

CHAPTER EIGHTY-SEVEN

The Prayers of the Personified Vedas

This chapter presents the prayers by the personified Vedas glorifying the personal and impersonal aspects of Lord Nārāyaṇa.

King Parīkṣit asked Śrīla Śukadeva Gosvāmī how the Vedas can directly refer to the Supreme Absolute Truth, Brahman, since the Vedas deal with the material realm governed by the three modes of nature and Brahman is completely transcendental to these modes. In reply, Śukadeva Gosvāmī described an ancient encounter between Śrī Nārāyaṇa Ṛṣi and Nārada Muni at Badarikāśrama. Traveling to that sacred hermitage, Nārada found the Lord surrounded by exalted residents of the nearby village of Kalāpa. After bowing down to Nārāyaṇa Ṛṣi and His associates, Nārada submitted this same question to Him. In reply, Nārāyaṇa Ṛṣi related an account of how this very question had been discussed long ago among the great sages living on Janaloka. Once these sages, feeling inquisitive about the nature of the Absolute Truth, chose Sanandana Kumāra to speak on the subject. Sanandana told them how the numerous personified Vedas, appearing as the first emanations from the breathing of Lord Nārāyaṇa, recited prayers for His glorification just before the creation. Sanandana then proceeded to recite these elaborate prayers.

The residents of Janaloka were perfectly satisfied upon hearing Sanandana recite the prayers of the personified Vedas, which enlightened them about the true nature of the Supreme Absolute Truth, and they honored Sanandana with their worship. Nārada Muni was equally satisfied to hear this account from Śrī Nārāyaṇa Ṛṣi. Thus Nārada offered his obeisances to the Lord and then went to see his disciple Vedavyāsa, to whom he explained everything he had heard.

Text 1:

Śrī Parīkṣit said: O brāhmaṇa, how can the Vedas directly describe the Supreme Absolute Truth, who cannot be described in words? The Vedas are limited to describing the qualities of material nature, but the Supreme is devoid of these qualities, being transcendental to all material manifestations and their causes.

Text 2:

Śukadeva Gosvāmī said: The Supreme Lord manifested the material intelligence, senses, mind and vital air of the living entities so that they could indulge their desires for sense gratification, take repeated births to engage in fruitive activities, become elevated in future lives and ultimately attain liberation.

Text 3:

Those who came before even our ancient predecessors meditated upon this same confidential knowledge of the Absolute Truth. Indeed, anyone who faithfully concentrates on this knowledge will become free from material attachments and attain the final goal of life.

Text 4:

In this connection I will relate to you a narration concerning the Supreme Lord Nārāyaṇa. It is about a conversation that once occurred between Śrī Nārāyaṇa Ṛṣi and Nārada Muni.

Text 5:

Once, while traveling among the various planets of the universe, the Lord's beloved devotee Nārada went to visit the primeval sage Nārāyaṇa at His āśrama.

Text 6:

From the very beginning of Brahmā's day Lord Nārāyaṇa Ṛṣi has been undergoing austere penances in this land of Bhārata while perfectly performing religious duties and exemplifying spiritual knowledge and self-control — all for the benefit of human beings in both this world and the next.

Text 7:

There Nārada approached Lord Nārāyaṇa Ṛṣi, who was sitting amidst sages of the village of Kalāpa. After bowing down to the Lord, O hero of the Kurus, Nārada asked Him the very same question you have asked me.

Text 8:

As the sages listened, Lord Nārāyaṇa Ṛṣi related to Nārada an ancient discussion about the Absolute Truth that took place among the residents of Janaloka.

Text 9:

The Personality of Godhead said: O son of self-born Brahmā, once long ago on Janaloka, wise sages who resided there performed a great sacrifice to the Absolute Truth by vibrating transcendental sounds. These sages, mental sons of Brahmā, were all perfect celibates.

Text 10:

At that time you happened to be visiting the Lord on Śvetadvīpa — that Supreme Lord in whom the Vedas lie down to rest during the period of universal annihilation. A lively discussion arose among the sages on Janaloka as to the nature of the Supreme Absolute Truth. Indeed, the same question arose then that you are asking Me now.

Text 11:

Although these sages were all equally qualified in terms of Vedic study and austerity, and although they all saw friends, enemies and neutral parties equally, they chose one of their number to be the speaker, and the rest became eager listeners.

Texts 12-13:

Śrī Sanandana replied: After the Supreme Lord withdrew the universe He had previously created, He lay for some time as if asleep, and all His energies rested dormant within Him. When the time came for the next creation, the personified Vedas awakened Him by chanting His glories, just as the poets serving a king approach him at dawn and awaken him by reciting his heroic deeds.

Text 14:

The śrutis said: Victory, victory to You, O unconquerable one! By Your very nature You are perfectly full in all opulences; therefore please defeat the eternal power of illusion, who assumes control over the modes of nature to create difficulties for conditioned souls. O You who awaken all the energies of the moving and nonmoving embodied beings, sometimes the Vedas can recognize You as You sport with Your material and spiritual potencies.

Text 15:

This perceivable world is identified with the Supreme because the Supreme Brahman is the ultimate foundation of all existence, remaining

unchanged as all created things are generated from it and at last dissolved into it, just as clay remains unchanged by the products made from it and again merged with it. Thus it is toward You alone that the Vedic sages direct all their thoughts, words and acts. After all, how can the footsteps of men fail to touch the earth on which they live?

Text 16:

Therefore, O master of the three worlds, the wise get rid of all misery by diving deep into the nectarean ocean of topics about You, which washes away all the contamination of the universe. Then what to speak of those who, having by spiritual strength rid their minds of bad habits and freed themselves from time, are able to worship Your true nature, O supreme one, finding within it uninterrupted bliss?

Text 17:

Only if they become Your faithful followers are those who breathe actually alive, otherwise their breathing is like that of a bellows. It is by Your mercy alone that the elements, beginning with the mahat-tattva and false ego, created the egg of this universe. Among the manifestations known as anna-maya and so forth, You are the ultimate one, entering within the material coverings along with the living entity and assuming the same forms as those he takes. Distinct from the gross and subtle material manifestations, You are the reality underlying them all.

Text 18:

Among the followers of the methods set forth by great sages, those with less refined vision worship the Supreme as present in the region of the abdomen, while the Āruṇis worship Him as present in the heart, in the subtle center from which all the prāṇic channels emanate. From there, O unlimited Lord, these worshipers raise their consciousness upward to the top of the head, where they can perceive You directly. Then, passing through the top of the head toward the supreme destination, they reach that place from which they will never again fall to this world, into the mouth of death.

Text 19:

Apparently entering among the variegated species of living beings You have created, You inspire them to act, manifesting Yourself according to their higher and lower positions, just as fire manifests differently according

to the shape of what it burns. Therefore those of spotless intelligence, who are altogether free from material attachments, realize Your undifferentiated, unchanging Self to be the permanent reality among all these impermanent life forms.

Text 20:

The individual living entity, while inhabiting the material bodies he has created for himself by his karma, actually remains uncovered by either gross or subtle matter. This is so because, as the Vedas describe, he is part and parcel of You, the possessor of all potencies. Having determined this to be the status of the living entity, learned sages become imbued with faith and worship Your lotus feet, to which all Vedic sacrifices in this world are offered, and which are the source of liberation.

Text 21:

My Lord, some fortunate souls have gotten relief from the fatigue of material life by diving into the vast nectar ocean of Your pastimes, which You enact when You manifest Your personal forms to propagate the unfathomable science of the self. These rare souls, indifferent even to liberation, renounce the happiness of home and family because of their association with devotees who are like flocks of swans enjoying at the lotus of Your feet.

Text 22:

When this human body is used for Your devotional service, it acts as one's self, friend and beloved. But unfortunately, although You always show mercy to the conditioned souls and affectionately help them in every way, and although You are their true Self, people in general fail to delight in You. Instead they commit spiritual suicide by worshiping illusion. Alas, because they persistently hope for success in their devotion to the unreal, they continue to wander about this greatly fearful world, assuming various degraded bodies.

Text 23:

Simply by constantly thinking of Him, the enemies of the Lord attained the same Supreme Truth whom sages fixed in yoga worship by controlling their breath, mind and senses. Similarly, we śrutis, who generally see You as all-pervading, will achieve the same nectar from Your lotus feet that Your consorts are able to relish because of their loving attraction to Your

mighty, serpentine arms, for You look upon us and Your consorts in the same way.

Text 24:

Everyone in this world has recently been born and will soon die. So how can anyone here know Him who existed prior to everything else and who gave rise to the first learned sage, Brahmā, and all subsequent demigods, both lesser and greater? When He lies down and withdraws everything within Himself, nothing else remains — no gross or subtle matter or bodies composed of these, no force of time or revealed scripture.

Text 25:

Supposed authorities who declare that matter is the origin of existence, that the permanent qualities of the soul can be destroyed, that the self is compounded of separate aspects of spirit and matter, or that material transactions constitute reality — all such authorities base their teachings on mistaken ideas that hide the truth. The dualistic conception that the living entity is produced from the three modes of nature is simply a product of ignorance. Such a conception has no real basis in You, for You are transcendental to all illusion and always enjoy perfect, total awareness.

Text 26:

The three modes of material nature comprise everything in this world — from the simplest phenomena to the complex human body. Although these phenomena appear real, they are only a false reflection of the spiritual reality, being a superimposition of the mind upon You. Still, those who know the Supreme Self consider the entire material creation to be real inasmuch as it is nondifferent from the Self. Just as things made of gold are indeed not to be rejected, since their substance is actual gold, so this world is undoubtedly nondifferent from the Lord who created it and then entered within it.

Text 27:

The devotees who worship You as the shelter of all beings disregard Death and place their feet on his head. But with the words of the Vedas You bind the nondevotees like animals, though they be vastly learned scholars. It is Your affectionate devotees who can purify themselves and others, not those who are inimical to You.

Text 28:

Though You have no material senses, You are the self-effulgent sustainer of everyone's sensory powers. The demigods and material nature herself offer You tribute, while also enjoying the tribute offered them by their worshipers, just as subordinate rulers of various districts in a kingdom offer tribute to their lord, the ultimate proprietor of the land, while also enjoying the tribute paid them by their own subjects. In this way the universal creators faithfully execute their assigned services out of fear of You.

Text 29:

O eternally liberated, transcendental Lord, Your material energy causes the various moving and nonmoving species of life to appear by activating their material desires, but only when and if You sport with her by briefly glancing at her. You, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, see no one as an intimate friend and no one as a stranger, just as the ethereal sky has no connection with perceptible qualities. In this sense You resemble a void.

Text 30:

If the countless living entities were all-pervading and possessed forms that never changed, You could not possibly be their absolute ruler, O immutable one. But since they are Your localized expansions and their forms are subject to change, You do control them. Indeed, that which supplies the ingredients for the generation of something is necessarily its controller because a product never exists apart from its ingredient cause. It is simply illusion for someone to think that he knows the Supreme Lord, who is equally present in each of His expansions, since whatever knowledge one gains by material means must be imperfect.

Text 31:

Neither material nature nor the soul who tries to enjoy her are ever born, yet living bodies come into being when these two combine, just as bubbles form where water meets the air. And just as rivers merge into the ocean or the nectar from many different flowers blends into honey, so all these conditioned beings eventually merge back into You, the Supreme, along with their various names and qualities.

Text 32:

The wise souls who understand how Your Māyā deludes all human beings render potent loving service to You, who are the source of liberation from birth and death. How, indeed, can fear of material life affect Your faithful servants? On the other hand, Your furrowing eyebrows — the triple-rimmed wheel of time — repeatedly terrify those who refuse to take shelter of You.

Text 33:

The mind is like an impetuous horse that even persons who have regulated their senses and breath cannot control. Those in this world who try to tame the uncontrolled mind, but who abandon the feet of their spiritual master, encounter hundreds of obstacles in their cultivation of various distressful practices. O unborn Lord, they are like merchants on a boat in the ocean who have failed to employ a helmsman.

Text 34:

To those persons who take shelter of You, You reveal Yourself as the Supersoul, the embodiment of all transcendental pleasure. What further use have such devotees for their servants, children or bodies, their wives, money or houses, their land, good health or conveyances? And for those who fail to appreciate the truth about You and go on pursuing the pleasures of sex, what could there be in this entire world — a place inherently doomed to destruction and devoid of significance — that could give them real happiness?

Text 35:

Sages free from false pride live on this earth by frequenting the sacred pilgrimage sites and those places where the Supreme Lord displayed His pastimes. Because such devotees keep Your lotus feet within their hearts, the water that washes their feet destroys all sins. Anyone who even once turns his mind toward You, the ever-blissful Soul of all existence, no longer dedicates himself to serving family life at home, which simply robs a man of his good qualities.

Text 36:

It may be proposed that this world is permanently real because it is generated from the permanent reality, but such an argument is subject to logical refutation. Sometimes, indeed, the apparent nondifference of a cause and its effect fails to prove true, and at other times the product of

something real is illusory. Furthermore, this world cannot be permanently real, for it partakes of the natures of not only the absolute reality but also the illusion disguising that reality. Actually, the visible forms of this world are just an imaginary arrangement resorted to by a succession of ignorant persons in order to facilitate their material affairs. With their various meanings and implications, the learned words of Your Vedas bewilder all persons whose minds have been dulled by hearing the incantations of sacrificial rituals.

Text 37:

Since this universe did not exist prior to its creation and will no longer exist after its annihilation, we conclude that in the interim it is nothing more than a manifestation imagined to be visible within You, whose spiritual enjoyment never changes. We liken this universe to the transformation of various material substances into diverse forms. Certainly those who believe that this figment of the imagination is substantially real are less intelligent.

Text 38:

The illusory material nature attracts the minute living entity to embrace her, and as a result he assumes forms composed of her qualities. Subsequently, he loses all his spiritual qualities and must undergo repeated deaths. You, however, avoid the material energy in the same way that a snake abandons its old skin. Glorious in Your possession of eight mystic perfections, You enjoy unlimited opulences.

Text 39:

Members of the renounced order who fail to uproot the last traces of material desire in their hearts remain impure, and thus You do not allow them to understand You. Although You are present within their hearts, for them You are like a jewel worn around the neck of a man who has totally forgotten it is there. O Lord, those who practice yoga only for sense gratification must suffer punishment both in this life and the next: from death, who will not release them, and from You, whose kingdom they cannot reach.

Text 40:

When a person realizes You, he no longer cares about his good and bad fortune arising from past pious and sinful acts, since it is You alone who

control this good and bad fortune. Such a realized devotee also disregards what ordinary living beings say about him. Every day he fills his ears with Your glories, which are recited in each age by the unbroken succession of Manu's descendants, and thus You become his ultimate salvation.

Text 41:

Because You are unlimited, neither the lords of heaven nor even You Yourself can ever reach the end of Your glories. The countless universes, each enveloped in its shell, are compelled by the wheel of time to wander within You, like particles of dust blowing about in the sky. The śrutis, following their method of eliminating everything separate from the Supreme, become successful by revealing You as their final conclusion.

Text 42:

The Supreme Lord, Śrī Nārāyaṇa Ṛṣi, said: Having heard these instructions about the Supreme Self, the Personality of Godhead, the sons of Brahmā now understood their final destination. They felt perfectly satisfied and honored Sanandana with their worship.

Text 43:

Thus the ancient saints who travel in the upper heavens distilled this nectarean and confidential essence of all the Vedas and Purāṇas.

Text 44:

And as you wander the earth at will, My dear son of Brahmā, you should faithfully meditate on these instructions concerning the science of the Self, which burn up the material desires of all men.

Text 45:

Śukadeva Gosvāmī said: When Śrī Nārāyaṇa Ṛṣi ordered him in this way, the self-possessed sage Nārada, whose vow is as heroic as a warrior's, accepted the command with firm faith. Now successful in all his purposes, he thought about what he had heard, O King, and replied to the Lord as follows.

Text 46:

Śrī Nārada said: I offer my obeisances to Him of spotless fame, the Supreme Lord Kṛṣṇa, who manifests His all-attractive personal expansions so that all living beings can achieve liberation.

Text 47:

[Śukadeva Gosvāmī continued:] After saying this, Nārada bowed down to Śrī Nārāyaṇa Ṛṣi, the foremost of sages, and also to His saintly disciples. He then returned to the hermitage of my father, Dvaipāyana Vyāsa.

Text 48:

Vyāsadeva, the incarnation of the Personality of Godhead, respectfully greeted Nārada Muni and offered him a seat, which he accepted. Nārada then described to Vyāsa what he had heard from the mouth of Śrī Nārāyaṇa Ṛṣi.

Text 49:

Thus I have replied to the question you asked me, O King, concerning how the mind can have access to the Absolute Truth, which is indescribable by material words and devoid of material qualities.

Text 50:

He is the Lord who eternally watches over this universe, who exists before, during and after its manifestation. He is the master of both the unmanifest material energy and the spirit soul. After sending forth the creation He enters within it, accompanying each living entity. There He creates the material bodies and then remains as their regulator. By surrendering to Him one can escape the embrace of illusion, just as a dreaming person forgets his own body. One who wants liberation from fear should constantly meditate upon Him, Lord Hari, who is always on the platform of perfection and thus never subject to material birth.