

Krishna Lifts Govardhana Hill

Krishna and Balarama saw that the cowherd men of Vrindavan were preparing a sacrifice to please Indra, the King of heaven. Indra is responsible for supplying water.

Krsna wanted to establish the importance of devotional service, without desire for material gain. Because Krishna is aware of everything, he knew this preparation was for the Indra sacrifice; but, out of good manners, he asked questions of his father, Maharaja Nanda, with great respect.

Krishna asked, “Dear Father, please let me know the purpose of the sacrifice? Is it according to scripture? Or is it simply a popular ceremony?”

On hearing this, Maharaja Nanda replied, “My dear son, this ceremony is traditional. Because rainfall is due to the mercy of Lord Indra, and since water is so important for our living, we must show our gratitude to him. We are therefore arranging to please King Indra. Water is very important. Without rainfall we cannot farm or produce grain: without grain we cannot live! Rain is therefore necessary for dharma, economic development, enjoyment and even liberation. So we should not give up this traditional ceremony.”

After hearing this, Lord Krishna, the Supreme Lord, spoke to make Indra, the king of heaven, very angry. He presented his father two reasons for stopping the sacrifice. Firstly, he stated, there was no need to worship the demigods since all results derived from their worship are temporary, and only less intelligent people are fascinated by temporary results. Krishna’s second reason was that any temporary results given by demigods are actually granted by the Supreme Lord, Without His permission, no god or goddesses can bestow any benefit upon others.

In this instance, Lord Krishna wanted to make Indra angry. Although King Indra was a devotee of the Lord, he was too proud of his power. Krishna wanted to teach him a lesson.

With this in mind, Krishna began to talk as if He were an atheist, a person who rejects God’s authority. He explained to Nanda Maharaja that there is no need to worship any demigod, since every living being is born according to his past karma. Krishna explained that various levels of happiness and distress are results of different kinds of activities, from either the past life or this present life.

Nanda Maharaja and the other elders argued that one cannot derive any good results simply by hard work. He argued that to achieve agricultural results they must satisfy Indra who is in charge of rain supply. Lord Krishna defeated this argument, saying that the demigods give results only to people who have executed their duties. Lord Krishna said, “Let us, rather, perform our prescribed duties very nicely. The demigods will be satisfied by proper execution of all duties, so there is no need to worship them.” Krishna further explained that “the universe is working under the three modes of material nature – goodness, passion and ignorance. The cloud is caused by the action of rajo-guna, so what does Indra have to do with it? We do not get any benefit from Indra.”

After hearing this, Nanda Maharaja agreed to his son's wishes and prepared instead to satisfy Govardhana Hill and the local brahmanas. Delicious food was cooked, charity was given to brahmanas and delicious prasadam was distributed to everyone. When everything was complete, Krishna declared to the residents of Vrindavana that He Himself was Govardhana Hill.

When Indra understood that Krishna had stopped his sacrifice, he was furious. He called upon the Samvartaka cloud, which he invites when there is a need to devastate the whole cosmos. Indra ordered this cloud to drift over Vrindavan and flood the whole area. Indra thought himself to be God, proud of his strength and position.

Dark and dangerous clouds swirled above Vrindavan and poured water with continuous lightning and thunder. The rain fell like piercing arrows, and gradually filled the fields of Vrindavan. It was accompanied by blasting winds and severe cold. With no other source of shelter, the shivering residents of Vrindavan approached Govinda, and prayed "You are very affectionate towards your devotees. Please protect us from the anger of Lord Indra."

Krishna could understand that Indra felt humiliated. He therefore sent the rain with large chunks of hail, all out of season. Krishna concluded, "This demigod thinks himself to be the Supreme Deity, but I shall answer him according to my position. I will teach him that I am the Supreme Lord! I shall thus destroy Ingra's arrogance and false prestige."

Krishna immediately lifted the Govardhana Hill with one hand, just as easully as a child plucks a mushroom from the ground. He then assured His devotees not to be afraid, and invted them to happily gather underneath the gigantic umbrella.

The inhabitants of Vrindavan remained there with their animals for one week. They felt no thirst, hunger, or other discomfort. They were astounded to see how Krishna was holding up the mountain with the little finger of His left hand. Seeing Krishna's extraordinary power, Indra was dumbfounded and ordered the clouds, "Stop!". As the sky became clear again, the sun emerged and the winds abated. Krishna, now known as 'The lifter of Govardhana Hill', said to His devotees, "My dear cowherd men, you may now leave with your wives, children, cows and valuables, because the destruction has ended."

After the inhabitants had cleared away everything, Krishna gently replaced the hill in its original spot. The inhabitants of Vrindavan approached Krishna with great love and embraced Him with ecstasy. In the heavens, the demigods showered flowers on the surface of the earth and blew conch shells. Lord Krishna, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, returned to His home surrounded by His dear friends and the cows and calves.

Questions:

1. Who or what does Lord Krishna protect?
2. Who did he punish, and why?
3. What does he teach, through this story, do you think?