

While Nanda Mahārāja was returning home, he considered Vasudeva's warning that there might be some disturbance in Gokula. Certainly the advice was friendly and not false. So Nanda thought, "There is some truth in it." Therefore, out of fear, he began to take shelter of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. It is quite natural for a devotee in danger to think of Kṛṣṇa, because he has no other shelter. When a child is in danger, he takes shelter of his mother or father. Similarly, a devotee is always under the shelter of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, but when he specifically sees some danger, he remembers the Lord very rapidly.

After consulting with his demoniac ministers, Kāṁsa instructed a witch named Pūtanā, who knew the black art of killing small children by ghastly sinful methods, to kill all kinds of children in the cities, villages and pasturing grounds. Such witches can play their black art only where there is no chanting or hearing of the holy name of Kṛṣṇa. It is said that wherever the chanting of the holy name of Kṛṣṇa is done, even negligently, all bad elements – witches, ghosts and dangerous calamities – immediately disappear. And this is certainly true of the place where the chanting of the holy name of Kṛṣṇa is done seriously – especially in Vṛndāvana when the Supreme Lord was personally present. Therefore, the doubts of Nanda Mahārāja were certainly based on affection for Kṛṣṇa. Actually there was no danger from the activities of Pūtanā, despite her powers. Such witches are called khecarī, which means they can fly in the sky. This black art of witchcraft is still practiced by some women in the remote northwestern side of India. They can transfer themselves from one place to another on the branch of an uprooted tree. Pūtanā knew this witchcraft, and therefore she is described in the Bhāgavatam as khecarī.

Pūtanā entered the county of Gokula, the residential quarter of Nanda Mahārāja, without permission. Dressing herself just like a beautiful woman, she entered the house of Mother Yaśodā. She appeared very beautiful, with raised hips, nicely swollen breasts, earrings, and flowers in her hair. She looked especially beautiful on account of her thin waist. She was glancing at everyone with very attractive looks and smiling face, and all the residents of Vṛndāvana were captivated. The innocent cowherd women thought that she was the goddess of fortune appearing in Vṛndāvana with a lotus flower in her hand. It seemed to them that she had personally come to see Kṛṣṇa, who is her husband. Because of her exquisite beauty, no one checked her movement, and therefore she freely entered the house of Nanda Mahārāja. Pūtanā, the killer of many, many children, found baby Kṛṣṇa lying on a small bed, and she could at once perceive that the baby was hiding His unparalleled potencies, which resembled fire covered by ashes. Pūtanā thought, "This child is so powerful that He can destroy the whole universe immediately."

Pūtanā's understanding is very significant. The Supreme Personality of Godhead, Kṛṣṇa, is situated in everyone's heart. It is stated in the Bhagavad-gītā that He gives one necessary intelligence, and He also causes one to forget. Pūtanā was immediately aware that the child whom she was observing in the house of Nanda Mahārāja was the Supreme Personality of Godhead Himself. He was lying there as a small baby, but that does not mean He was less powerful. The materialistic theory that God-worship is anthropomorphic is not correct. No living being can become God by undergoing meditation or austerities. God is always God. Kṛṣṇa as a baby is as complete as He is as a full-fledged youth. The Māyāvāda theory holds that the living entity was formerly God but has now become overwhelmed by the influence of māyā. Therefore the Māyāvādīs say that presently he is not God, but when the influence of māyā is taken away he will again become God. This theory cannot be applied to the minute living entities. The living entities are minute parts and parcels of the Supreme Personality of Godhead; they are minute particles or sparks of the original fire. So these sparks can be covered by the influence of māyā, but the original fire, Kṛṣṇa, cannot. Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Personality of Godhead, even from the beginning of His appearance in the house of Vasudeva and Devakī.

Kṛṣṇa showed the nature of a small baby and closed His eyes, as if to avoid the face of Pūtanā. This closing of the eyes is interpreted and studied in different ways by the devotees. Some say that Kṛṣṇa closed His eyes because He did not like to

see the face of Pūtanā, who had killed so many children and who had now come to kill Him. Others say that Pūtanā hesitated to take the baby on her lap because something extraordinary was being dictated to her from within, and that in order to give her assurance, Kṛṣṇa closed His eyes so that she would not be frightened. And yet others interpret in this way: Kṛṣṇa appeared in order to kill the demons and give protection to the devotees, as stated in the Bhagavad-gītā: paritrāṇāya sādhūnāṁ vināśaya ca duṣkṛtām. The first demon to be killed was a woman. According to Vedic rules, the killing of a woman, a brāhmaṇa, cows or a child is strictly forbidden. Kṛṣṇa was obliged to kill the demon Pūtanā, and because the killing of a woman is forbidden according to Vedic śāstra, He could not help but close His eyes. Another interpretation is that Kṛṣṇa closed His eyes because He simply took Pūtanā to be His nurse. Pūtanā came to Kṛṣṇa just to offer her breast for the Lord to suck. Kṛṣṇa is so merciful that even though He knew Pūtanā was there to kill Him, He took her as His nurse or mother.

There are seven kinds of mothers, according to Vedic injunction: the real mother, the wife of a teacher or spiritual master, the wife of a king, the wife of a brāhmaṇa, the cow, the nurse and mother earth. Because Pūtanā came to take Kṛṣṇa on her lap and offer her breast milk to be sucked by Him, she was accepted by Kṛṣṇa as one of His mothers. That is considered to be another reason He closed His eyes: He had to kill a nurse or mother. But His killing of His mother or nurse was no different from His love for His real mother or His foster mother, Yaśodā. We further understand from Vedic information that Pūtanā was also treated as a mother and given the same facility as Yaśodā. As Yaśodā was given liberation from the material world, Pūtanā was also given liberation. When the baby Kṛṣṇa closed His eyes, Pūtanā took Him on her lap. She did not know that she was holding death personified. If a person mistakes a snake for a rope, he dies. Similarly, Pūtanā had killed so many babies before meeting Kṛṣṇa, and she mistook Him to be like them, but now she was accepting the snake that would kill her immediately.

When Pūtanā was taking baby Kṛṣṇa on her lap, both Yaśodā and Rohinī were present, but because she was so beautifully dressed and showed motherly affection toward Kṛṣṇa, they did not forbid her. They could not understand that she was a sword within a decorated case. Pūtanā had smeared a very powerful poison on her breasts, and immediately after taking the baby on her lap, she pushed her breastly nipple within His mouth. She was hoping that as soon as He would suck her breast, He would die. But baby Kṛṣṇa very quickly took the nipple in anger. He sucked the milk-poison along with the life air of the demon. In other words, Kṛṣṇa simultaneously sucked the milk from her breast and killed her by sucking out her life. Kṛṣṇa is so merciful that because the demon Pūtanā came to offer her breast milk to Him, He fulfilled her desire and accepted her activity as motherly. But to stop her from further nefarious activities, He immediately killed her. And because the demon was killed by Kṛṣṇa, she got liberation. As Kṛṣṇa pressed her breast extremely hard and sucked out her very breath, Pūtanā fell down on the ground, spread her arms and legs and began to cry, "Oh, child, leave me, leave me!" She was crying loudly and perspiring, and her whole body became wet.

As she died screaming, there was a tremendous vibration on the earth and in the sky, on the upper and lower planets and in all directions, and people thought that thunderbolts were falling. Thus the nightmare of the Pūtanā witch was over, and she assumed her real feature as a great demon. She opened her fierce mouth and spread her arms and legs all over. She fell exactly as Vṛtrāsura did when struck by the thunderbolt of Indra. The long hair on her head was scattered all over her body. Her fallen body extended up to twelve miles and smashed all the trees to pieces, and everyone was struck with wonder upon seeing this gigantic body. Her teeth appeared just like plows, and her nostrils appeared just like mountain caves. Her breasts appeared like small hills, and her hair was a vast reddish bush. Her eye sockets appeared like blind wells, and her two thighs appeared like two banks of a river. Her two hands appeared like two strongly constructed bridges, and her abdomen seemed like a dried-up lake. All the cowherd men and women became struck with awe and wonder upon seeing this. And the tumultuous sound of her falling shocked their brains and ears and made their hearts beat strongly.

When the gopīs saw little Kṛṣṇa fearlessly playing on Pūtanā's lap, they very quickly came and picked Him up. Mother Yaśodā, Rohinī and other elder gopīs immediately performed the auspicious rituals by taking the tail of a cow and circumambulating His body. The child was completely washed with the urine of a cow, and the dust created by the hooves of the cows was thrown all over His body. This was all just to save little Kṛṣṇa from future inauspicious accidents. This incident gives us a clear indication of how important the cow is to the family, society and to living beings in general. The transcendental body of Kṛṣṇa did not require any protection, but to instruct us on the importance of the cow, the Lord was smeared over with cow dung, washed with the urine of a cow, and sprinkled with the dust upraised by the walking of the cows.

After this purificatory process, the gopīs, headed by Mother Yaśodā and Rohinī, chanted the names of Viṣṇu to give Kṛṣṇa's body full protection from all evil influences. They washed their hands and feet and sipped water three times, as is the custom before chanting mantra. They chanted as follows: "My dear Kṛṣṇa, may the Lord who is known as Aja protect Your legs; may Lord Maṇimān protect Your knees; may Lord Yajña protect Your thighs; may Lord Acyuta protect Your upper waist; may Lord Hayagrīva protect Your abdomen; may Lord Keśava protect Your heart; may Lord Īśa protect Your chest; may Lord Sūrya protect Your neck; may Lord Viṣṇu protect Your arms; may Lord Urukrama protect Your face; may Lord Īśvara protect Your head; may Lord Cakradhara protect Your front; may Lord Gadādhara protect Your back; may Lord Madhusūdana, who carries a bow in His hand, protect Your right side; may Lord Ajana protect Your left side; may Lord Urugāya with His conch shell protect You on all sides; may the Personality of Godhead Upendra protect You from above; may Lord Tārkṣya protect You on the ground; may Lord Haladhara protect You from all sides; may the Personality of Godhead known as Hṛṣīkeśa protect all Your senses; may Lord Nārāyaṇa protect Your life airs; may the Lord of Śvetadvīpa, Nārāyaṇa, protect the core of Your heart; may Lord Yogeśvara protect Your mind; may Lord Prśnigarbha protect Your intelligence; and may the Supreme Personality of Godhead protect Your soul. While You are playing, may Lord Govinda protect You from all sides, and when You are sleeping, may Lord Mādhava protect You from all danger; when You are walking, may the Lord of Vaikuṇṭha protect You from falling down; when You are sitting, may Lord Nārāyaṇa give You all protection; and while You are eating, may the Lord of all sacrifices give You all protection."

Thus Mother Yaśodā chanted different names of Viṣṇu to protect child Kṛṣṇa's different bodily parts. Mother Yaśodā was firmly convinced that she should protect her child from different kinds of evil spirits and ghosts – namely Dākinīs, Yātudhānīs, Kuṣmāṇḍas, Yakṣas, Rākṣasas, Vināyakas, Koṭarās, Revatīs, Jyeṣṭhās, Pūtanās, Māṭrkās, Unmādas and similar other evil spirits, who cause persons to forget their own existence and give trouble to the life airs and the senses. Sometimes they appear in dreams and cause much perturbation; sometimes they appear as old women and suck the blood of small children. But no such ghosts and evil spirits can remain where there is chanting of the holy name of God. Mother Yaśodā was firmly convinced of the Vedic injunctions about the importance of cows and the holy name of Viṣṇu; therefore she took all shelter in the cows and the name of Viṣṇu just to protect her child Kṛṣṇa. She recited all the holy names of Viṣṇu so that He might save the child. Vedic culture has taken advantage of keeping cows and chanting the holy name of Viṣṇu since the beginning of history, and persons who are still following the Vedic ways, especially the householders, keep at least one dozen cows and worship the Deity of Lord Viṣṇu, who is installed in their house. Persons who are advancing in Kṛṣṇa consciousness should take instruction from this pastime and also be very interested in cows and the holy name of Viṣṇu.

The elder gopīs of Vṛndāvana were so absorbed in affection for Kṛṣṇa that they wanted to save Him, although there was no need to, for He had already protected Himself. They could not understand that Kṛṣṇa was the Supreme Personality of Godhead playing as a child. After performing the formalities to protect the child, Mother Yaśodā took Kṛṣṇa and let Him suck her breast. When the child was protected by viṣṇu-mantra, Mother Yaśodā felt that He was safe. In the meantime,

all the cowherd men who had gone to Mathurā to pay tax returned home and were struck with wonder at seeing the gigantic dead body of Pūtanā.

Nanda Mahārāja recalled the prophecy of Vasudeva and considered him a great sage and mystic yogī; otherwise, how could he have foretold an incident that happened during his absence from Vṛndāvana? After this, all the residents of Vraja cut the gigantic body of Pūtanā into pieces and piled it up with wood for burning. When all the limbs of Pūtanā's body were burning, the smoke emanating from the fire created a good aroma of aguru. This aroma was due to her being killed by Kṛṣṇa. This means that the demon Pūtanā was washed of all her sinful activities and attained a celestial body. Here is an example of how the Supreme Personality of Godhead is all-good: Pūtanā came to kill Kṛṣṇa, but because He sucked her milk, she was immediately purified, and her dead body attained a transcendental quality. Her only business was to kill small children; she was only fond of blood. But in spite of being envious of Kṛṣṇa, she attained salvation because she gave her milk to Him to drink. So what can be said of those who are affectionate to Kṛṣṇa in the relationship of mother, who with great love and affection always serve Him, the Supreme Personality of Godhead and the Supersoul of every living entity?

It is concluded, therefore, that even a little energy expended in the service of the Lord gives one immense transcendental profit. This is explained in the Bhagavad-gītā: sv-alpam apy asya dharmasya trāyate mahato bhayāt. Devotional service in Kṛṣṇa consciousness is so sublime that even a little service rendered to Kṛṣṇa, knowingly or unknowingly, gives one the greatest transcendental benefit. The system of worshiping Kṛṣṇa by offering flowers from a tree is also beneficial for the living entity who is confined to the bodily existence of that tree. When flowers and fruits are offered to Kṛṣṇa, the tree that bore them also receives much benefit, indirectly. The arcanā process, or worshiping procedure, is therefore beneficial for everyone. Kṛṣṇa is worshipable by great demigods like Brahmā and Lord Śiva, and Pūtanā was so fortunate that the same Kṛṣṇa played in her lap as a little child. The lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa, which are worshiped by great sages and devotees, were placed on the body of Pūtanā. People worship Kṛṣṇa and offer Him food with great reverence and devotion, but automatically He sucked the milk from the body of Pūtanā. Devotees therefore pray that if simply by offering something as an enemy Pūtanā got so much benefit, then who can measure the benefit of worshiping Kṛṣṇa in love and affection? Therefore only Kṛṣṇa should be worshiped, for so much benefit awaits the worshiper.

Although Pūtanā was an evil spirit, she gained elevation just like the mother of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. It is clear that the cows and the elder gopīs who offered milk to Kṛṣṇa were also elevated to the transcendental position. Kṛṣṇa can offer anyone anything, from liberation to anything materially conceivable. Therefore, there cannot be any doubt of the salvation of Pūtanā, whose bodily milk was sucked by Kṛṣṇa for such a long time. And how can there be any doubt about the salvation of the gopīs, who were so fond of Kṛṣṇa? Undoubtedly all the gopīs, cowherd boys, cows and everyone else who served Kṛṣṇa in Vṛndāvana with love and affection were liberated from the miserable condition of material existence.

When all the inhabitants of Vṛndāvana smelled the good aroma from the smoke of the burning Pūtanā, they inquired from each other, "Where is this good fragrance coming from?" And while conversing, they came to understand that it was the fumes of the burning Pūtanā. They were very fond of Kṛṣṇa, and as soon as they heard that the demon Pūtanā had been killed by Kṛṣṇa, they offered blessings to the little child out of affection. After the burning of Pūtanā, Nanda Mahārāja came home and immediately took up the child on his lap and began to smell His head. In this way, he was quite satisfied that his little child was saved from this great calamity. Śrīla Śukadeva Gosvāmī has given a blessing to all persons who hear the narration of the killing of Pūtanā by Kṛṣṇa: they will surely attain the favor of Govinda.