

Gokarna History

Only Listening to the Bhāgavatam with Full Attention Will Produce Results

Even after an aspirant to spiritual life has attained the company of devotees and hears the Bhāgavatam in their association, he must still be careful to hear it in the proper manner. Otherwise, he will not get the full result of this powerful devotional activity.

The instructive tale of Gokarna is found in the section of Padma Purāṇa known as “The Glories of the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam” (Bhāgavata-māhātmya). Gokarna was the adopted son of the brahmin Ātmadeva and his wife Dhundhulī. Dhundhulī and her husband also raised her sister’s child Dhundhukārī, who unfortunately was very wicked. Because of his sinful life, when Dhundhukārī died he became a ghost and haunted his family’s village. Out of compassion for his stepbrother, Gokarna recited the entire 12 cantos of the Bhāgavatam over a period of seven days and, when it was over, Dhundhukārī was liberated from his ghostly body. Where he had previously been invisible, he suddenly appeared before the entire assembly of devotees in a wonderful form, described in the Bhāgavata-māhātmya as follows:

“Dhundhukārī manifested before them in a marvelous, beautiful deep blue-colored form, garlanded with *tulasī* leaves and wearing a yellow cloth, a jeweled crown, and earrings.” (Bhāgavata-māhātmya 5.51)

Dhundhukārī prostrated himself before his stepbrother and thanked him sincerely for having recited the entire Bhāgavatam for his benefit. As he was himself energetically glorifying the seven-day recital of the Bhāgavatam, a marvelous celestial carriage, attended by residents of the Vaikuṇṭha world, descended into the midst of the assembly, brightening the surroundings with their effulgence. Before the eyes of the amazed spectators, Dhundhukārī boarded the lustrous carriage. Before leaving, however, Gokarna asked the denizens of Vaikuṇṭha the following important question:

“There were many people in the audience who were purified by listening to the Bhāgavatam recital. Why then were celestial carriages not brought for all of them? I observed them all participating equally in the act of hearing. Please explain, O beloved of Hari, why there is a difference in the results they have gotten?” (Bhāgavata-māhātmya 5.69-70)

The associates of the Lord answered by speaking the following verses:

“The difference in results comes of the differences in the quality of their hearing. Everyone present, it is true, listened to the Bhāgavatam, but not everyone reflected on what they had heard. The difference in results came from this, as well as from the quality of their worship, O respectful one.” (Bhāgavata-māhātmya 5.71)

“The ghost listened for seven days, but each night he worshipped the Lord, during which time he reflected with concentration on what he had heard. Knowledge which is unstable is lost, as is the learning of someone who has been inattentive. Japa done without concentration or hearing advice which comes from a doubtful source are both wasted. A land without Vaishnavas is worthless, as is the offering of oblations by a person without qualifications, charity given to an unlearned person, and a family which has no ethical principles. To obtain the fruits of hearing the Bhāgavatam, one should have faith in the words of the spiritual master and an attitude of humility about his own

worth; he should be victorious over the flaws of the mind and have unswerving concentration on the topics he is hearing.

“When all these people hear the Bhāgavatam a second time, they too will gain eternal residence in Vaikuṇṭha, of this there is no doubt. As for you, Gokaṛṇa, Govinda will personally take you to Goloka, the abode of the cows.” (Bhāgavata-māhātmya 5.72-77)

After thus speaking to Gokaṛṇa, the associates of Lord Hari began to loudly sing the Lord’s names, ascending to Vaikuṇṭha with the transformed Dhundhukārī.

In the following month of Śrāvaṇa, Gokaṛṇa undertook a second Bhāgavata-saptāha. The same audience was again present, but this time they listened more carefully than they had previously. At the end of the week, there was the most wonderful epiphany. Śrī Hari Himself descended into the assembly, surrounded by innumerable associates in innumerable celestial carriages. The sounds of prayer and glorification resounded in every direction. Even Lord Hari Himself added to the auspicious cacophony by blowing the conch Pāñcajanya, which He always holds in His hand. The Lord then embraced Gokaṛṇa tightly, transforming the devotee, who took the dark form of a Vaikuṇṭha resident with four arms, yellow silk dress, and jeweled crown and earrings. Instantly, everyone in the assembly was similarly transformed. Even other creatures, and lower-caste residents of the village were also transformed into divine beings and, as a result of Gokaṛṇa’s mercy, were given places in the celestial carriages and taken to the transcendental abode sought after by the great yogis. The Lord of the cows, Gopāla, took Gokaṛṇa, His dearmost devotee, with Him to His own abode of Goloka.