

Introduction to Spiritual Food

The word “prasādam” translates from the Sanskrit as “mercy.” It refers to the foodstuffs that have been duly offered to the Supreme Personality of Godhead and have thus become not only freed from any sinful reaction, but have been rendered totally transcendently beneficial by the grace of the Lord.

Bhagavad-gītā chapter 3, text 13, tells us-

“The devotees of the Lord are released from all kinds of sins because they eat food which is offered first for sacrifice. Others, who prepare food for personal sense enjoyment, verily eat only sin.”

Śrīla Prabhupāda has given us the example of a military general. If a foot soldier goes to war and follows the direction of the general, he is not personally responsible for any reaction to his war actions.

The Supreme Lord says, in Bhagavad-gītā, chapter 9, text 26-

“If one offers Me with love and devotion a leaf, a flower, a fruit or water, I will accept it.”

(There is thus no sinful reaction to honoring those remnants.)

Purport

“Here Lord Krishna, having established that He is the only enjoyer, the primeval Lord and the real object of all sacrificial offerings, reveals what types of sacrifices He desires to be offered. If one wishes to engage in devotional service to the Supreme in order to be purified and to reach the goal of life – the transcendental loving service of God – then one should find out what the Lord desires of him. One who loves Krishna will give Him whatever He wants, and he avoids offering anything which is undesirable or unasked. Thus meat, fish and eggs should not be offered to Krishna. If He desired

such things as offerings, He would have said so. Instead He clearly requests that a leaf, fruit, flowers and water be given to Him, and He says of this offering, “I will accept it.” Therefore, we should understand that He will not accept meat, fish and eggs. Vegetables, grains, fruits, milk and water are the proper foods for human beings and are prescribed by Lord Krishna Himself. Whatever else we eat cannot be offered to Him, since He will not accept it. Thus we cannot be acting on the level of loving devotion if we offer such foods.”

In the Third Chapter, verse 13, Śrī Krishna explains that only the remains of sacrifice are purified and fit for consumption by those who are seeking advancement in life and release from the clutches of the material entanglement. Those who do not make an offering of their food, He says in the same verse, are eating only sin. In other words, their every mouthful is simply deepening their involvement in the complexities of material nature. But preparing nice, simple vegetable dishes, offering them before the picture or Deity of Lord Krishna and bowing down and praying for Him to accept such a humble offering enable one to advance steadily in life, to purify the body, and to create fine brain tissues which will lead to clear thinking. Above all, the offering should be made with an attitude of love. Krishna has no need of food, since He already possesses everything that be, yet He will accept the offering of one who desires to please Him in that way. The important element, in preparation, in serving and in offering, is to act with love for Krishna.

The impersonalist philosophers, who wish to maintain that the Absolute Truth is without senses, cannot comprehend this verse of Bhagavad-gītā. To them, it is either a metaphor or proof of the mundane character of Krishna, the speaker of the Bhagavad-gītā. But, in actuality, Krishna, the Supreme Godhead, has senses, and it is stated that His senses are interchangeable; in other words, one sense can perform the function of any other. This

is what it means to say that Krishna is absolute. Lacking senses, He could hardly be considered full in all opulences. In the Seventh Chapter, Krishna has explained that He impregnates the living entities into material nature. This is done by His looking upon material nature. And so in this instance, Krishna's hearing the devotee's words of love in offering foodstuffs is wholly identical with His eating and actually tasting. This point should be emphasized: because of His absolute position, His hearing is wholly identical with His eating and tasting. Only the devotee, who accepts Krishna as He describes Himself, without interpretation, can understand that the Supreme Absolute Truth can eat food and enjoy it.

Preparing food for Krishna... For most of us, our worship of the Lord will be in our own homes. The simple point, is that Krishna eats first in our home, everything is first offered to him. And, if He is our eternal guest, or live-in-Lord, then we serve the guest as he or she desires to be served. If we know that our guest does not like spinach, for example, we don't make spinach for him. If the Lord requests no meat, fish, eggs, no onions, mushrooms, or garlic, we don't prepare those things for Him. We prepare foodstuffs as the Lord likes, and then take only those remnants, or prasādam. A devotee only takes Krishna prasādam, and from that simple step, spiritual life blossoms.

Offering foodstuffs to the Lord in the temple and to the Lord in the home for practical family purposes are the same and different. In the temple, there is no consideration of personal preference when the food preparation is done although the cook has to be considerate of the devotees, but in the home, there has to be specific consideration of family preferences, specific health needs, and so on. The basics in preparing food to offer to Krishna are the same, however.

There must be a clean mentality. So, chanting, listening to bonafide kirtans and Krishna Conscious lectures, and so on, while doing the actual food preparation will be beneficial to the overall consciousness, or just a quiet meditation

on the cooking. No popular music, no mundane conversations, no media, the mind has to be as Krishna Conscious and clear and focused as possible.

Ingredients should be pure, everything prepared from scratch. Remember that Krishna accepts the love and devotion in the preparation. No pre-prepared breads or crackers, or other things, like hummus. Everything from pure ingredients. It is not just a matter of looking at a food label at the grocery store and deciding that the ingredients are OK for offering. This may be difficult at first, so start where it is comfortable, and work towards the goal of total purity in eating habits, Krishna prasādam only. It is very practical if there are a couple of families that can help each other out, like making breads or snacks for the children. Real community means practical support in the development of Krishna consciousness. It is nice to have like-minded friends.

There must also be physical cleanliness. Cleanliness is Godliness, so best to be freshly bathed and wearing clean cloth when doing the food preparation to be offered to Śrī Krishna. The kitchen counters and pots should all be clean. Try to keep the children off the cooking counters! And the pets out of the house. Animals have no sense control, so they will lust after everything being prepared, which contaminates the offering. Really, it's very practical. We must wash our hands as required. It might be likened to creating a sacred space for proper food preparation. We should not be thinking about tasting or eating the preparations as we make them for the pleasure of Krishna. We have to become expert in our skills and learn our ingredients. If after the offering, something needs to be resalted or respiced a little bit, it is fine. If something falls on the floor and can be washed to purify it, it is fine to use it. If we need to check the quality of an ingredient before using it, sometimes that might need to be done. Have you ever made a cucumber salad and one of the cucs was so bitter that it ruined the whole thing? Better to do a simple taste test first by cutting off a small piece, offering in the mind with a simple "Hare Krishna,"

and tasting it. Better to do that than to destroy an entire preparation because an ingredient was questionable.

Devotees of the Lord are not just vegetarians. So many animals are vegetarian, but it does not mean that they know Krishna. We take only Krishna prasādam. Whatever Krishna likes, we prepare nicely for Him and only take those remnants.

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