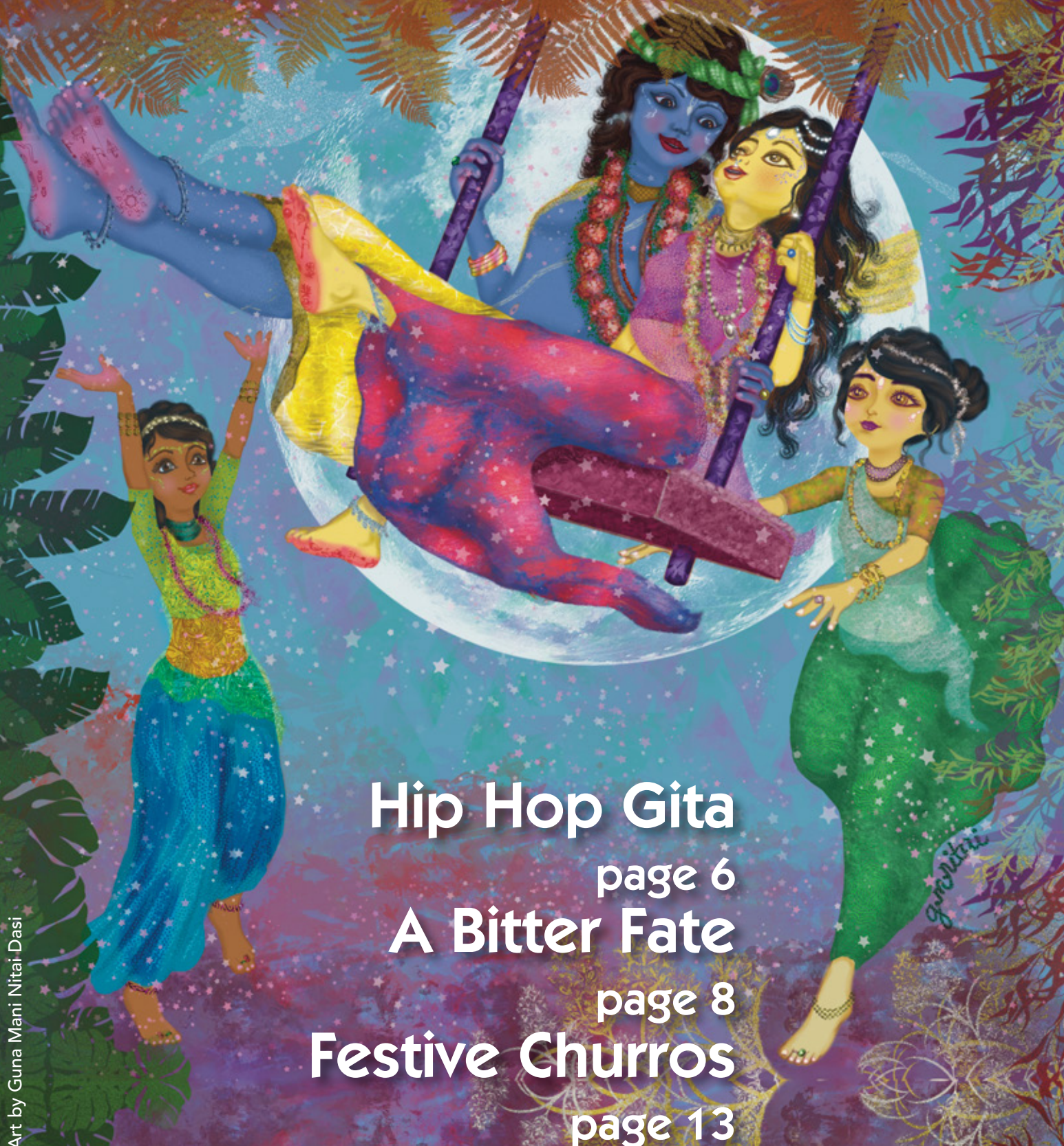




INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR KRISHNA CONSCIOUSNESS
Founder Acharya: His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

HARE KRISHNA NEWS

November / December 2020



Hip Hop Gita

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Swing Festival

On The Cover

Art by Guna Mani Nitai Dasi

I am originally from Mauritius but moved to Melbourne, Australia in 2007 to complete my Bachelor of Commerce degree. That is where I started my devotional life and met my beloved spiritual master. I had the great privilege to tour South Africa with His Holiness Kadamba Kanana Swami in October 2011 where I met many wonderful devotees.

I have been painting for as long as I can remember. As a child I was extremely shy and reserved and painting with vibrant colours was my way to express my internal exuberance. I majored in art in high school with a 2-metre tall painting of my grand-mother, which ranked 3rd nationwide. About a year ago I began digital art thanks to the encouragement of my husband. It is so much more

feasible and less messy to paint digitally when you have young kids!

The work on the cover is entirely digital and was done in the Procreate App on an iPad Pro. I wanted to create a candy-coloured outlook of the spiritual world. I had a specific perspective in mind so I simulated Krishna's and the gopis' postures in an app called EasyPose to get the proportions right. I am inspired by art with a variety of textures and bright colours and I hope to inspire others that way too.

This particular piece "Swing Festival" was inspired by the Jhulan Yatra festival, which is when I started the painting. When I worked in the Member Services Office at the Melbourne Temple, every year we were always on the hunt for newer and fresher artwork to make the festival posters. So, I guess I tried to add to the repertoire of choices for others in that same quest. I was hoping to represent the joy and youthfulness of the ever-fresh activities of the spiritual world, which is an actual reality. Working on such a piece helps to enhance my meditation of the absolute goal and destination.

The greatest take away for me with this artwork is perseverance. I wanted to give up on this painting many times. For hours and hours I was unhappy with the outcome but the silent yet firm voice of the Supersoul rang: "Keep going! You've got this." Krishna is the best inspirational coach! This painting took 22hrs 36mins to complete and was done over the course of two and a half months. I tend to be impatient so I seek results quickly. But at the same time the perfectionist in me doesn't want to call it complete until it is perfect ... if there is even such a thing as perfection in the material world. Whatever may be, I stuck at it; painted over many of the different elements many, many times and this is the final outcome. I hope that this painting will inspire you as much as it inspires me. You can view my collection on Instagram & Facebook @g.m.nitai_art

The Prabhupada Effect

Living with Srila Prabhupada

An excerpt from A Bond of Love:
Srila Prabhupada and His Daughters



Alarka Devi Dasi

When she was in high school in New York in 1970, Alarka started coming to the temple and chanting thirty-two rounds because she thought a round was both ways on the japa beads. In April of 1971, Prabhupada came to New York for a week.

I moved into the temple a month before Prabhupada came. When I first saw him, he was coming out of the airport elevator and looked effulgent, as if he wasn't from this planet. It was purifying to be in his presence. I felt fortunate and sensed he knew me from beyond time and loved me, a soul.

Srila Prabhupada came every year and to be in his presence made all our austerities worth it. Whatever we did, our whole meditation was, "We're going to see Prabhupada soon, we're going to get his mercy." In my initiation letter, Prabhupada wrote that we should distribute the little booklet, *The Reservoir of Pleasure*. We distributed millions of those. Once at the airport he told us to distribute the *Perfection of Yoga*, so we immediately started selling them. That was the biggest book distribution day I ever had.

Later, four of us from the New York *sankirtan* party went to Vrindavan and Mayapur. Once we were waiting to get on a plane in India when Prabhupada wanted us to have a *kirtan*. I was playing the *mridanga* and Prabhupada was looking at me, nodding his head and smiling. He was happy I was playing. He

knew what was on my mind and looked at the good things there, not the bad things. He cared about all of us.

When we were on 55th Street in New York, Prabhupada handed cookies out to all the kids. Then all the *brahmacharis* wanted cookies but Prabhupada said, "Women first," and at that time I got a cookie from Srila Prabhupada.

The day Prabhupada passed away I was looking out over Manhattan at sunset feeling so much sorrow for the Earth and all the living entities on it, because this pure devotee had left and was not longer blessing us with his presence.

Prabhupada saved me not just spiritually but materially also because I was not moving in a positive direction. Through him I feel strongly connected to Krishna and His protection. The underlying feeling that Krishna is present has kept me going on all these years. I chant sixteen rounds and feel my spiritual life is a personal, inward relationship between Krishna and me.

I'm fortunate I got Prabhupada's association and was able to imbibe a small amount of the Krishna consciousness he emanated. No matter who you were, it was hard not to get affected by Prabhupada. Everyone could feel his love and beauty. You can purchase *A Bond of Love* on [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

Vaishnava Calendar

Ekadasi 11 Dec 2020 Friday
Break Fast 12 Dec 2020 Saturday 04:48 - 09:29

25 Dec 2020 Friday
Advent of Srimad Bhagavad-gita

Ekadasi 26 Dec 2020 Saturday
Break Fast 27 Dec 2020 Sunday 04:55 - 09:36

29 Dec 2020 Tuesday
Katyayani vrata Ends

3 Jan 2021 Sunday
Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakur's
Disappearance
(Fast until noon)

Ekadasi 9 Jan 2021 Saturday
Break Fast 10 Jan 2021 Sunday 05:05 - 09:44

15 Jan 2021 Friday
Srila Jiva Gosvami's Disappearance

Ekadasi 24 Jan 2021 Sunday
Break Fast 25 Jan 2021 Monday 05:18 - 09:51

28 Jan 2021 Thursday
Sri Krsna Pusya Abhisek

2 Feb 2021 Tuesday
Srila Gopala Bhatta Gosvami's Appearance

3 Feb 2021 Wednesday
Sri Jayadeva Gosvami's Disappearance

4 Feb 2021 Thursday
Sri Locana Dasa Thakur's Disappearance

Ekadasi 7 Feb 2021 Sunday
Break Fast 8 Feb 2021 Monday 06:58 - 09:56

Cheating Death

Part Two

By Pranada Dasi

And we need to die to the false self. How do we do that?

Jnanis traditionally sat naked on the ground surrounded by a ring of fire in the midday summer sun, or submerged themselves up to their necks in the freezing waters of a river in winter. Yogis, also by sheer force, whipped the mind into submission by continuous breath control with *pranayama* and body control through *asanas*. *Bhakti's* way is more gentle. It is the way of heartfulness, of developing divine love, primarily through mantra meditation.

In a previous cosmic season, Dhruva called Sri Vishnu to him by chanting the mantra *om namo bhagavate vasudevaya*. His heart call was so imbued with love that Vishnu, who is controlled by love, had to appear. Our Original Conscious Source is always attracted and forever bound by divine love. The *Upanisads* direct our attention to the love anthem for the current cosmic time by recommending the *sadhana* of meditating on the *maha-mantra*: *Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare/ Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare*.

The sacred texts describe the power of the *maha-mantra*, a mantra of names. On the spiritual platform, there is no difference between the name and the named. When we chant with attentive devotion, we associate directly with the Supreme Person, Sri Krishna. By chanting, we turn the *citta* inward toward the *atma*/self and toward the Supreme in the form of his name. Chanting occurs on the *atma* platform. It isn't an activity of this world; the sound has descended from the spiritual world. The mantra of the names completely purifies the *citta* because we are in the direct presence of the

supreme pure. This association through the names creates spiritual *samskaras*, specifically *bhakti samskaras*. It works something like this: If we have a glass filled with black ink and we pour in pure milk, the ink will gradually be removed if we keep on pouring.

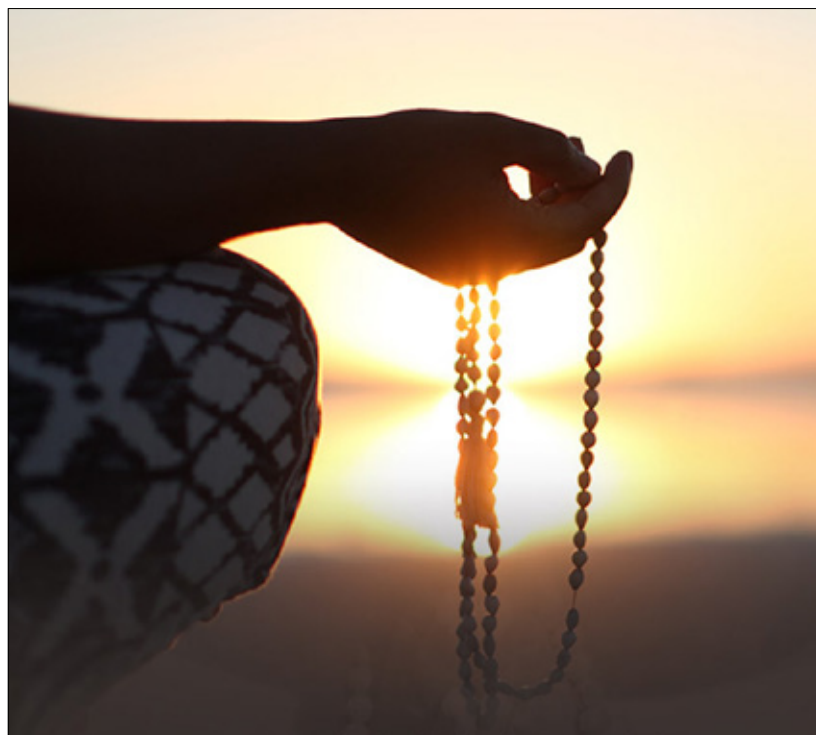
In addition to purifying the *citta* by displacing its mundane contents, when we keep company with the Supreme in His names, our affections for Him are aroused. Thus we cultivate pure love and become inclined to act lovingly toward Him and everyone else. As love matures, our heart becomes fixed on the object of our meditation, preparing us for a very different experience of death and modifying our destination. In other words, the mantra grants fearlessness from death and a divine identity.

But we have to be willing recipients of the milk. Besides taking up a *sadhana* of mantra meditation, we enable the flow of *bhakti* by ego effacement. Though *bhakti* is not as severe as *jnana* or yoga, we have to participate and respond as the mantra guides us to areas requiring work. And work it is. We can't expect that a transcendental vehicle will descend from beyond to pick us up unless we're serious.

We voluntarily face the death of the ego. In contrast, we're forced to face the death of the body. The death of the body is repeated; the death of the ego is undergone once. Actually, a complete ego death is a process of working through layers of falsity. As each layer is discarded, we step further into illumination and happiness. Our abiding connection with the mental body mandates that the process of dying to the ego happens in stages: should all the layers be dismantled in one go, we wouldn't be able to survive with any sanity! The death of the gross body that we occupy for fifty, sixty, or a hundred years is troublesome and frightening. Can you imagine what we have to wrestle with when we face the ego, which we've been with since beginningless time? There will be resistance!

A number of years into my *bhakti* practice, it was undeniable: I was living many lives in this one life. My *bhakti sadhana* was rapidly propelling me forward through what would normally take many lives, sometimes at a pace my physical body could barely keep up with. Each death event improved the quality of my being and living. And each death had its own drama, trauma, grief, deep sense of loss, then renewal and improved beginnings.

After a while, I could recognize the pattern. This is how it usually runs. When I first get a glimpse of the next internal obstacle to tackle, I stare in disbelief. How could I really be like this? No, I'm not like that. I'm a good girl, right? But no. It isn't so. I may ignore this dawning realization for a while. If the matter is daunting (or maybe not), I will justify why my



thinking or behaving exists – almost as if that will take me off the hook for removing it. I wrestle with what I must do – and with my resistance, yet again, against doing it.

My mantra meditation brings these insights, but more; it brings me closer to my ideal. As I grow closer to my goal, my happiness increases – a happiness greater than any material pleasure. In other words, the journey is joyful even as I fight the obnoxious, ugly, and counterproductive. And so it is that I bolster myself with honesty and resolve. Sometimes I only take up the work when I'm forced – when the trait or thinking simply creates too much suffering for me. Through a straight or circuitous route, I begin wrestling with the obstacle itself, intentionally checking patterns of behaviour and thought.

There are times when it takes much effort and repeated attempts to remove just one layer, and I seem to cycle around for what seems forever. Over and over again, I face the same issue and try to root it out. As long as I'm persistent, eventually, the issue is resolved – sometimes without my even realizing it at first. At other times, I easily dispense with some nonsense aspect of my personality or thinking. In fact, this is more often the case now. Being buoyed by the increased connection I feel with my Friend through my chanting *sadhana*, I'm more willing to release and let go. As the taste of chanting becomes sweeter and I feel progress, I more easily abandon anything that keeps me from pure love.

I've shared notes with many *yoginis*, and we all have a similar experience. We come to realize that ego effacement can't be completed by our own endeavour. We're facing a limitless pool of conditioned existence. Pulling up one thing, we find another and another. Five coverings are discovered where one alone stood. There are twenty layers beyond those five. And the work gets more and more subtle. As we dig deeper, we're forever surprised what new, lame, and destructive aspects cover the self – how inconceivably deep the roots run. Ultimately, we've noted, this is not an undertaking that we can master by brute force, astute intelligence, or undeviating sincerity. We require help outside ourselves.

Therefore we turn to the chanting of the holy names with increased fervour, seeking mercy and love and – in dependence, like a child calling for her mother – we seek our Divine Friend's shelter. The more my petition is heartfelt, the more I feel my Friend's presence resolving conflicts, clarifying confusion, calming angst, remove layers of ego, lighting a way forward. The chanting is done as *kirtan* or *japa*. *Kirtan*, the call-and-response song/prayer popular in the *asana* community, is a group mantra meditation. *Japa* is a private meditation, and

the mantra is counted on *malas*, or prayer beads. It can be done while dying – even if you can't sing out loud or pick up your *mala*.

A few years ago, I lay in a hospital in Delhi on the verge of death. The surgeon had mistakenly cut my left ureter and only discovered her mistake after I had lost much blood. I couldn't go into the required emergency surgery because I needed multiple blood transfusions. But they were having trouble getting blood into me quickly enough.

My senses began shutting down first. Before I was unable to speak, I took two short phone calls. One from my mom to say goodbye and the other from my husband. I couldn't make a call to my son or any of my many friends, so I said goodbye in my mind, visually drawing each person up and sending them love. I closed

my eyes; they didn't want to open anymore. My legs and arms lay immovable. Busy hospital sounds faded into an unnoticeable background. Searing pain dulled. Pretty soon, I couldn't think clearly.

I cried no tears, had no regrets. As I faced death, I was calm and peaceful. Unable to chant, I listened to the mantra on tape, a passive recipient to the transcendental sound vibration. This dying, I thought, is easier than my work of ego effacement!

Or possibly the work I had done prepared me for death. It seemed so. Perhaps we can say these voluntary deaths develop eyes to see reality. Ego death opens the soul's eyes; the eyes of flesh will not see the self or any other aspect of transcendence.

Grief and other responses to deaths of all types aren't necessarily avoided with a spiritual practice, insight, and perspective, but to whatever degree we're illuminated by a genuine practice, we stand on a foundation that helps us navigate through these events – and we may even cheat death. There's something deeply pervading from a genuine *sadhana* that keeps us going, moves us through, and enables us to step back, observe, witness, and then pick up acting on the spiritual platform. It's a process. A worthy one.

How will you navigate toward death? What can you do today, this moment, to make progress? While studying sacred texts nourishes and enlightens me, it doesn't afford the experience of a spiritual life. And for me, sitting surrounded by fires in the Florida sun is not an option. I'll pick up my *mala* and look to remove the next obstacle in the way of divine love.

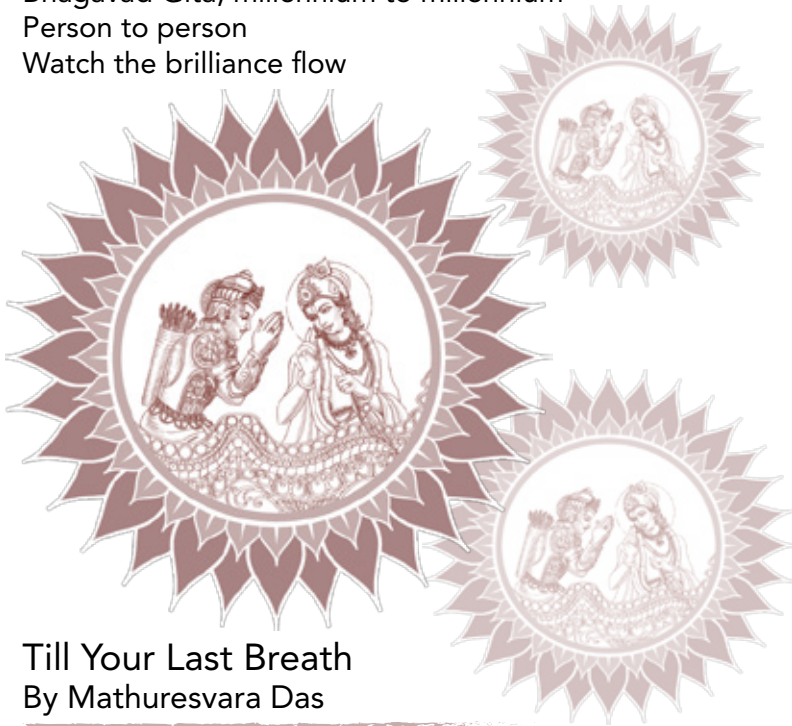
Pranada Dasi is a disciple of His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, is a devoted pilgrim, heartfelt-ness educator, and award-winning author of Wise-Love: Bhakti and the Search for the Soul of Consciousness. Her writing sheds light on bhakti's wisdom school of heartfelt-ness with a focus on how to culture wise-love in our lives and relationships so we can experience the inherent, unbounded joy of the self.

Soul Poetry

The Gita

By Sharadiya Rasa Devi Dasi

Bhagavad Gita is gold
Born from the fire of the great Battle of Kuruksetra
The Song of God, precious in all circumstances
Glowing as much in its entirety, as in a single word
A seeker led by the spiritual teacher
Ventures into the depths of sacred texts,
Like gold undiscovered until a miner unearths it
And through the process of fire its brilliance flows
To find in its essence the process —
Bhakti-yoga, faith and action
Flowing like fired gold
Bhagavad Gita, millennium to millennium
Person to person
Watch the brilliance flow



Till Your Last Breath

By Mathuresvara Das

Prabhupada says, "Not this body, do realize!"
But spirit soul that never dies
Young, old, rich, poor or fame
Death is there all the same

Raja Parikshit had only seven days to step down
The emperor of the world had removed his crown
Parikshit asked about the duty at death,
The answer — devotional service till the last breath

The miseries of the material world, always there
Birth, old age, disease and death — don't despair
Just chant the holy name "Hare Krishna" don't brew
Krishna says take one step to Him, He takes many to you

By chanting the holy name with great respect,
You clear the path to Krishna, that's what you can expect
Away from this miserable material tide,
To the spiritual sky, cool, calm and without pride

Hip Hop Gita

By Rukmini Devi Dasi

Narrator: High on the chariot of the sun-god
And braced for brutal combat
Weapons raised and ready for action
Arjuna, the Supreme Archer, sat

Arjuna: Krishna, please drive my chariot
To the center of this holy ground
I want to see the faces of those
To whom this trial of arms is bound

Narrator: Beneath the sober exterior
In his heart, a doubt was poised
Had he the strength to perform his duty
When his own relatives were opposed?

Arjuna: My every own blood
stands before me, in war
My grandfather, my teacher
The ones I would die for

Look at their faces,
They do not relent
Once looked on me lovingly
Now, on death they're hell bent

Narrator: His limbs began to tremble
His throat was dry in grief
Overpowered by confusion
What was he to believe?

karpanya-dosapahata-svabhavah
prcchami tvam dharma-sammudha-cetah
yac chreyah syan niscitam bruti tan me
sisyas te ham sadhi mam tvam prapannam

Arjuna: Now I am confused about my duty
I've lost composure, my heart is weak
Tell me for certain, what's best for me
I surrender. Krishna, please speak

Narrator: A moment in the life of every living being
When your back's against the wall
& the roof is closing in
Arjuna turned to Krishna, looking for a solution
Smilingly Krishna prepares to dispel his illusion

Krishna: Yo, my man Arjuna
Let me teach you a thing or two
You grieving without perceiving
that your body isn't really you.

Wake up!
Lament neither for the living nor the dead
your mortal form may perish,
but your soul will move ahead

8 million 4 hundred thousand species
You've transmigrated through
From virus to lioness,

All of them were you

No you don't remember,
But me, I never forget
your soul remains the same
no matter the body you get.

By nature intrinsic
You are meant to serve
Approach a spiritual master
Follow his every word

(Just fight)
It is your duty to fight
(Just fight)
Don't worry if you win
(Just fight)
Don't worry if lose
(Just fight)
The result is irrelevant
(Just fight)
Because I ask you to

Your senses are hissing serpents
Your mind your arch enemy
Bring it under control
Free yourself for eternity

Arjuna: Oh Krishna to control my mind
Is an impossible thing
It is wild and raging
It'd be easier to capture the wind.

Krishna: Arjuna, just think of me
Think of me and fight
Dedicate your actions to me
You'll reach me without a doubt

Arjuna: This path seems very risky
What if I don't see the end?
What if I can't be as you want of me?
What will happen to me then?

Krishna: Yo my friend, Arjuna
You don't seem to know
I'm by your side in this battle
You are not alone

I preserve what you have
I provide what you lack
In other words, my man
Don't worry, I got your back

Man mana bhava mad bhakto
Madyaji mam namaskuru
Mam evasyasi satyam te
Pratijana priyosi me

Think of Me
Worship Me
And bow down to Me
You will come to Me

This is my promise

Material or spiritual
Of all worlds I am the source
Those who know this engage
In devotional service

My pure devotees
They just dwell in me
Their unending bliss
Is to glorify me

Constantly devoted
They serve me with love
And I give understanding
So that to me they come

Darkness
Is in everyone's hearts
I destroy this
Special mercy I impart.

Special mercy

Arjuna: Hearing your words
My confusion is quelled
The strike my heart
My illusion is dispelled

Krishna: Be conscious of Me Arjuna
All obstacles you'll pass
but act not hearing me
And all will be lost

Confidential knowledge
I've explained to you
THINK ABOUT IT FULLY (pause)
Then do what you wish to

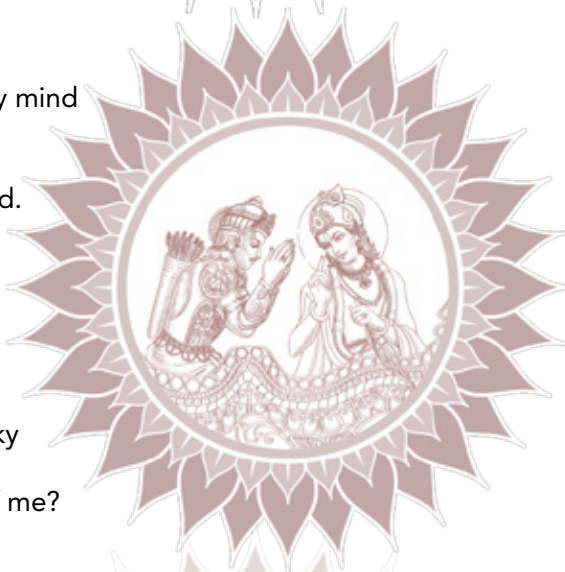
Abandon all religion
To me you must surrender
I'll free you from sin
Do not Fear

One who explains this secret
Pure devotion is guaranteed
At the very end
He will come to me

There isn't now,
nor will there ever be
A servant in this world,
who is more dear to me

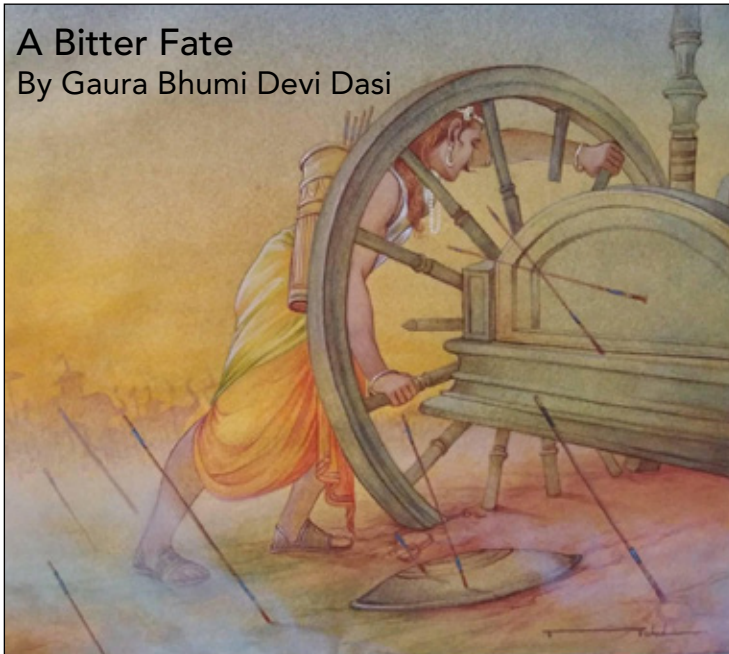
These are my words, Arjuna
Of sacred consequence
And I declare, he who studies it
Worships me with intelligence

Arjuna bows, climbs on chariot.



A Bitter Fate

By Gaura Bhumi Devi Dasi



The scorching heat sweltered upon his exposed skin, leaving behind a trail of salty perspiration, yet the icy unease of hopelessness had slowly begun to creep into his heart. His chariot wheel was well and truly stuck. Try as he might to tug it out, each exertion unraveled nothing more than a strand of faith. Had he no faith left, then would there be a difference between a hero and a coward? The mud from the blood-soiled earth had begun to crust on his hands, he had no choice left. The battle cries and wails of death reached a crescendo around him. It was time for the forgotten son of an immortal lineage to die.

The unfairness of life flashed before his eyes. Karna's earliest memory of his mother was of her telling him that she wasn't. Rather, he had

been found coddled in a woven-basket, floating downstream, one unassuming morning — nothing more than an unusual set of golden armour and the cries of an illusory woman for memories. Raised as a charioteer's son certainly awarded disadvantages to his spark despite the love he shared with his family. The taunts and jeers of the young princes would forever follow him into his darkest nightmares as he dejectedly left the sages he had approached for military training. A charioteers' son had no place among the children of earthly gods. The sneer of the heavenly princess for daring to believe he was worthy of her hand in marriage and her and her husbands' subsequent taunts on many other occasions, his own birth mother revealing herself only to seek a favour for her

family — his lifelong tormentors. The Kaurava Prince, Duryodhana was the only person who saw him for who he was — a warrior, someone of valour, capable of heroic and herculean feats. Someone who defied the odds life threw at him to chisel out his own destiny from the iron-clad shackles of fate.

"Wait Arjuna!" Karna bellowed at his rival, "Ethical codes condemn the attack of an opponent who puts down his weapons. My back is turned and I am attempting to salvage my chariot, how can you possibly attack me? Where is your honor and virtue?"

"Where was yours!?" rumbled Krishna, "When you became an accomplice in the brutal murder of a 16-year old boy? Where was your so-called virtue when an innocent woman beseeched an assembly of men to save her from humiliation? Instead of overcoming your selfishness, you jeered on her helplessness, rubbing salt into her wounds." Karna bowed his head in shame; he had snapped his last strand of faith.

No matter the weight of life's burdens and the unfairness of circumstance, we have no license to tread a life on the wrong line of morality and *dharma*.

Karna bellowed, "Where is your honor and virtue?"
"Where was yours!?"
rumbled Krishna

Arjuna was just as much a victim of circumstantial unfairness as Karna. But what is the turning point of the parallels between these two warriors? Their receptivity to the Song of the Supreme

Person – the essence of all philosophies! The root meaning of *dharma* is "that which sustains one's existence." The words of divinity alone have the grace to cut through the darkness born of ignorance with the sword of intelligence. For all of his heroic valour and apparent moral compass, Karna's cowardly companions steered him down a dense path towards a bitter end. He took from life what he could without discretion, as he felt life owed him compensation. Arjuna's culmination of grace came in the form of Krishna – Divinity Himself, speaking to him the very essence of life on the brink of fratricidal war, for it is the darkest of times that award the greatest opportunities to elevate consciousness. Allow the *Bhagavad Gita* to give life to your existence.



Krishna In Our Hearts
For the Kids
By Radhe Gendron

This colouring project will remind you that Krishna is in every living beings' heart!. Colour to your hearts' desire!

Faith Makes You Fearless

Oh Govinda!

By Acyuta Gopi Dasi

"What is it?" Sridama craned his neck, looking up as far as he could, but still unable to see an end to the enormous obstacle.

"I'll tell you what it is. It's a snake!" Subala shouted the last word, already skipping backwards, ready to run from danger. Another boy caught the end of Subala's cloth wrapper, yanking him back to the group of investigative cowherd boys. Subala returned hesitantly, eyeing the cave warily.

"Don't be foolish! A snake could never be this big. This is probably just a cave that's been fashioned to look like a snake's mouth by Krishna." Charu waved away Subala's concerns and smiled with wonder. He examined the huge, gaping hole in the road from every angle, nodding with appreciation.

"A cave that's meant to look like a snake? Why would Krishna do that?" Subala cast a nervous glance at the mouth of the "cave". He was still ready to run.

"To give us another amazing spot to play in, of course!" Charu spread his arms wide as though he had found

the perfect explanation.

A smaller boy grabbed Subala's cloth and tugged until Subala looked down at him. His eyes were huge, but his voice was no more than a whisper.

"Do you really think this is a creature waiting here with its mouth open to swallow us all? Is this some kind of immovable living thing? Some sort of tiger maybe? Or something even...worse?" Subala could hear the small boy's gulp loud and clear. Subala wasn't sure how to answer but looked to the group of older boys who were discussing the roadblock with concern.

As they were navigating the pathways of the many forests of Vrindavan, the cowherd boys and Krishna had come across a great obstacle in the road. It extended through the sky for as far as the eye could see, and it seemed as though none of them could make out what the huge blockage was. Madhumangala stepped through the group of boys, and came close to what they guessed was the mouth of the great cave. He stroked his chin while deep in thought, considering, with all of his brahminical intelligence what the huge statue could be. Speaking with authority and confidence in his deductive reasoning, Madhumangala's voice was sure, but cautious.



"Dear friends, I think this is certainly an animal sitting here waiting to swallow us all. Look! The upper lip is touching the clouds, and the lower lip forms the base of the cave which is actually a huge mouth." Madhu pointed as he made his points, extending his arms outward. "On the right and the left, those two deep depressions that look like mountain caves are actually the corners of its mouth, and those mountain peaks there and there, are its teeth." Madhu looked like a scientist as he explained the anatomy of the great beast.

"This broad traffic-way must be the tongue, and inside its mouth it is very dark and grave like the cave of a mountain. The hot wind blowing from inside the cave is actually its breath, and the horrible burning smell coming off the wind must be from all of the animals it's eaten!" Madhu held his hand in front of his face, no longer able to stomach the stench, and the rest of the boys made retching noises and sounds of disgust as they began to consider this new information.

The boys looked around them at the bigger picture. It was just as Madhu had said.

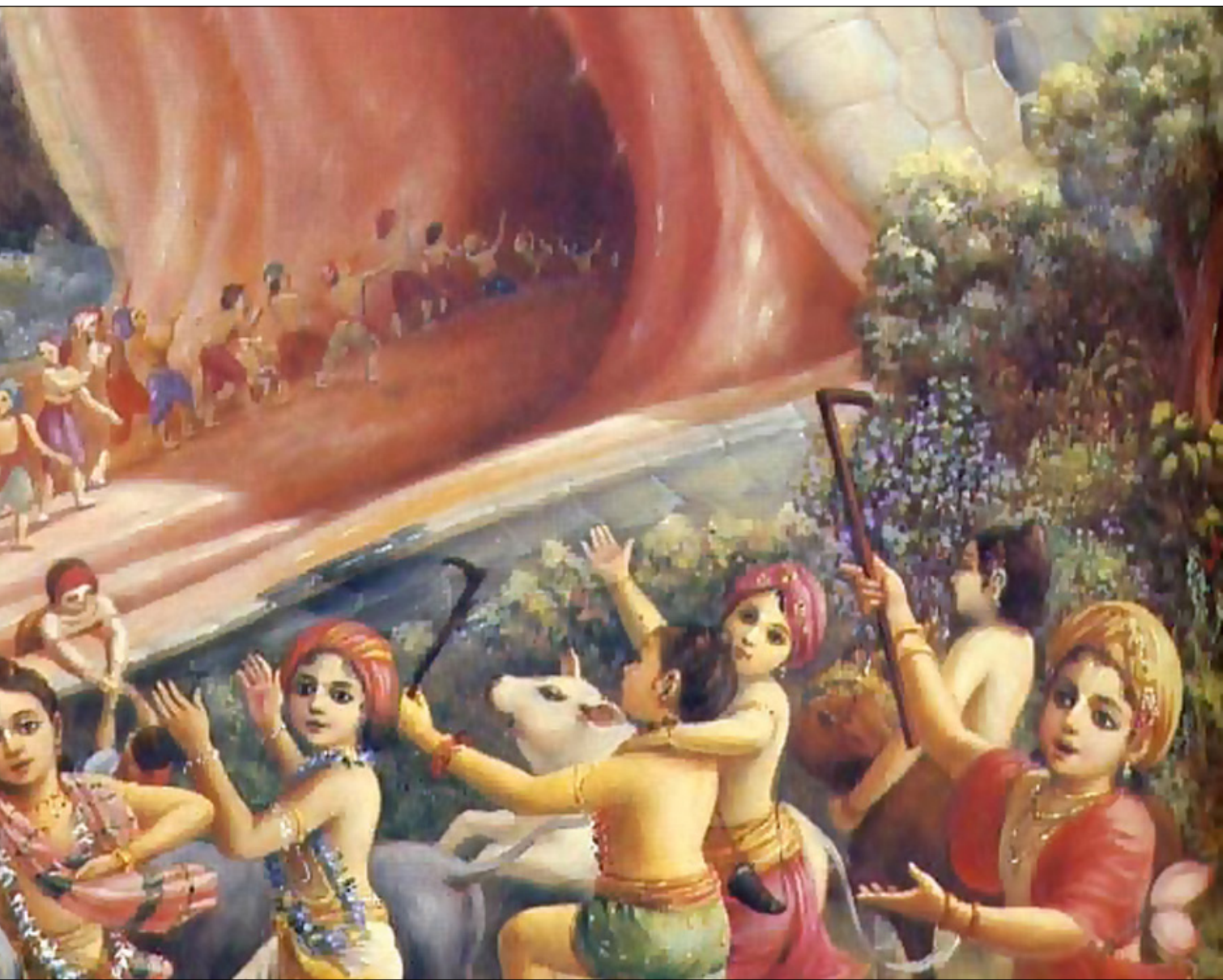
"Then I was right! This is a great beast waiting to devour us all." Subala was now more anxious than ever and began to inch backward again. The younger boys trembled and clung to him. At the first sight of true

danger they would also flee with him to safety.

"Has this creature really come to swallow us? Ha! If that's so then in an instant, Krishna will kill it just like all the other demons. Krishna is right there. Why should we worry?" Charu gestured toward Krishna who was standing on the far side of the road, gathering the cows who had spread out to pasture. The other cowherd boys looked to their invincible friend. Just like that, their previous concerns and fears vanished. Their best friend Gopal was playing little melodies on his flute to keep the cows gathered as they chewed happily on the sweet grass. As they set their eyes on Krishna their hearts filled with the bright sun of happiness, chasing their cloud-like fears away.

The boys remembered the strength of their friend and how he had saved them many times. Almost daily, he would save them from a different demon. They began to cheer and clap their hands, laughing excitedly amongst each other. Charu puffed his chest out and pointed a finger towards the dark entrance into the open mouth of the beast.

"So what do you say Gopas! Let's go see what's in that mouth!" Charu marched forward as though he were a soldier and was followed by all of the other gopas. They clapped their hands and some of them even danced a little as they formed a line like little ants marching into



the deep hole of an anthill.

Krishna stopped playing his flute for a moment. The receding voices of the cowherd boys had caught his attention. He watched every single one of his gopa friends walk into the mouth of the vicious demon Aghasura, who had taken the form of a large python. Krishna held out a hand to stop the boys, a huge breath held in his chest, waiting to call out to them to stop, but the last of the boys disappeared into the demon's dark mouth. The cows, who had seen their protectors head into the distance, began to walk toward the beast to enter into its mouth as well. Krishna wanted to warn his friends. To forbid them from entering into the mouth of the demon. But now, it was too late. They were gone. They were depending on him, and he had to save them.

Although all of the boys had already entered its gigantic mouth, the mouth of the great demon remained open, as though it was waiting for something. Krishna tucked his flute into his belt before tightening the sash at his waist. There was only one thing to do. The beast was waiting. Not for something. For someone. With a nod and one angry look at the demon's upper lip high in the sky, Krishna walked determinedly into the mouth of the demon to save his friends.

Reflection

The most amazing lesson in this story for me is that the cowherd boys knew without a doubt that Krishna would save them. Each day, usually just before lunch time, a demon would enter into their midst and try to destroy Krishna and all of his friends. Krishna would then perform heroic deeds and immediately save them. Once they were saved from impending doom, they would sit down with raging appetites brought on by all the excitement and eat a full lunch together, talking animatedly about the day's activities.

One of the boys uses this as evidence to boost his argument when talking about why they **SHOULD** walk into the mouth of the huge, man-eating, snake demon! Why should they worry? Krishna was right there! He had always protected them, and he would always protect them. They were absolutely, positively certain. They were so sure that they laughed while marching into the belly of the beast--literally. I look at beautiful examples like the young boys of vrindavan and I know that I want to cultivate faith like theirs. Faith that will make me brave enough to march into the belly of the beast of life knowing that there is absolutely nothing that Krishna cannot save me from.

The boys saw an obstacle in the road. It was an obstacle to their playtime with Krishna, and they fearlessly overcame it, knowing that it would only enhance their relationship with Krishna. Their friend would save them, giving them something to talk about for the rest of the day. It would give them another reason to adore him more than they already did. He was their protector.

He was their everything. But when will I realize that it is no different for me? There are so many obstacles that show up on the path of life, but I can choose to face them head-on, knowing that I can't tackle them alone, but once I am carried through by the mercy of my divine friend, it will make my relationship with Govinda even sweeter.

This is a world where there is literally danger at every step. The cowherd boys knew of so many calamities that Krishna saved them from each day. They were even standing face to face with a literal demon. But what if the beast is already here, what if the demon has already taken up residence in my life, but because of the great umbrella of Krishna's mercy that has sheltered me, I have been blissfully unaware? With no knowledge of the amazing miracles that my supreme friend has performed in my life daily, I stunt myself with the demon of my own fears. The boogey-man of my shortcomings. The beast of my own self-doubt. I wonder if the future will work out the way that I want it to. I wonder if I will be able to become the person that I have dreamt of. I wonder if all of my plans will come to fruition. When really, I could and should march through those misgivings with faith, all the while, thanking Krishna for saving me from the countless calamities that he hasn't even let me find out about!

The vastness of these realizations brings me to my knees until my head is on the floor, touched in humble gratitude, to the tiny lotus feet of my sweet deities. They are the ones that listen to my many problems everyday, from the time that I wake up until the time that I go to sleep. They watch over me while I sleep, constantly soothing me with the shade of their amazingly merciful compassion. I yearn to understand that they have been guiding me every moment of everyday since before I can even remember. Like those cowherd boys, we are only being sustained by grace and the life-saving mercy of our dearest friend. Somehow, every day that I realize how much Krishna has been there for me, is another day that together (but mostly Him because He's God and I'm... well-- little me), we conquer the belly of the beast.

Just as there is danger at every step, in the same way, with Govinda there is trust at every step. There is love, commitment, and the flowers of grace softening the path of life before me. With each step forward I say: Govinda, I trust you. Guide me. Save me. Keep me forever under your shelter.

I pray that I can sow the seed of devotion in the fertile ground of a grateful heart, with the knowledge that I walk in the faith of Govinda.

Acyuta Gopi is a disciple of His Holiness Radhanath Swami. She serves at the ISKCON Brooklyn Temple as a Pujari, Sunday School Teacher, and Kirtaniya. She has recently published a book, Prema Mala. You can follow her on Facebook (Acyuta Gopi), Instagram (lowercase. gopi) and acyutagopi.me



Festive Churros

The Vaishnava Chef
By Chandrashekara Das

A churro is a fried dough pastry, which hails from Spain/Portugal. Try your hand at this quick but delicious dessert this festive season!

Churro Ingredients

1.5 cups of water
1 Tbsl castor sugar
1 tsp olive oil
1.5 cups cake flour
1 tsp baking powder
1 tsp vanilla essence
sunflower oil for deep frying

Dredging Mixture

1/3 cup castor sugar
¼ tsp cinnamon powder

Chocolate Sauce

230 g good quality dark chocolate, chopped
½ cup full cream milk

To Make Churros

In a small saucepan whisk together the water, olive oil, salt, sugar and vanilla essence over medium/high heat. Allow to boil for a minute and then remove from heat. In a separate bowl mix together the cake flour and baking powder. Add flour mixture to the hot liquid and beat thoroughly until a smooth dough is formed. It is important to ensure that all the water is well absorbed. Note; this dough is meant to be slightly stiff. Let the dough rest for ten minutes.

To Make Chocolate Sauce

Heat milk over medium/high heat in a saucepan until it comes to a boil and then remove from heat. Add in the chopped dark chocolate and stir well to melt the chocolate into the hot milk until a smooth sauce is obtained. (Note that constant stirring is required to prevent the chocolate from scorching at the bottom of the pan)

Frying Churros

Heat sunflower oil to approximately 180 degrees Celsius (medium/high heat). Place the churro dough into a piping bag fitted with a star piping nozzle with an opening at least 1.5cm wide. Since the dough is slightly stiff a double layered piping bag may be required to avoid splitting the bag. If the dough is too stiff to pipe, press the dough directly through the nozzle using your thumb. Pipe 5cm to 6cm dough lengths into the hot oil (You will need to snip the piece of dough from the nozzle end using a scissor in order to release the dough) and fry for 2-4 minutes or until golden brown and crispy on the outside. Drain off excess oil and place on a platter lined with a kitchen towel. Dredge the hot churros in sugar/cinnamon mixture. Offer the churros and chocolate sauce with love and serve warm.