has the love of pure knowledge for Him, the fullness of beauty, as if she were His mother. As a Child He submits Himself to this love of pure realisation, experiencing Himself as the fullness of charm. She binds Him, as if He *only* were the Child, as if the ever present infinity in Him did not exist at all, as if He had an inside and an outside! However, her eternal realisation of God does not go astray, since He is *the unity of the – to our thinking – impossible opposites: Child and infinity!*

He, Who is the Origin of everything, He, Who is always independent, He fully yields to His Own associates’ serving love of unadulterated knowledge. In the form of His Own servant He fully submits Himself to Himself. He, to Whom endless universes and their creators submit themselves, He experiences it as joy to be bound to the mortar by His mother. *This* grace, to be allowed to bind Him, is granted to Yaśodā. In this way she proclaims and disseminates God’s glory (yaśodā), His renown of being fully under the spell of this fully self-sacrificing, serving love of pure realisation. To bind Him, the infinite Child, is Yaśodā’s privilege. And it is *only* Yaśodā who is capable of doing this. And to bind Him, the infinite Youth, is Rādhā’s privilege. And it is *only* Rādhā who is capable of doing this. Not even the most perfect servant among His eternal associates – who serves Him through eternity through His Own serving love of pure realisation – and who serves Him as the fullness of majesty, glory and might, is capable of doing this. Not even Lakṣmī, Nārāyaṇa’s most beloved śakti, who never leaves God as the fullness of omnipotence, is granted the mercy that is bestowed upon Yaśodā, ever. The serving love of unadulterated knowledge for the fullness of omnipotence excludes the experience, service and realisation of God as the fullness of charm. It has to be like this, as follows already from the fact that God as the fullness of omnipotence does not experience Himself as the fullness of charm. This does not imply that He Himself is limited, since He is both, the fullness of omnipotence and the fullness of charming beauty. And He is much more than these two. In His realm, He is *always* the fullness, the infinite. He is *always* form. At the same time, all of His Own forms of being in His Own realm are *simultaneously* present *everywhere*, without mixing with each other. This may be contrary to the logical laws of poor mankind, but who has told man that the laws of *his brain* are the laws prevailing in God’s realm? The laws we experience to be binding in our empirical

world, and which we in immense presumptuousness declare to be universally valid, are laws valid in our universe. They are intended for those ātmā-s who have turned their backs on God and who, by means of a fictitious I, through their mind and body want to experience a world conditioned by time and space.

By his own efforts, not even the most eminent and noble human being is capable of perceiving even a trace of God's realm. Only the ātmā who is touched by God's Own power of unadulterated knowledge has the capacity, through this power in the form of serving love of pure realisation, to totally exhaust himself in endless exultation to His joy and perceive something of God's mystery.

God as the fullness of charming beauty, sweetness and unrestricted exuberance, Yaśodā's Son, cannot be attained by those who still believe they are human beings and have not yet grasped that mind, soul and body are nothing but coverings, alien to the nature of the ātmā. Nor can He be attained by those who immerse themselves in the realisation of the nature of the ātmā and in the boundless, tranquil light of the formless Brahma, which is the aura or the formless effulgence of God's Own form and thereby of all His avatāra-s. As mentioned above, the avatāra-s are those eternal forms of God's being Who, without the slightest change, "descend" from the world of space- and timelessness to the world of space and time. In this context, "descend" does *not* imply spatial direction, but expresses differences in value.

The Son of the gopī, Kṛṣṇa, can neither be attained by those who indulge in the realisation of the nature of the ātmā – who is nothing but a tiny spark of true knowledge and eternal being – nor by those who experience the substantial oneness of their ātmā with the Paramātmā – the foundation of the world, God as the cause of the evolution of the world. In the latter case, the ātmā disappears into this unity – just like a deer becomes invisible when it disappears into the woods – without ever losing his own identity. The tiny spark ātmā never becomes God Himself, either qualitatively or quantitatively. It is evident that the realisation of the formless Brahma and the ātmā does not lead to Him, Kṛṣṇa, as not even Lakṣmī, who eternally serves Nārāyaṇa, God as the fullness of majesty, is ever successful in her attempts to attain Kṛṣṇa, the fullness of beauty and charm, the Child of Yaśodā.

And yet, they could all attain Him! When the immense longing to serve those who serve Yaśodā has been bestowed upon a person, then his ātmā is able to attain Kṛṣṇa, comfortably and safely. And this immense longing comes through the bhakta, who bestows the godsent mercy of serving love and realisation of God as the fullness of beauty and charm.

Lack of love, however, the condition of *not having enough* love, makes Him unattainable. The greatest lack of love shows itself in THE DESIRE TO KNOW, THE DESIRE TO EXPERIENCE, THE DESIRE TO FORCE ONE’S WAY CLOSE TO GOD.⁴ This is not only foul selfishness but also lack of the right will to let oneself be enlightened by the wisdom of the Word Revelation.

The foremost of the Upanishads, Brahmā [who is entrusted by God with the task of manifesting the forms and shapes in the universe], Uddhava, Kṛṣṇa’s intimate friend – all those who have perceived something of the greatness of the love of God as the fullness of beauty and charm, and the greatness of those who are His Own associates, have prayed for the fortune to be allowed to be a speck of dust under the holy lotus feet of those who are His Own in His sacred realm, to be allowed to touch those feet, i.e. to be allowed to anoint themselves with the dust from the feet of those who serve Him, Kṛṣṇa.

The ātmā, this infinitesimal spark of pure consciousness and joy – which he does not even know himself to be at present – who in endless lives of forgetfulness of God wrongly perceives himself as man, animal or plant, could he ever, in delusion of grandeur, consider himself worthy of being used as a thread in the rope used by Yaśodā when she binds the Child!

Is not Lakṣmī – the most beloved śakti of Nārāyaṇa, God as the fullness of omnipotence – a warning example? Since eternity, she is fully conscious of being Nārāyaṇa’s most beloved. She Herself *is* Nārāyaṇa in the form of Lakṣmī. And yet, all her endeavour, all her wishes are of no use. All her sacrifices are in vain. She cannot leave the conception “I am Lakṣmī”, and therefore she lacks the desire to serve the gopī-s, Kṛṣṇa’s most beloved companions in Vraja. In the shadow of the real Vraja, the realm which is available to our experience, opposite Vṛndāvana on the other side of the river Yamunā, a little grove is situated, with a small village. At this place in His realm of Vraja, Lakṣmī once dwelled, practising severe asceticism in order to be able to experience something of Kṛṣṇa’s greatness – as the fullness of beauty and charm. And yet she was never allowed to cross the river. The potency forming the eternal play of Kṛṣṇa kept her away!

To be allowed to know the true nature of Vraja, the bhakta-s’ mercy is required. From their hearts and lips the words consisting of eternal existence, true knowledge and unlimited joy flow, words dealing with Vraja. Through the ear of those who long for the true will to be allowed to serve, these words of mercy reach into their heart, into their ātmā. According to the degree of willingness to let oneself be enlightened by these words, which are transcendental knowledge and

⁴ To satisfy the intellect (the thirst for knowledge) and the emotional life (the craving for enjoyment and experience), and not understand that the pure, unadulterated bhakti is free from all ulterior motives, and that even the free jīva is always subordinated to those who are God’s eternal companions, and that the service of those who serve those who serve God directly pleases Him the most.

have the power to awaken true knowledge of God, it can be known what Vraja is, and what constitutes the greatness of the love and service of those who are His Own.

God's Revelation, God's *mercy* consists in bringing about the encounter with the bhakta-s. Through their words, which are the Word-form of His Own form, His realm, His līlā, and those who are His Own, the serving love of pure realisation is conveyed. These words deliver the ātmā from his oblivion of God and enable him to be *willing* to surrender to the serving love of pure realisation.

It is Kṛṣṇa's great mercy that the Dāmodara-līlā is conveyed in the *Bhāgavatam* and other Revelations of God's Word. It is great mercy that, at first sight, this līlā seems to be a līlā within time and space, because what is beyond time and space would be unavailable to us beforehand, if it did not from time to time appear to be enacted within time and space.

The power of the serving love of pure realisation is just as infinite, eternally present everywhere, as God and His realm themselves are.

Just like the infinite realm once became manifest within the boundaries of the district of Mathurā, without changing the least as regards its contents, the serving love of pure realisation – unrestricted in its mode of being – becomes manifest through the lips of the bhakta-s. Kṛṣṇa and the secret of His love enter through the ear of the one who is longing for His service and touch his heart. However, the ear that wants to intoxicate itself with the words of the līlā is only able to perceive the shadow of these words, and instead of true realisation, misconceptions and errors enter the heart. The bhakta is the mouth of a spring, through which the eternal knowledge of God is flowing. The ear and heart of those who are longing to serve is the chalice. The eternal Words of His līlā are knowledge of God, intelligible through the will and the power to serve.

Sixth Part

Yaśodā has accomplished her wondrous feat. Kṛṣṇa, however, has not stopped weeping. He has let Himself be bound. He is fully the punished Child. The mother looks at her work. A look of triumph. And to Him, this is the most beautiful look of all. He wanted to see this look of triumph. Actually, it was not at all *her* triumph, it was a triumph for Kṛṣṇa's sake, and thus His triumph. Neither the revelation of His infinity, nor the fact that it was *His* compassion with her exhaustion, *His mercy*, that made it possible for her to be able to bind Him at all, had in any way disturbed her experience of Kṛṣṇa as the fullness of charming beauty.

She takes a quick glance at the amazed faces of the astounded women, who do not believe their eyes. She has managed to bind Him, at last! Then Yaśodā breaks up in order to see to her domestic duties. She looks at Kṛṣṇa's little friends, telling them: "Now, have a good look at Him! Keep an eye on Him! If He should somehow free Himself, you must call for me at once, is that clear?" Accompanied by the bevy of women she leaves the scene, leaving the still weeping Kṛṣṇa bound to the heavy mortar, surrounded by His friends.

After a short while, He stops weeping. His roguish countenance brightens up. Could this foolish mortar restrict His plays? His roguish friends are there, and with a jerk He crawls ahead, amid their cheers, and with all His might He drags the heavy mortar along.

He really cheers up, it does not cross His mind that this bond is a bond. Amid the merry laughter of His friends, He drags the heavy mortar along, first slowly, then faster and faster, passing the house of the parents, and onto the path leading to the village road. Oh, there are two wonderful trees, whose stems have grown together, resembling a "V". It would be a delight to drag the heavy mortar right up to these trees – and then the rope will snap by itself, when the heavy mortar remains hanging in the narrow end of this "V"!

These two trees are no ordinary trees. In the same way as Kṛṣṇa enters into this world of time and space as if He were the Child of His parents, all His companions enter as well, so that the world will not be able to understand that God and His Own associates have come. Madhukaṇṭha, "honey throat", and Snigdhaṇṭha, "sweet throat", are two bards who at the great feasts in Nanda's realm Vraja [Goloka] delight Nanda and all inhabitants with their epical songs. Once, two followers of Rudra had arrogantly done an injustice to Nārada, the bestower of divine wisdom. Their hearts were fully dedicated to God, but when the power of the līlā wishes, wondrous things happen, bringing eternal good to all

beings. As if under a strange impulse, they had committed an offence against Nārada, who blessed them. He gave them a blessing which the ignorant world conceives as a curse, saying that they were to be two inseparable trees, but through Kṛṣṇa they would once again be restored to their original state. But even as trees they would never forget who they are. These two followers of Rudra entered into the being of Madhukaṇṭha and Snigdhaṇṭha, God's two eternal companions, who became visible in the līlā of Gokula in the form of two trees.

The power of Kṛṣṇa's līlā [yogamaya-śakti] always aims at fulfilling the wishes of His bhakta-s, such as Nārada, and now it intends to liberate these two followers of Rudra.

The boys think that Kṛṣṇa is seeking the cooling shade of these two huge trees. Laughing, He has now arrived there. He crawls between the two trunks, but the mortar is too wide and with a light jerk He bumps it against the two trunks, growing as from one root. – A dreadful sound is heard, which penetrates the universe. It is a reverberation that makes all the inhabitants of Vraja unconscious for more than an hour. It has to be like that, otherwise everyone could have seen what happened: The mighty trees are lying on the ground. In front of the Child, two noble youths are standing with suppliant raised hands, praying for the gift that their lips may sing His praise forever; their ears only hear about Him forever; their hands serve Him; their minds always contemplate His lotus feet; their head bow down before His realm; their eyes behold those who have dedicated themselves to Him forever.

Their wish is granted and He bestows the boon of the serving love of pure knowledge for Himself on them.

When He has taken leave of them, the two followers of Rudra disappear, returning to their own realm, and the bards go to that realm of Vraja [Goloka], which does not become visible in this world.

Kṛṣṇa has not been willing or able to free Himself from the bonds of motherly love, as these bonds are His Own pride. But, as by pure chance, His mere touch has liberated the two trees from all bonds.

Open-mouthed, the boys had witnessed all this. Of the words of the hymn of praise they had not understood anything.

Meanwhile, all the others had recovered from the great fear that the power of the play had raised in them, putting them in a state where they were unaware of themselves for one hour – in order to keep them at a distance.

Now, they all come running. Nanda, the father, Rohiṇī with Balarāma and all the women, children and other inhabitants of Gokula. Nanda sees the Child. He is bound! Nanda looks around, releases the Child, puts Him on his lap, and fondles Him gently. Where is Yaśodā? Did he not just see her in the crowd that came

rushing to the spot?

Kṛṣṇa experiences His Own loveliness through His father's love for Him. The father understands Him and asks: "But this is terrible! Who on earth has bound You here?" Nanda knows all too well that the mother has done this, but he also knows that his sympathy pleases Kṛṣṇa. Quickly, Kṛṣṇa looks about, and whispers in His father's ear: "Mā has bound Me!"

Nanda knows how much the mother is affected by this, he knows that she has done this only for His own good and that it almost turned into a disaster. Everyone knew these two trees. They were strong and by no means decayed. Something inauspicious has been going on, but as if by a miracle the Child has been saved.

Nanda and the others ask Kṛṣṇa's playmates how this all happened. "A light touch by the Child and the trees fell aside, two radiant youths ..." – All this is nothing but silly talk of the boys, this is simply not possible! The children must be inventing all this, they know just as little as we do.

On His father's lap, Kṛṣṇa keeps everyone fully under the spell of His charm.

Finally, the father takes Him along to the Yamunā for a bathe, where wise Brahmins pronounce benedictions on the Child. Together with Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma the father has his morning meal. Out of grief, Yaśodā stays out of the way. In the evening, Rohiṇī and other women come and tell them that Yaśodā has been fasting all day in distress, and out of shame not uttered a single word to anyone, silently attending to her duties.

Holding the Child in his arms, Nanda asks Him: "Don't You want to go to your mother?" Kṛṣṇa: "No, I don't want to. I want to stay with you – day and night!" Then the aunts, the wives of Nanda's brothers, ask Him: "From whose breast do You want to drink?" Kṛṣṇa: "I want to drink hot milk with sugar candy!" Then everyone ask Him: "But with whom do You want to play and have fun?" Kṛṣṇa: "With Pā and Balarāma." Nanda asks Him: "Why don't You want to stay with Rohiṇī?" Kṛṣṇa: "She left Me alone and went away." And He sheds a few tears in anger. Then Rohiṇī says: "Why are You so hard on us? The mother suffers without You!" But with His eyes filled with tears, Kṛṣṇa just looks at His father, giving no answer. With gestures, Rohiṇī assigns Balarāma to go to Kṛṣṇa and entice Him into coming along with him. Kṛṣṇa rejects Balarāma's intervention and with His little arms He clings to Nanda's neck and weeps, looking imploringly at His father. And God's charming beauty lays the father completely under a spell.

But the father knows the strength of Kṛṣṇa's love for His mother. In order to entice this love, hidden behind His rejection, he shows the Child his raised hand: "Shall I punish the mother?" This was more than Kṛṣṇa could bear. Imploringly,

He takes a firm hold of His father's hand. Then Nanda says: "Kṛṣṇa, as things are now with Your mother – she does not eat, and grieves – what will You do in the end?"

Now He cannot restrain Himself any longer. The great longing for the mother breaks through. Weeping, He calls out: "Where is Mā?" "Where is Mā?" Then Rohiṇī takes Him into her arms and hurries into the house, to Yaśodā. Oh, how quick He is! When He is set loose, He immediately rushes to the mother and clings to her neck. The mother is totally overwhelmed, clasping Him to her bosom. She weeps and sobs, and all the women around her are weeping. "He has escaped from such a danger, and it could have ended so badly!"

Blessed is the serving love of pure realisation. Yaśodā experiences God's charming beauty and worries and grieves for the sake of the Child, in Whom all infinity is present.

The spell of His charming loveliness is stronger than her worries and grief. She offers Him her breast, and full of bliss He makes up for what was withdrawn from Him in the early morning. She experiences His charming beauty, and He experiences His charming beauty in her serving love of pure knowledge. – Thereby, all the turbulent events of the day have almost vanished from her heart. Together with Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma, she then sits down to eat, with Rohiṇī and the other women around them.

Nanda, however, like the other elders, is deeply worried. Many uncanny things have happened in this place. Is that because the town Mathurā and the evil king Kāṁsa with his demonic friends are so close? It is true that Mathurā is situated on the other side of the river, but still, it is an eery neighbourhood. One could never know...

Several years before Kṛṣṇa's appearance, they had lived in Nandagrāma, at the foot of the Nandīśvara mountain. Perhaps it would be more advisable to leave this place and move to Vṛhadvana, stay there for a while and then move on to Nandagrāma.

But until they can hold a meeting and discuss with each other, and everyone can finally leave together, all measures must be taken so that Kṛṣṇa is never left alone, not even for a moment. Nanda instructs Yaśodā to always carry the Child with her in her garment and not to leave Him alone, not even for a moment. Nanda knows that the Child could not be better looked after and protected by anyone else than her. She had already had this thought in her mind, but to Nanda and all the others, to Kṛṣṇa, and not least to herself, His exuberant plays were such a source of joy. Everyone finds it hard to deprive Him of His freedom of play. But as He is very much looking forward to the journey, the wonderful grove Vṛhadvana, and new, new plays, the time up to the departure is easy for Him. After this exciting

day, it is so lovely to be quite, quite close to each other – she, the mother and He, The God of beauty, loveliness and carefree exuberance.

The inhabitants of Vraja now have a new name for Him: “Dāmodara”, i.e. He who has a “dama”, a rope around His “udara”, body. In joy and in jest they call Him that.

Conclusion

God's names, His realm and His play are eternal. When He, His realm and His play shine forth in the world of time and space, then He reveals Himself, His realm and His play as a sequence of events in time and space. This does *not* imply that the laws of our world of time and space are suspended; on the contrary, the wonder is that He and His play *seemingly* follow the laws of our world, *without* being subjected to them *in reality*.

This play has a special appeal for those who are His Own co-players and for Himself. It has a special significance for Him and those who are His Own. It is an eternal play, manifesting itself in time and space.

In the Play that *does not* become visible in time and space, i.e. in Goloka, He is the eternal Youth. In that realm Kṛṣṇa does not manifest the form of the Child. There Yaśodā *sees* the Child in Him, although He *is* the Youth.

In the manifested līlā, however [in Gokula], He manifests the form of the Child and she is allowed to bind Him. The fullness of beauty, loveliness and exuberance, which Kṛṣṇa is, is intensified in the manifest līlā, and in consequence the serving love of pure realisation is intensified.

The name “Dāmodara”, which becomes known in the course of this līlā, proclaims Yaśodā's greatness, makes herself and Kṛṣṇa renowned through this līlā. Kṛṣṇa fully submits Himself to this serving love of pure realisation, which fully sacrifices itself for the sake of His joy.

His mercy works in the way that He brings about the encounter with His bhakta-s, from whose lips words stream that are identical with the līlā itself, words that arouse the serving love of pure realisation. This serving love of pure realisation, which is called bhakti, is Kṛṣṇa's Own potency of pure knowledge and joyful experience [saṁvit- and hlādinī-sakti]. Through this power, He draws the ātmā towards Himself, and He Himself succumbs to this power of attraction.

The gateway to the realm of bhakti is not human virtue of the most excellent kind, nor to have a character of the most noble kind, nor severe asceticism, nor strenuous study of the Sanskrit word cover of the eternal Word, nor realisation of the nature of the ātmā; only the mercy of the bhakta-s.

To the serving love of pure realisation for Kṛṣṇa, to the fullness of charming sweetness and carefree exuberance, to the mysterious dark Thief and Robber of the eyes, heart and senses, leads only *one* form of this serving love of pure realisation – that bhakti of which *Bhāgavatam* X.9.21 says: “The bhakti for Yaśodā, the serving love of pure realisation that wants to serve *her*, is the only way to bhakti for Kṛṣṇa Himself, yes, it *is* the bhakti for Kṛṣṇa Himself.”

Serving love of pure realisation for God is the beginning, the middle and the end; it is its own origin, sustenance and aim. It does not know any “why”, just like He Himself does not know any “why”.

Man’s life is enslaved by aims and purposes. The bhakta, however, does not know why and for what purpose he serves and loves God, His Own eternal associates and other bhakta-s. Kṛṣṇa’s Own eternal companions and those who are His bhakta-s have this bhakti, which does not originate in man or his ātmā but flows from God and flows back into Him, and therefore they are so dear to *Him*, more dear and precious than His Own self. That is the reason why the bhakti for those who are His Own is more dear and precious *to Him* than the bhakti for Himself.

Serving love of pure knowledge for Yaśodā is the power that gives knowledge, realisation of Kṛṣṇa. He is the eternal, infinite fullness of charming sweetness and pure exuberance, consisting of eternal being, pure knowledge and true joy. To serve in love, to know, to realise is a unity. Knowledge follows according to the degree of serving love, and serving love follows according to the degree of knowledge. The fullness of charming beauty is the innermost secret of God, which is God Himself. To know Him, to experience Him in the most profound way is to realise and experience His infinite Self, Himself as the fullness of beauty and charm. The deepest serving, realising love is the love for Him as the fullness of beauty and charm. This love wants to *serve*, hence it has knowledge. This love has knowledge, not due to the will to have this knowledge, but due to the will to serve.

The Dāmodara-līlā is not an invitation to strive for the happiness and bliss of beholding God. Such a motive is the safest way never to perceive even a breath of bhakti and the charming beauty that Kṛṣṇa is.

The Dāmodara-līlā wants to arouse in the heart the longing for the mercy of the bhakta-s, the mercy through which Kṛṣṇa can bestow serving love of pure knowledge for Yaśodā – when He so wishes. He is always submissive to the serving love of pure knowledge of His bhakta-s. When a bhakta finds us ready to receive the seed of bhakti, when he finds in us the spontaneous, prompt willingness to act in accordance with the conviction that bhakti is the eternal means *and* end – and when the bhakta then asks Kṛṣṇa, there is no doubt that He, through His bhakta, will bestow this mercy of serving love of pure knowledge and thereby Himself.

No one receives either more or less than what he has accomplished himself. Deeds done for our own good here, and for our eternal bliss after death, have the human I at the centre, not God. From this I, and for the sake of this I, all human, mundane and religious endeavour takes place. But according to his structure, the

ātmā does *not* belong to this world of Māyā or oblivion of God. He is a stranger in the world of this I. Because of his lack of willingness to serve, the ātmā got into the coverings of flesh, mind and soul, with which he identifies himself through ignorance. This I does never have access to the realm of serving love.

But when a person is willing to render service to the bhakta-s, then this is the result of the fact that he has already served bhakta-s in a previous life, and proves that the ātmā has already been lightly touched by a first ray of God's mercy.

No one intrudes upon the freedom of an ātmā who is *not* willing to serve God in love. But the world is arranged in such a way that God – Who is always present in close proximity to the ātmā in every being, as the inner Guide – makes sure that an encounter with a bhakta take place once a person even slightly perceives that the ultimate purpose of a human being is to completely expend himself in his service of God, and that it is a delusion to think that God's mercy consists in guaranteeing the satisfaction of his physical, mental and religious needs.

God's mercy consists in the fact that we *will* find His bhakta-s when we honestly long for the serving love of pure knowledge for God and those who are His Own. This inevitable encounter with the bhakta-s is the unheard-of grace that God shows man. The Paramātmā, however, is not Kṛṣṇa Himself, He is only His partial manifestation. The Paramātmā is the fullness of majesty, glory and grandeur, that aspect of Nārāyaṇa which is facing the world.

Kṛṣṇa, however, is the fullness of charming beauty, is the eternal play, which in serving love of pure knowledge is intensified, from eternity to eternity, without ever being exhausted.

In serving love of pure realisation, we pray to the great bhakta, our Guru and master: Show us the mercy of bestowing on us the serving love of pure knowledge, because this power is the only power through which we can listen to this Dāmodara-līlā, understand it and speak about it together in the right way. You are one of His Own, appearing in this world of incessant change, without belonging to it. We pray for the power to serve you lovingly, in pure knowledge, because serving love in pure knowledge for you is serving love of pure knowledge for the maidservants of Yaśodā, for Yaśodā and for Kṛṣṇa Himself. Give us the power to celebrate this month of Dāmodara properly through loving service of true knowledge.

In love and respect I bow down to the Guru. In love and respect I bow down to Dāmodara. In love and respect I bow down to the serving love of pure knowledge.