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KR̥ṢṢṢNA'S DĀMODARA-LĪLĀ

Rendering based on passages from the
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

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

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

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”.

² More or less corresponding to the month of November.

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*.