

The Life of Tulasi Devi  
and

Her Care and Worship -  
Amala-bhakta dāsa

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Retold by Amala-bhakta dāsa

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LTD 1: The Appearance of Tulasi Devī

Chapter 1

The Appearance of Tulasi Devī

Nārada Muni asked Lord Nārāyaṇa, "O Bhagavān! How did the pure, chaste Tulasi Devī become Your wife? Where was she born? Who was she in her previous birth? What family did she come from? And what austerities did she perform to get You as her husband-You, who are above the material energy, not subject to change, the Cosmic Self, the Supreme God, the Lord of all, omniscient, the cause of all, omnipresent, container and preserver of all. And how did Tulasi Devī, Your chief goddess, become a tree? O You who resolve all doubts, my mind is curious to know all about these points; therefore, it compels me to ask you these questions. Kindly remove these doubts from my mind."

Lord Nārāyaṇa then related the following account....

Manu Dakṣa Sāvarni was a partial expansion of Lord Viṣṇu. He was extremely virtuous, devoted to the Lord, and very famous for his good deeds. Dakṣa Sāvarni's son, Dharma Sāvarni, was also extremely virtuous. Dharma Sāvarni's pious son was called Viṣṇu Sāvarni, and his son, who was a great Vaiṣṇava, was known as Rāja Sāvarni.

However, Rāja Sāvarni's son, Vṛṣadhvaṇa, was fanatically devoted to Lord Śiva. Lord Śiva lived in Vṛṣadhvaṇa's house for three celestial yugas (ages) and loved him more than his own sons. Vṛṣadhvaṇa did not revere Lord Nārāyaṇa, Goddess Lakṣmī or any of the demigods. He abolished the worship of Lakṣmī in the month of Bhadra (Aug., Sept.) and the

worship of Sarasvatī in the month of Māgha (Jan., Feb.). He did not participate in the sacrifice and worship performed out of respect for Lord Viṣṇu (Nārāyaṇa) and criticized them rather severely.

The demigods did not curse him because they feared Lord Śiva. However, Sūrya, the sun god, no longer able to restrain his wrath, cursed him: "O King, just as you are completely devoted to Lord Śiva and only to Lord Śiva, and just as you do not recognize any of the other demigods, I declare that you will now lose your wealth and prosperity!"

When Lord Śiva heard this curse, he became angry. Seizing his trident, he ran after Lord Sūrya. Afraid, the sun god went with his father, Kaśyapa Muni, to Brahmāloka, the highest material planet, to take shelter of Lord Brahmā. But Lord Śiva pursued him there. Lord Brahmā, also afraid of Lord Śiva, took Lord Sūrya and Kaśyapa Muni to the region of Vaikuṅṭha, the spiritual or eternal world. There, with throats parched due to anxiety, they took refuge of Lord Nārāyaṇa, the Lord of all. They offered obeisances to Him and praised Him repeatedly and finally explained why they were so apprehensive.

Lord Nārāyaṇa bestowed His mercy on them and granted them the power to be fearless. He said, "O fearful ones, be consoled. How can you be afraid of anyone while I am here? If anyone remembers Me when he is in danger, wherever he may be, I hurry to him with my Sudarśana disc in my hand and save him. O demigods! I am always the creator, preserver and destroyer of this universe. In the form of Viṣṇu, I am the preserver; in the form of Brahmā, the creator; and in the form of Śiva, the destroyer. I am Śiva, I am you, and I am Sūrya. I assume numerous forms and preserve the universe. So go back to your respective places. You have nothing to be afraid of. All will be well.

"From this day on, you have nothing to fear from Lord Śiva. He is the shelter of the pious, is easily pleased, is the servant and lord of his devotees, and is great minded. Lord Śiva and the Sudarśana-cakra are dearer to Me than My life. In the world of valor, they excel all. Lord Śiva can easily create ten million Sūryas and ten million Brahmās. For him, nothing is impossible. He is not conscious of the external world. Meditating on Me, his heart centered, he is absorbed day and night. From his five faces he repeats My mantra with devotion, and he always sings My glories. Day and night, I also always think of his welfare. To whatever degree one worships Me, to that degree I favor one. The nature of Śiva is all-auspiciousness."

While Lord Nārāyaṇa was speaking, Lord Śiva arrived. His eyes red, he was sitting on his bull carrier holding his trident. He dismounted quickly and humbly offered obeisances with devotion to the Lord of Lakṣmī, the tranquil Supreme Being.

Lord Nārāyaṇa, Viṣṇu, was sitting on His jewel-studded throne. He was decorated with a crown, earrings, and a garland, and was holding His disc. His form was extremely beautiful, and His complexion like a fresh blue rain cloud. Each of His attendants had four arms and was fanning Him with four hands. His body was anointed with sandal paste and He was wearing a yellow garment. Lord Viṣṇu, who shows kindness to His devotees, was chewing betel nut that had been offered to Him by His wife Lakṣmī. Smiling, He was watching and listening to the dancing and singing of the Vidyādharis.

After Lord Śiva bowed down to Lord Nārāyaṇa, he bowed to Lord Brahmā. Lord Sūrya and Kaśyapa Muni respectfully saluted Lord Śiva. Then Lord Śiva worshiped Lord Viṣṇu, the Lord of all, and seated himself on a throne. The attendants of Lord Nārāyaṇa began to fan Lord Śiva with white whisks to relieve him of the fatigue of his journey. Lord Śiva, because of being in contact with Lord Viṣṇu's virtues, then assumed a cheerful disposition and adored the Eternal Being with his five mouths.

Lord Nārāyaṇa was highly gratified. With sweet, nectarean words, He said, "O Lord Śiva, you are the symbol of all good and welfare. Thus, to ask about your welfare would be foolish. I would ask you only out of respect for the rules of society and the method prescribed in the Vedas. One who yields fruits of devotion and gives all prosperity should not be asked about his austerities or material prosperity. Since you preside over knowledge, it would be useless to ask if you are increasing in knowledge. It would be equally useless to ask a conqueror of death if he is free from all danger. But you have come to my residence for a reason. What is it? Have you become angry over something?"

"O Lord Viṣṇu!" Lord Śiva began. "King Vṛṣadhvaja is my great devotee. Lord Sūrya has cursed him and that has made me angry. Out of affection for my son, the king, I was about to kill Sūrya. But Sūrya sought shelter of Lord Brahmā, and now both of them have sought Your protection. Those who are distressed and take shelter of You, either by speaking about You or by remembering You, become completely safe and free from danger. They overcome death and old age. What to speak of those who come personally to You and take shelter. When one remembers You, his dangers disappear. All good comes to him. O Lord of the world! What will become of my foolish devotee who, by the curse of Lord Sūrya, has lost his fortune and prosperity?"

Lord Viṣṇu replied, "O Lord Śiva! A half hour has elapsed here in Vaikuṅṭha. In that time, twenty-one celestial yugas have passed away. Therefore, King Vṛṣadhvaja, through the revolution of irresistible and dreadful time, is dead. His son, Hamsadhvaja, in the course of time, also died. Hamsadhvaja begot two noble sons named Dharmadhvaja and Kuśadhvaja. They are both great Vaiṣṇavas but, because of Lord Sūrya's curse, they have become luckless. They lost their kingdoms, including all property and prosperity. But they are now engaged in worshipping Goddess Lakṣmī, who is

pleased with their efforts. Therefore, She has agreed to descend to Earth and expand Herself partially by taking birth from the wives of those two kings. Then, by the favor of Goddess Lakṣmī, Dharmadhvaja and Kuśadhvaja will become prosperous, mighty kings. O Lord Śiva! Your devotee Vṛṣadhvaja is dead, so return to your abode. O Lord Brahmā, Lord Sūrya and Kaśyapa Muni-you also should return your realms."

Bhagavān Viṣṇu then went with His wife to the inner apartments. The demigods went cheerfully to their own abodes, Lord Śiva continuing his practice of austerity.

Dharmadhvaja and Kuśadhvaja performed harsh asceticism and worshiped Goddess Lakṣmī. Thereafter, they separately obtained the blessings they desired. By Goddess Lakṣmī's favor, they again became the rulers of the earth. They acquired great spiritual merits, were married, and begot children. King Dharmadhvaja was married to Mādhavī. After some time, she became pregnant with a partial incarnation of Goddess Lakṣmī. However, the infant remained in Mādhavī's womb for one hundred celestial years. Day by day Mādhavī's luster increased. Then, on an auspicious day and moment, when there was a full moon, in the month of Kārttika, on a Friday, she gave birth.

The grace of the Goddess of Fortune, Lakṣmī, manifested through the baby. There were marks of the lotus flower on the infant's feet. Her face looked like the autumnal moon, her eyes resembled blooming lotuses, and her lips appeared like ripe bimba fruit. Her palms and the soles of her feet were reddish, her navel was deep, and just above it were three folds. Her buttocks were round, and her body was delightfully warm in the winter and cool in the summer-very pleasant to touch. Her breast was firm and her waist thin, and the light shining from her body surrounded her like a halo. Her complexion was white, like a campaka flower, and her hair looked beautiful. Because her beauty was incomparable, the sages called her Tulasī.

LTD 2: Tulasī Performs Austerities

Chapter 2

Tulasī Performs Austerities

As soon as she was born, Tulasī resolved to go to the mountainous region of Badarīnātha to practice severe austerities. Though many persons tried to dissuade her, no one was able to; for she was determined to stay and pray in the forest till Lord Kṛṣṇa appeared and agreed to become her husband. During a period of one hundred thousand celestial years, she endured the following:

In the summer, she exposed herself to four fires around her and the sun above; in the winter, she submerged herself in the icy waters; and in the rainy season, she subjected herself to heavy downpours at the funeral grounds. For 20,000 years, she subsisted on fruits and water; for 30,000 years, she chewed dry leaves; for 40,000 years, she lived only on air; and for 10,000 years, she ate nothing and just stood on one leg.

Finally, she saw Lord Brahmā in the sky, riding on his swan carrier and sweeping down towards her. Believing that he had come to grant her a boon, she bowed down low to him.

Lord Brahmā said, "O Tulasī, ask me for a boon. Whether it be devotion to Lord Hari or servitorship to Him or freedom from old age or freedom from death-I will grant it."

"Yes, O Lord, I will ask. Please listen. I will not hide my desires out of fear or shame, since you are all-knowing. My name is Tulasī. Formally I was a cowherd girl in Goloka, and there I served Rādhārāṇī, the beloved of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. I am a partial expansion of Rādhārāṇī and was her favorite companion. But one day in the place where the rasa dance had occurred, Kṛṣṇa became intimate with me and I fainted from excessive joy. While I was lying there, Rādhārāṇī suddenly appeared and saw me in that condition. She was not at all pleased. Blinded with fury, she first reproached Kṛṣṇa and then cursed me. She said, 'O vile one! Go! And take birth as a human being!'

"Then Kṛṣṇa said to me, 'When you take birth in India, if you practice austerities, Lord Brahmā will grant you a blessing. He will arrange for you to marry the four-armed Nārāyaṇa, who is an expansion of Myself.' Then Kṛṣṇa disappeared. And out of fear of Rādhārāṇī, I left Goloka and was born in this world...So please grant me that boon. I want to have that handsome and peaceful Nārāyaṇa as my husband."

Lord Brahmā replied, "O Tulasī, Sudāmā was a partial expansion of Kṛṣṇa and was one of Kṛṣṇa's cowherd boyfriends in Goloka. As a result of a curse by Rādhārāṇī, he is presently living on earth among the Dānavas (demons). His name is Śaṅkhacūḍa. He is very energetic and no one can compare with him in strength. While living in Goloka, he was very attracted to you and wanted to marry you. But because he feared Rādhārāṇī, he did not make any overtures.

"Just as you are a jātismarā-that is, one who knows her previous births-Śaṅkhacūḍa also is. Remembering his past desire to be close to you, he has performed severe austerities to obtain you as his wife. I now wish to grant his desire. Therefore, O beautiful one, please agree to wed him. However, later on, by the special arrangement of Providence, you will get the beautiful Nārāyaṇa as your husband. But after that, He will curse you and you will be transformed into the world-purifying Tulasī plant (holy basil). You will be the best of flowers and dearer to Nārāyaṇa than His own life. No one's worship will be complete without your leaves. You will remain as a tree in Vṛndāvana and will be widely known as Vṛndāvanī. The cowherd men and women will worship Lord Hari with your leaves. As the presiding deity of the Tulasī plant, you will always enjoy the company of Kṛṣṇa, the best of cowherd boys."

Tulasī Devī smiled and gladly said to Lord Brahmā, "O Father, I will be honest with you. I am not as devoted to the four-armed Nārāyaṇa as I am to the two-armed Kṛṣṇa. For in Goloka, my close encounter with Kṛṣṇa was suddenly interrupted, leaving me still longing for Him. Thus, it was only because Kṛṣṇa had asked me that I have been praying to get Nārāyaṇa for my husband. But now it appears certain that by your grace I will again get Kṛṣṇa, who is very difficult to attain. However, O lord, please grant me the following boon: that I lose my fear of Rādhārāṇī."

Lord Brahmā replied, "O child, I shall now give you the sixteen-lettered rādhā-mantra. By this boon you will be as dear to Rādhārāṇī as Her life, and She will approve of Your intimate dealings with Kṛṣṇa."

Lord Brahmā initiated Tulasī Devī into to the sixteen-lettered mantra, the hymn, and the mode of worship of Śrī Rādhā. Then, blessing her, he disappeared.

As directed, Tulasī engaged herself in worshipping Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī and, after twelve years, attained success. Obtaining the desired boon, she reaped the fruits that were unattainable by others. As the pangs of her austerities ended, she became cheerful. When one gets the fruits of one's labor and then considers the difficulties experienced in attaining them, the difficulties then seem pleasurable.

Tulasī was in the prime of her youth and she longed for the company of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Finishing her food and drink, she lay down on a beautiful bed decorated with flowers and perfumed with sandal paste. She went to sleep with a happy heart. But while she slept, Kāmadeva, the god of love, shot five arrows at her-arrows that were meant to enchant her.

Consequently, though she was anointed with cooling sandal paste and slept on a bed strewn with flowers, her body began to feel as though it were on fire. Out of joy, the hairs on her body stood on end, her eyes reddened and her body began to tremble. One moment she looked thin and at another moment she grew restless or drowsy. Sometimes she became agitated or warm with desire, at other times she fainted, then recovered, then sorrowed. Sometimes she got up from the bed, walked this way and that way, sat down or lay down.

This abnormal condition of her body and mind increased daily; so much so that her soft bed felt like a bed of thorns; delicious fruits and water tasted like poison; her house seemed like a desert; her soft delicate cloth felt hot like fire; and the vermilion mark on her forehead pained like a boil.

In her dreams she saw a nicely dressed, smiling, jolly youth. He was adorned with jewels, besmeared with sandal paste, and garlanded with flowers. Gazing at her face, he spoke to her affectionately, and embraced and kissed her repeatedly. One moment he went away; the next moment he returned; then she cried out, "O Lord of my heart, where are you going? Please don't go!" When she awakened, she wept again and again. In this way Tulasī Devī passed her days at Badarikāśrama.

LTD 3: The Birth of Śaṅkhacūḍa

Chapter 3

The Birth of Śaṅkhacūḍa

The sage Kaśyapa was the son of the Prajāpati (forefather) Marīci and the grandson of Lord Brahmā, and was very learned. Dakṣa, another Prajāpati, gave him thirteen of his daughters in marriage. One of Kaśyapa Muni's wives was known as Danu. She was very attractive and chaste, and Kaśyapa cared for her with love and devotion. Danu bore many mighty sons, one of whom was Vipracitti, who was exceedingly powerful and courageous. His son Dambha was self-controlled and a great devotee of Lord Viṣṇu. But he could not beget a son, so he became anxious. Therefore, to improve the situation, he went to Puṣkara Forest and performed severe austerities for a hundred thousand years. There, sitting in a steady posture and uttering the Kṛṣṇa-mantra, he practiced japa.

While practicing, an intolerable effulgence shot out from Dambha's head and spread everywhere. It was so hot that all the demigods, sages and Manus were scorched by it. Thus, with Indra leading, they all sought shelter of Lord Brahmā. Arriving at Lord Brahmā's abode, they praised him and then informed him of the situation. After hearing about it, Lord Brahmā, to relate the problem to Lord Viṣṇu, led them to Vaikuṅṭha. There, with palms joined reverentially, they praised the great savior and Lord of the three worlds. The demigods then asked, "O Lord, we do not know what has caused this. Please tell us. What is that light by which we have been scorched?"

Lord Viṣṇu laughed and lovingly said, "O demigods, do not be afraid; remain calm and unshaken. No flood will occur and it is not the time of universal dissolution. The asura Dambha, one of my devotees, is performing asceticism to obtain a son. I shall soon bless him and that will quiet him."

Encouraged by this, Lord Brahmā and the other demigods returned to their own realms.

Lord Viṣṇu went to Puṣkara where Dambha was practicing austerity. Seeing that Dambha was repeating His name, the Lord consoled him and asked, "What blessing do you want Me to grant you?"

Dambha offered obeisances with great devotion and praised the Lord repeatedly. Then he said, "O Lord of lords, O lotus-eyed one, obeisances unto You. O Lord of Lakṣmī, O Lord of the three worlds, please be merciful to me. Please give me a powerful and courageous son who will be Your devotee, be invincible to the demigods, and be a conqueror of the three worlds."

Lord Viṣṇu asked Dambha to stop his austerity, granted him the blessing, and disappeared. As the Lord vanished, Dambha offered obeisance in that direction and returned home. Within a short while, his blessed wife became pregnant. She radiated an effulgence that illuminated the inner apartment of her residence. The soul residing in her womb was Sudāmā, one of Lord Kṛṣṇa's leading cowherd companions who had been cursed by Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī. When Dambha's chaste wife gave birth to a radiant-looking son, Dambha invited the sages to his place and had the post-natal rites performed. There was great jubilation and, on a favorable day, the father named him Śaṅkhacūḍa. The son grew up in his father's residence like the moon in its bright half. In his childhood, he learned all the traditions, customs, injunctions and prohibitions, and became resplendent. Engaging in childhood play, he delighted his parents and became the favorite of all the family members.

Later on, to obtain a boon from Lord Brahmā, Śaṅkhacūḍa performed austerities in Puṣkara for a long while. He concentrated his mind, restrained his senses and organs of action, and chanted a mantra that his preceptor, Jaigīṣavya, had imparted to him. Finally, Lord Brahmā went to Śaṅkhacūḍa to grant him a blessing. Lord Brahmā asked, "Tell me what boon you want."

Seeing Lord Brahmā, the Dānava king bowed to him humbly and praised him with devotional words. Then he said, "Please make me invincible to the demigods, and also enable me to marry Tulasī.

"So be it," Brahmā replied. Then he gave Śaṅkhacūḍa the divine amulet of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa. This amulet, called Sarvamaṅgalamaya (Conqueror of the World), was considered the most auspicious of all auspicious things in the world, for it guaranteed victory everywhere.

Brahmā continued, "Now you should go to Badarikāśrama. Tulasī Devī is performing penance there by her own will. You should marry her there. She is the daughter of King Dharmadhvaḥja." Lord Brahmā then disappeared.

Śaṅkhacūḍa, whose austerity had now borne fruit at Puṣkara, tied that most precious amulet round his neck. He then set out for Badarikāśrama, his face beaming with joy.

LTD 4: Tulasī Devī Tests King Śaṅkhacūḍa

Chapter 4

Tulasī Devī Tests King Śaṅkhacūḍa

Tulasī saw Śaṅkhacūḍa approaching in his jeweled airplane and noticed that he was in the prime of his youth. He was handsome like Cupid, white-complexioned like the campaka flower and decorated with gems. His face resembled the full moon of autumn, his eyes looked like lotuses in full bloom, and his cheeks flashed with the glow of his earrings. A pārijāta flower garlanded his neck, musk and saffron anointed his body, and sandal paste perfumed his person.

As he came closer, Tulasī hid her face in her shawl and smiled at him with sidelong glances. Blushing at the thought of this first meeting, she bowed her head nervously and eagerly drank in with her eyes the lotus of his face.

Śaṅkhacūḍa also gazed at Tulasī, seated as she was on a lovely bed strewn with flowers and sandalwood. Her teeth shown like pearls, her lips were like bimba fruit, her nose was graceful and her complexion golden. She resembled the autumnal moon. Adding to her grace, just below the parting of her hair, was the mark of sandal paste and musk; and just below them, a mark of vermilion. She had a low yet deep navel, and below it, three lovely abdominal folds. Her palms were reddish, her fingernails were glowing, and her feet were radiant and crimson, colored with lac-dye. Her glowing toenails surpassed the glow of the autumn moon, giving her an unrivaled beauty.

Tulasī was adorned with lovely jingling ornaments, and the knot of hair at the back of her head was decorated with a jasmine wreath. Shark-shaped earrings adorned her cheeks while a diamond necklace beautified her breast. She wore gorgeous bangles of conch on her arms and wrists, as well as precious jewels on her fingers.

Śaṅkhacūḍa sat down and said to her, "O beautiful girl, whose daughter are you? And how have you come to this forest? You look most fortunate and blessed. Indeed, you are the personification of heavenly joy-the best of women!

You are a model of loveliness and can certainly bewilder even the saints!"

When Tulasī gave no reply, he asked, "O gracious one, why don't you speak? I am your servant, so please greet me with the melody of your speech."

Her head lowered, her face smiling, the beautiful-eyed Tulasī said, "I am the daughter of King Dharmadhvaḥja and have been practicing asceticism here. But who are you? And why are you talking to me? If a noble man sees a virtuous woman alone, he does not talk to her. So go away-whenever you please."

But Śaṅkhacūḍa did not move.

Tulasī continued. "The śāstras say that only a degraded man desires a woman. At first a woman is sweet to a man, but later proves fatal. Though her mouth rains honey, her heart is like a jar of poison. She uses sweet words but her heart is sharp like a razor. To achieve her own selfish ends she is submissive to her husband; otherwise, she is unsubmissive. While her face looks cheerful, her heart is dirty. Even the Vedas and the Purāṇas cannot fathom her character. A wise man never trusts a base woman. She has no friend or enemy; for all she wants are new lovers. When a woman sees a well-dressed man, she inwardly desires him, but outwardly she appears chaste and modest. She is naturally passionate, attracts men's minds, and eagerly engages in sex. Though outwardly she hides her lust and appears modest, when she

meets her lover in secret, she is ready to swallow him up. When she does not have sex with him, she feels offended, her body burns with anger, and she begins to quarrel. When her passions are fully satisfied, she becomes cheerful; when unsatisfied, morose.

"A woman likes a good lover more than sweet foods or refreshing drinks; she likes him even more than her own son; he is dearer to her than her life. But if the lover becomes impotent or aged, she regards him as an enemy. Quarrels and anger ensue. Then she devours him as a snake eats a rat. She is rashness personified and a mine of vices. A woman is hypocritical, obstinate and unfaithful. Even Lord Brahmā and other gods are deluded by her. She is a hindrance on the path of austerity, an obstacle to liberation, an impediment to developing faith in Lord Hari, a refuge of all delusion and a living chain that binds men to the world. She is like a magician and is as false as dreams. She appears to be very beautiful, but she is a bucket of stool, urine, gas and blood. When God created her, he arranged that she should become the spirit of delusion to the deluded and poison to those who desire liberation. Thus, on no account should a woman be desired, and by all means she should be avoided."

Śaṅkhacūḍa smiled and then answered, "O goddess, what you have said is not completely false. It is partly true and partly false. From the Creator have come chaste and unchaste women. One is praiseworthy, the other is not. Examples of chaste women are Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī, Durgā, Sāvitrī and Rādhā. Women who are expansions of them are auspicious, glorious and very commendable, such as Śatarūpa, Devahūti, Svadhā, Svāhā, Dakṣiṇā, Anasūya, Gaṅgā, Diti, Aditi, Vedavatī, etc. In every yuga cycle these women are excellent. The heavenly prostitutes are also expansions and partial expansions of the above women, but they are not praiseworthy because they are unchaste.

Women who are in the mode of goodness are virtuous and pure. The sages declare them to be excellent. But those who are in the modes of passion and ignorance are not so praiseworthy. The passionate ones are fond of sense pleasures, indulge in them, and always want to fulfill their selfish goals. Such women are usually insincere, deluded, and irreligious. Generally, they are unchaste. But woman in the mode of ignorance are considered the worst. They are irresistible.

"A virtuous man would never court another man's wife in either public or private. But I have come to you by Lord Brahmā's command-to marry you according to the Gāndharva rite. (In this, the bride and bridegroom meet each other of their own accord and consummate their meeting in sexual union. No sacred rituals are necessary.)

"My name is Śaṅkhacūḍa. When the demigods see me, they flee in fear. In my previous birth, I lived in Goloka and was a cowherd boy named Sudāmā. I was a close friend of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's, one of His attendants. I was one of the eight celebrated cowherds. Then Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī cursed me to be born in India in a demon family. By Kṛṣṇa's grace and by His mantra, I am a jātismarā, that is, I know the history of my previous birth. You also are a jātismarā. So you know that in your previous birth, in Goloka, when Rādhārāṇī caught you alone with Kṛṣṇa, she became angry and cursed you to be born here, in India. In Goloka I very much wanted to consort with you; but because I feared Rādhārāṇī, I did not do so."

Śaṅkhacūḍa stopped talking. Tulasī smiled and cheerfully said, "Persons like you are famous in this world and good women desire such husbands. You have defeated me in argument. A man who is conquered by a woman is very impure and condemned by people in general. The forefathers and the demigods regard men who are conquered by women as low and contemptible. Even their fathers and mothers mentally despise them. The Vedas say that when a child is born or a relative dies, the brāhmaṇas are purified in ten days; the ksatriyas in twelve days; the vaiśyas in fifteen days; and the śūdras as well as other low classes in twenty-one days. But a man conquered by a woman always remains impure. Only when his body is burned to ashes does he become purified. Neither the ancestors nor the demigods accept from him offerings of cakes, flowers, etc. Men whose hearts are totally conquered by women acquire no fruits from their knowledge, austerities, japa, fire sacrifices, worship, learning or fame.

"I tested you to determine how strong you are in knowledge. One should choose one's husband by examining a man's merits and defects. If one gives his daughter in marriage to a man devoid of good qualifications, to an old man, to a man who is ignorant or poor, illiterate, diseased, ugly, wrathful, harsh, lame, limbless, deaf, dumb, inactive, or impotent-this sin is equivalent to the sin of murdering a brāhmaṇa. But if one gives his daughter in marriage to a young Vaiṣṇava who is learned, well-qualified and peaceful, one acquires the fruits of performing ten horse sacrifices. If one raises a daughter and then sells her out of greed for profit, he falls to the hell known as Kumbhīpāka. There, for a period equal to fourteen of Lord Indra's lifespans, such a sinner has to drink his daughter's urine and eat her stool as well as be bitten by worms and crows. When this period ends, he has to be born in this world as a diseased person and earn his livelihood by selling and carrying meat."

LTD 5: Tulasī Marries Śaṅkhacūḍa

Chapter 5

Tulasī Marries Śaṅkhacūḍa

When Tulasī Devī stopped speaking, Lord Brahmā suddenly appeared there. After Śaṅkhacūḍa and Tulasī offered him their respects, Lord Brahmā said, "O Śaṅkhacūḍa! Why are you wasting your time in such empty talks with Tulasī?"

Marry her now by the Gandharva rite. As you are a gem among males, she is a gem among females. When a clever couple marry, the union is very happy. And who would abandon happiness when it is at hand? Anyone who would do so is worse than a beast. And you, Tulasī! Why are you testing this noble and qualified person who can subdue both the gods and the demons? Marry Śaṅkhacūḍa, just as Lakṣmī is married to Nārāyaṇa, Rādhikā to Kṛṣṇa, my Sāvitrī to me, Śaci to Indra and Aditi to Kaśyapa. Stay with the handsome Śaṅkhacūḍa for a long time and, as you like, wander with him to various places. When Śaṅkhacūḍa leaves his body, you will return to Goloka and get Kṛṣṇa as your husband." Lord Brahmā then blessed them and returned to his own abode.

Śaṅkhacūḍa then married Tulasī by the Gandharva rite. Glorifying the marriage, the demigods sounded their drums and showered flowers on them from the sky.

Sometimes the newly married couple would go to a flower grove and at other times to a river bank. There, they would sleep on flower beds smeared with sandal paste and enjoy marital pleasures. Tulasī easily stole the heart of her husband, and Śaṅkhacūḍa also attracted Tulasī's heart. After Tulasī garlanded her husband with pārijāta flowers, which prevent disease and old age, she placed a precious jeweled ring on his finger and offered him rare beautiful gems. Bowing down to his feet with devotion, she repeatedly said, "I am at your service!"

Śaṅkhacūḍa smiled. He then presented Tulasī with clothes he had obtained from Lord Varuṇa's house; he also gave her a precious necklace of jewels, an armlet he had gotten from Svāhā (Agni's wife), armlets from Chāya (the sun god's wife), earrings from Rohiṇī (the moon god's wife), finger rings from Rati (Cupid's wife), conch ornaments from Viśvakarmā, as well as excellent bedding adorned with pearls and jewels. After further adorning her, he placed her feet on his chest and said, "I am your servant."

They left the hermitage and began to travel to various places. They went to different mountains, flower gardens, caves, beaches, riversides and forests. Wherever they went, they enjoyed each other's company with great satisfaction, never tiring of one another. Śaṅkhacūḍa then brought Tulasī to his own kingdom and there they continued to delight in each other's company.

LTD 6: Lord Viṣṇu Helps the Demigods

Chapter 6

Lord Viṣṇu Helps the Demigods

Śaṅkhacūḍa enjoyed his kingdom for one manvantara (4,320,000 years) and, during that period, gained control over all the Devas, Dānavas, Gandharvas, Kinnaras and Rākṣasas. He dispossessed the gods of their realms and privileges, deprived them of their rights with respect to worship and offerings, and seized their weapons and ornaments.

Consequently, they wandered about the universe like helpless beggars. Finally, they united in a group and went to Lord Brahmā's assembly. Sobbing, they related the whole story of how Śaṅkhacūḍa had oppressed them. Lord Brahmā took them to Lord Śiva's realm and related to Śiva the details of the case.

Lord Śiva then took them all to the highest place, Vaikuṅṭha, where there is neither old age nor death. As they approached the first gate, they saw the watchmen guarding the gate and sitting on jeweled seats. The watchmen had beautiful dark blue bodies and looked effulgent. They had smiles on their faces, lotuslike eyes, and four arms—each hand holding a conch, mace, disc and lotus. They wore yellow garments, were decorated with jeweled ornaments, and were garlanded with forest flowers.

Lord Brahmā asked them for admittance and they nodded their approval. Then, after passing through sixteen gates, the group finally arrived before Lord Nārāyaṇa. The assembly hall was filled with saints and four-armed attendants who resembled Nārāyaṇa and were wearing Kaustubha jewels. The assembly hall was so brilliant with rays of light that it appeared as though the moon had just arisen. By Lord Nārāyaṇa's mercy, there were diamonds, gems and necklaces of jewels placed in various areas. In some spots there were rows of pearls that shed their splendor and brilliance, and in other spots there were mirrors arranged in a circle. In certain areas there were jewels called padmarāgas which were artistically arranged to appear like lotuses spreading their radiant beauty everywhere. There were rows of steps made of Syamantaka jewels. Throughout the hall were wonderful pillars built of indranila jewels. There were sandal leaves strung high from pillar to pillar. There were also golden jars full of water. All around were pārijāta-flower garlands, sweet-scented sandal trees, and saffron and musk; the whole atmosphere was permeated with sweet fragrances.

The Vidyādharas were dancing in one area. The assembly hall measured eight thousand miles in circumference. All over, numerous servants were engaged in various services. Lord Brahmā, Lord Śiva and other demigods saw Lord Hari (Nārāyaṇa) sitting in the center on a precious jeweled throne; He looked like the moon surrounded by many stars. He was wearing a crown on His head, earrings, a wildflower garland round His neck and sandal paste on His body. Holding a lotus in His hand, He was smiling, watching the dancers and listening to the music. He looked very tranquil. Lakṣmī was gently holding His feet and He was chewing the sweet-scented betel she had given Him. Gaṅgā was fanning Him devotedly with a white cāmara (whisk), and others were singing hymns to Him with their heads lowered in devotion.

Lord Brahmā and the other gods offered their obeisances to Lord Viṣṇu. As they did, their hairs stood on end, tears flowed from their eyes and their voices were choked with emotion. Then Lord Brahmā, his hands clasped and his head bowed, informed the Lord about Śaṅkhacūḍa's doings.

Lord Hari smiled and said, "O lotus born! I know all about Śaṅkhacūḍa. In his previous birth he was my great devotee, a very energetic cowherd boy in Goloka. I will tell you something about him which is quite sanctifying. His name was Sudāmā and he was my chief attendant. He is now a Dānava because in Goloka Rādhā pronounced a terrible curse on him. Here is how it happened..."

"One day I left Rādhā's company and went to the rasa dance area with the gopī named Virajā. Rādhā soon heard from one of Her maidservants that I had flirted with Virajā. Blinded with fury, She hastened there with Her attendants to see if this were true. Seeing that it was, Rādhā immediately converted Virajā into a river. I myself disappeared, so Rādhā rushed home angrily with Her attendants.

"Later, when I was with Sudāmā and She saw me, Rādhā rebuked me very much. However, I remained silent. But Sudāmā could not tolerate this, so he rebuked Rādhā in My very presence. This was quite intolerable to Her dignity. Her eyes became red with anger and She immediately ordered thousands of Her attendants to drive him away. Sudāmā then trembled with fear. As Rādhā's attendants tried to drive him away, he resisted and repeated his reproaches against Her. When She heard them, She cursed him, saying, 'May you be born in the womb of a Dānavī (demon woman)!'

"Sudāmā bowed down to Me and, crying, began to leave. But Rādhā, who is quite merciful, began to melt. Weeping, she tried repeatedly to stop him from leaving. 'Wait!' She called. 'Wait! Where are you going? You don't have to go. Please come back.' She became distressed, and Her attendants and the cowherd boys began to weep. I then explained to them, 'In about a half a moment Sudāmā will return, having fulfilled the conditions of the curse. Of course a half moment here is equal to about one manvantara (4,320,000 years) on Earth.' I then called to Sudāmā. 'O Sudāmā, when the curse expires, please come back here!'

"O demigods, that expert mystic and devotee Śaṅkhacūḍa will return to Goloka. Therefore, O gods, take My trident and go quickly to India. Lord Śiva will kill the Dānava with the trident. The demon is wearing My auspicious amulet around his neck. It is called 'Conqueror of the World.' As long as he keeps wearing it, no one can kill him. So I will go to him disguised as a brāhmaṇa and beg for the amulet. But you have granted him the boon that he cannot die unless his wife's chastity is violated. I will take care of this as well. Then he will surely die. Later, when his wife leaves her body, she will become my dearest wife." Nārāyaṇa then gave Lord Śiva his trident.

LTD 7: An Envoy Sent to Śaṅkhacūḍa

Chapter 7

An Envoy Sent to Śaṅkhacūḍa

Lord Brahmā and the other demigods returned to their respective abodes. Later, to gain victory for the demigods, Lord Śiva pitched his big tent and camped on the banks of the Candrabhāga River under a beautiful fig tree. He then sent Puṣpadanta, the leader of the Gandharvas, as a messenger to Śaṅkhacūḍa. When Puṣpadanta arrived at Śaṅkhacūḍa's capital, he noticed that it was more beautiful than Indra's realm and more opulent than Kuvera's.

The city was 40 miles wide and 80 miles long. It was built of pearl and jewel crystals, and on all sides there were roadways. Seven inaccessible moats, one after another, surrounded the city.

There were hundreds of shops full of trade articles and marketable commodities. Palatial buildings of traders and merchants were all over. Thousands and thousands of beautiful buildings, constructed with scarlet gems, inlaid with various ornaments, and decorated with fancy articles, gave the place a boundless charm.

The Gandharva chief saw that Śaṅkhacūḍa's palace was spherical like the moon. Four successive moats with fiery flames encircled it. On top of the palace were ramparts, made of jewels, that touched the sky. The palace was inaccessible to enemies but offered no hindrance to friends.

The twelve gates, decorated with lotuses, jeweled mirrors, paintings and statues, were guarded by twelve gatekeepers. On all sides the place was protected by very powerful, graceful, well-dressed and richly adorned demons who were holding heavenly weapons in their hands. When Puṣpadanta approached the first gate, he saw that it was guarded by a man who had a hideous face, copper complexion and tawny eyes, and who was smiling and holding a trident in his hand. Puṣpadanta explained to him the purpose of his mission—that he was a war ambassador—and the guard allowed him to pass inside; the other gatekeepers did the same. At the last gate he said to the guard, "O guard, quickly inform your king that a war is about to occur."

The guard did so and, obtaining Śaṅkhacūḍa's permission, ushered the messenger inside. There, the Gandharva saw the well-formed, handsome demon seated in the center of the royal assembly on a golden throne. One attendant was holding a jeweled umbrella over the king's head while other attendants were fanning him with white cāmaras.

Countless demons surrounded him and armed guards walked here and there. Śaṅkhacūḍa was beautifully dressed in heavenly garments, covered with garlands, and anointed with fragrance.



Seeing all this, Puṣpadanta was thunderstruck and said to Śaṅkhacūḍa, "O King, I am a messenger of Lord Śiva and my name is Puṣpadanta. My lord has ordered me to tell you the following: The demigods have sought the protection of Lord Hari. So you had better restore to them their kingdoms and rights. Lord Hari has given His own trident to Lord Śiva and asked him to wage war against you if necessary. Presently, Lord Śiva is residing under the shade of a fig tree on the bank of the Puṣpabhadra River. Either you must return to the demigods their property or you must be ready to fight with Lord Śiva...What shall I tell my lord is your reply?"

The demon laughed loudly and said, "You had better leave. I shall go to him in the morning."

The messenger returned to Lord Śiva and conveyed the demon's message. In the meantime the following group of persons appeared before Lord Śiva: Kārttikeya, Nandī, Mahākāla, Bāṇa, Maṇibhadra, the eight Bhairavas, the eleven Rudras, the eight Vasus, the twelve Ādityas, Indra, Agni, Candra, Viśvakarmā, the two Aśvini-kumāras, Kuvera, Yama, Jayanta, Nalakūvara, Vāyu, Varuṇa, Budha, Maṅgalā, Dharma, Śani, Kāma, Ugra-caṇḍā, Koṭarī, the hundred-armed Bhadrakālī, as well as many other personages.

Bhadrakālī was seated on an excellent chariot. Her paraphernalia, clothing, garland and sandal paste were red. Inspiring her devotees with courage and infusing fear into the enemy, she began dancing, laughing and singing. Her rolling tongue and the skull she held in her hand were each eight miles in circumference. She carried a trident, an iron spear, conches, a wheel, mace, lotus, bow, arrows, dumbbells, a scimitar, thunder, the weapons of Viṣṇu and Varuṇa, a snake noose, the weapons of Agni, Nārāyaṇa, Brahmā, Gandharva, Garuḍa, Paśupati, a pestle, shield, staff, as well as other irresistible weapons. This fearsome goddess was accompanied by millions of devotee Yoginīs and Dākinīs, and also countless ghosts, goblins and demons known as Bhūtas, Pretas, Piśācas, Kuṣmāṇḍas, Brahma-rākṣasas and Rākṣasas, as well as Yakṣas and Kinnaras. Then Kārttikeya arrived and he bowed down to his father Lord Śiva, who asked him to sit on his left side and help him. The army remained there in battle array.

LTD 8: Śaṅkhacūḍa Consoles Tulasī

Chapter 8

Śaṅkhacūḍa Consoles Tulasī

At the palace, the mighty Śaṅkhacūḍa went to the women's quarters and informed Tulasī about the imminent war.

Hearing this, her palate, lips and throat became dry. With a sorrowful heart, she said to him, "O my lord, my friend, my master! Stay for a moment and sit within my heart. Fill me with life for a moment. Please satisfy my human desire. Let me gaze at you fully so that my eyes may be satisfied. My breathing is very agitated now. For at the end of night I had a very bad dream. Therefore, I feel a burning within myself."

The king finished his meal and, in truthful and beneficial words, said to Tulasī, "O my queen, when it is time to reap the results of one's past acts, one experiences good and evil, pleasure and pain, fear and sorrow. In time, trees grow, branches develop, flowers blossom and fruits appear. In time, the fruitful tree decays. Similarly, in time, human beings grow and decline. In time, the creator creates, the preserver preserves and the destroyer destroys. This is the law of creation, preservation and destruction. Therefore, you should always adore Lord Kṛṣṇa, as He is the Lord of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva; He is the creator, maintainer and destroyer, He has no beginning nor end, and He does not depend on material nature. Lord Kṛṣṇa, by His own will, has manifested nature with its animate and inanimate objects.

"All things, from Lord Brahmā down to a blade of grass, are artificial and temporary. In time, they grow and decay.

Thus it would be better for you to adore Rādhā's consort, Lord Kṛṣṇa, who is distinct from the three modes of material nature, who is the Supersoul within all and the Lord of all. Take shelter of Kṛṣṇa, for it is by His command that the wind blows swiftly, the sun radiates heat, Indra pours rain, death visits human beings, fire burns, and the moon travels through the sky. Seek the Supreme Kṛṣṇa, who is the death of death, the time of time, the creator of the creator, the preserver of the preserver and the destroyer of the destroyer. Take refuge in Him. My dearest, no one is a friend of anyone, but Lord Hari (Kṛṣṇa) is the friend of all. Therefore, pray to Him and serve Him.

"My love, who am I and who are you? By our karma, Providence has united us. Providence will also separate us. When danger comes, only fools are disturbed. The wise are never thus shaken. Like wheels, pleasure and pain always revolve. In Badarikāśrama you absorbed yourself in austerities to obtain Lord Nārāyaṇa as your husband. Surely, you will get Him. I myself practiced austerities to obtain you as my wife. And by Lord Brahmā's grace, I have gotten you. Very soon, you will get Govinda in Goloka Vṛndāvana. And when I leave my demoniac body, I too shall go there. In that realm we will regularly see one another. By Rādhā's curse I was born in the precious land of India. But I will return to Goloka. Therefore, my dear, do not worry about me. You, too, will quit your human form, assume a spiritual form, and go to Lord Hari. So you need not sorrow."

Tulasī was thus consoled.

Śaṅkhacūḍa spent the night with Tulasī in the temple of gems, which was lit by diamond lamps. They rested on a nicely decorated bed strewn with flowers and anointed with sandal paste. Then Tulasī, who had not eaten any food and thus looked thin, became overwhelmed with grief and began weeping. The king, who knew the truth about life, clasped her to his chest and again appeased her in various ways. The spiritual instructions he had received in Bhāṇḍīra Forest from

Lord Kṛṣṇa, which were capable of destroying all sorrows and delusions, he now carefully conveyed to Tulasī. Upon receiving them, her joy knew no bounds, for she realized that everything in this world is temporary. She and her husband then spent the remainder of the night in loving exchanges.

LTD 9: Śaṅkhacūḍa Prepares for War

Chapter 9

Śaṅkhacūḍa Prepares for War

At brāhma-muhūrta (before sunrise), Śaṅkhacūḍa got up from his flower-strewn bed. He discarded his night clothes, bathed in pure water, put on freshly washed clothing, and smeared his body and forehead with bright tilaka markings. He performed the necessary rites and worshiped his personal Deity.

He then saw such auspicious things as curd, ghee, honey, parched rice, etc., and, as usual, distributed to the brāhmaṇas the best jewels, pearls, clothing and gold. To make his departure for war favorable, he gave to his guru some pearls, gems and diamonds, and he gave to the poor some horses, elephants and cows. He then gave to the brāhmaṇas a thousand storehouses, three lakhs (300,000) of towns and seven lakhs (700,000) of villages. He installed his son Sucandra as the acting king and entrusted to him the care of his family, kingdom, treasury, subjects, wealth, storehouses and conveyances.

Śaṅkhacūḍa dressed himself for war and armed himself with bow and arrows. The king ordered the armies to gather, so three hundred thousand horses, one hundred thousand elephants, ten thousand chariots, three crores of archers (30 million), three crores of armed soldiers, and three crores of trident holders readied themselves for battle. After counting his forces, the king appointed a mahāratha, an expert in the science of warfare, as commander-in-chief over three lakh akṣauhiṇī forces (300,000). [An akṣauhiṇī is a whole army consisting of 109,000 foot soldiers, 65,610 horses, 21,870 chariots and 21,870 elephants]. Ordering three akṣauhiṇīs to beat war drums, he remembered Lord Hari and emerged from the pavilion. Śaṅkhacūḍa rode on a fine chariot and, headed by his guru and his elders, left for Lord Śiva's place. Lord Śiva at that time was staying on the banks of the Puṣpabhadrā River at Siddhāśrama. This holy place was known to enable sādhus to easily attain perfection in yoga. It was here that Lord Kapila practiced asceticism, and thus devotees of Lord Kapila went there and did the same. The place was bounded on the west by the western sea, on the east by the Malaya mountain range, on the south by the Śrī Śaila mountain, and on the north by the Gandhamādāna Mountain. The Puṣpabhadrā River was forty miles wide and four-thousand miles long. This auspicious river offered great spiritual merit, and was always full of transparent, sparkling water. She is the favorite spouse of the Lavaṇa (salt) ocean and is indeed very sacred. This river issues from the Sarasvatī in the Himalayas and, keeping the Gomatī River on her left side, she eventually merges with the western ocean.

LTD 10: Lord Śiva's Counsel

Chapter 10

Lord Śiva's Counsel

When the demon arrived there, he saw Lord Śiva sitting in a yogic meditation posture at the root of a fig tree. Looking as bright as a million suns, Lord Śiva was smiling. He appeared as though the Infinite Light were radiating from every pore of his body. He was wearing a tiger skin and holding a trident and an ax, and his head was covered with bright bunches of matted hair. He had five faces and three eyes in each, and there were sacred snakes coiled around his neck. He was the death of death, the destroyer of the world and a powerful lord. His face was serene and beautiful. He immortalizes his devotees, awards the fruits of asceticism and is a source of prosperity. He destroys the world and rescues sinners from hell.

Upon seeing Lord Śiva, Śaṅkhacūḍa got down from his chariot and, with his entire army, bowed low to him. He also saluted Bhadrakālī, who was on Lord Śiva's left side, and Kārttikeya, who was in the front. In response, they bestowed blessings on him. Nandī and other devotees of Lord Śiva got up and greeted him in a suitable manner. Śaṅkhacūḍa spoke cordially to them and then sat down beside Lord Śiva, who greeted him cheerfully and said, "O King, Lord Brahmā, the creator of the world and the father of religious duty, had a Vaiṣṇava son named Marīci, who begat the virtuous Kaśyapa. Dakṣa, another son of Lord Brahmā, bowed to Kaśyapa and gave him his thirteen daughters in marriage. Of these daughters, Danu, who was very blessed and chaste, gave birth to forty sons. They were all very spirited and known as Dānavas. Amongst them, Vipracitti was prominent—he was most valorous, pious and devoted to Lord Viṣṇu. His son's name was Dambha and he obtained Śukrācārya as his guru. Following his teacher's advice, he worshiped Lord Kṛṣṇa at Puṣkara by reciting the Kṛṣṇa-mantra for one hundred thousand years. Consequently, by Lord Kṛṣṇa's boon, he was able to get a son like you.

"In your former birth, in Goloka, you were very religious and were the chief cowherd friend of Lord Kṛṣṇa. By Rādhā's curse, you have become lord of the demons here. But you are also a Vaiṣṇava. And a Vaiṣṇava regards everything—from the form of Lord Brahmā down to the form of a blade of grass—as very illusory. Even if the four kinds of liberation are offered to him, namely, sālōkya, sārṣṭi, sāyujya and sāmīpya (to live on the same planet as Lord Viṣṇu, to have the same opulences as Lord Viṣṇu, to merge with Lord Viṣṇu and to have equal association with Lord Viṣṇu, respectively), he

does not care at all for them; for he is only interested in serving Lord Viṣṇu. Nor does he care to have the position of Indra, Kuvera or Brahmā, for he thinks them all insignificant. He only cares to worship and serve Lord Kṛṣṇa. Now you are a true Kṛṣṇa devotee. Therefore, why do you care for things that belong to the demigods and which are false to you? Better return to the demigods their kingdoms and please me by this act. Let the demigods be reinstated in their own positions and you govern your own kingdom happily. You are all descendants of Kaśyapa Muni. So it is not desirable for relatives to feud. In fact, the sin committed by killing a brāhmaṇa is not even one sixteenth as great as that of creating hostilities amongst one's relatives.

"O King, pause. If you think that by restoring to the demigods their kingdoms, you will lose prestige, you should also consider that no one's position is stable or unchanging. When the world is completely dissolved, even Lord Brahmā disappears; then, by the will of God, he subsequently reappears. And later, by virtue of his knowledge, he again creates everything. But the type of knowledge, intellect and memory that people receive depends on the amount of austerity they practiced in their previous births.

"Also, consider this: truth is the support of dharma or virtue. In the Satya-yuga (golden or truthful age), virtue is complete; in the Treta-yuga (silver age), it is reduced by one fourth; in the Dvāpara-yuga (copper age) by one half; and in the Kali-yuga (iron age or age of quarrel), by three fourths; and at the end of the Kali-yuga, virtue becomes reduced even more, like the moon on the dark-moon night.

"Or consider the sun: in the summer its light is very intense; but not so in the winter. At noon, the sun is very hot; but not so in the morning and evening. In time, the sun rises; in time, it becomes powerful; and in time, it sets. By the working of time, it is obscured by clouds.

"Then consider the moon: when the moon is devoured by Rāhu (as in a lunar eclipse), it trembles; when it is released, it becomes bright again. In the full-moon night, it becomes full, but does not remain so. In the bright fortnight, it waxes daily, but in the dark fortnight, it wanes daily. In the bright fortnight, the moon looks healthy and rich, but in the dark fortnight, it looks decreasingly thinner, as if afflicted by consumption. Thus, at one time the moon looks powerful, and at another time it looks weak and pale.

"Similarly, Bali Mahārāja is presently living in Pātāloka (one of the planets beneath the earth), but at another time he will become lord of the demigods. At one time the earth is lush with grains and is the resting place of all beings, but at another time it becomes covered with water. The entire world, including everything moving and nonmoving, appears at one time and disappears at another.

"Only Lord Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, remains the same. It is by His grace that I obtained the name Mr̥tyuñjaya (the Conquerer of Death). I have witnessed many dissolutions of the world and I shall continue to witness them. Lord Kṛṣṇa is both material nature and the Supreme Being. He is the individual soul as well as the Supreme Soul. Though He assumes many forms, He is beyond these forms. Whoever repeats His name and sings His glories can conquer death; he does not come under the influence of birth, death, disease, old age and fear. Lord Kṛṣṇa has created Brahmā, the creator; Viṣṇu, the preserver; and me, the destroyer. By His will we possess those potencies and influences. O King! I have delegated Kāla, Agni and Rudra to do the work of destruction, whereas I myself only repeat His name and sing His glories incessantly, day and night. For this reason I am called Mr̥tyuñjaya, and by my knowledge, I have conquered death. I am fearless. When death sees me, he flies away, just as snakes flee when they see Garuḍa."

King Śaṅkhacūḍa thanked and praised Lord Śiva repeatedly, and replied modestly. "What you have said is quite true. But please allow me to say a few words. Kindly listen...You have just said that fighting with one's relatives is a great sin. Then why did the Lord, on behalf of the demigods, take away all of Bali Mahārāja's possessions and send him down to Pātāla? And why did the Lord, for the same reason, kill Hiraṇyākṣa, Hiraṇyakaśipu, Śumbha and other Dānavas (demons)? Long ago the demons and the demigods worked hard together churning the ocean to obtain nectar from it; but why did the Lord give the nectar to the demigods? O lord, this universe is the sporting ground of Lord Kṛṣṇa; and anyone He favors with fortune and glory obtains them. The quarreling between the demigods and the demons is eternal. Victory and defeat come to each party alternately. So it is improper and unnecessary for you to interfere in our quarrel. For you, O great lord, are both my relative and my friend. And your nature is of the Highest Self. To you, the demigods and the demons are equal. So it is certainly shameful for you to become our opponent and favor the demigods. If you win this battle, the glory and fame you gain would not be as great as if we win. And if we defeat you, the disgrace and infamy you earn would be much greater than that which we would if we were defeated: for we are small and you are great.

Lord Śiva smiled and gently said, "O King, you have descended from a brāhmaṇa family, so if I am defeated by you, how shall I incur shame? In former days, the Lord fought with Madhu and Kaiṭabha as well as Hiraṇyakaśipu and Hiraṇyākṣa. And I fought with Tripura. And the universal mother, Durgā Devī, fought with Śumbha and other demons. But none of the demons just mentioned, who were killed in the war, can be compared to you in prowess. You are the best of Lord Kṛṣṇa's attendants. The demigods have sought Lord Hari's protection, so He has sent me on their behalf to approach you. If I am defeated by a sublime person like yourself, how can I be disgraced? But I am surprised to hear

you talk of disgrace and infamy. There is no point in continuing this useless talk. Now, either return to the demigods their kingdoms or prepare to fight with me. I am firm in my determination."

LTD 11: The War Begins

Chapter 11

The War Begins

Śaṅkhacūḍa quickly got up, bowed down to Lord Śiva, and ascended his chariot with his ministers. Lord Śiva ordered his army to be ready immediately, and Śaṅkhacūḍa did the same. Musical instruments blared out, formally announcing the start of war. There was a great clamor along with the cries of the warriors. Then the fight between the demigods and demons began, and both sides fought righteously. Indra fought with Vṛṣaparvan, Bhāskara (the sun god) with Vipracitti, Niśākara (the moon god) with Dambha, Fire with Gokaṛṇa, Kuvera with Kālakeya, and Viśvakarmā with Māyā. Mṛtyu (the death god) battled with Bhayaṃkara, Yama with Śambara, Vāyu with Bala, Varuṇa with Vikaca, Budha with Dhṛtapaṛṣṭha, Śani with Raktākṣa, Jayanta with Ratnasāra, the Vasus with the groups of Varcasas, the two Āsvini-kumāras with the two Dīptimāns, Nalakūvara with Dhūma, and Dharma with Dhurandhara. Maṅgala contended with Gaṇakākṣa, Vaiśvānara with Śobhākara, Manmathā with Pipita, the twelve sun gods with Gokāmukha, Cūrṇa, Khaḍga, Dhūmra, Saṃhala, Viśva and Pālāśa. The eleven Rudras fought with eleven terrible and powerful asuras, Mahāmaṇi fought with Ugracaṇḍā and others, and Nandiśvara and the rest fought with the leading demons.

Lord Śiva, the goddess Kālī and their son Kārttikeya encamped at the root of the holy fig tree.

King Śaṅkhacūḍa, adorned with gems and surrounded by millions of demons, sat down on a beautiful jeweled throne. Then a great battle ensued. Many mystical and supernatural weapons were hurled, and numerous demigods and demons were killed. Maces, long and short swords, paṭṭiśas, bhuṣuṇḍis, mudgaras (different types of iron clubs), javelins, spears, axes and other weapons glowed in the soldiers' hands. Fighting with these weapons, the jubilant warriors roared and cut off each other's heads. Elephants, horses, chariots and foot soldiers, along with their drivers and passengers were hit and torn apart. Arms, thighs, hands, hips, ears and feet were cut off. Flags, arrows, swords, coats of mail and beautiful ornaments were split apart. From the tussle, glowing heads with earrings as well as elephantlike thighs were strewn about the earth. Severed arms with their ornaments and weapons were scattered about like honeycombs. Warriors running on the battlefield saw several headless bodies that jumped and which were still holding their weapons. The warriors discharged so many arrows at each other that the sun became obscured and it appeared as if the rainy season had arrived. Heroes roared like lions, blew conches loudly and fought furiously. Though the combat was terrible and tumultuous, it was pleasurable to the fighters. Then the demigods were defeated. Many were wounded by weapons and missiles, and, frightened, they fled the battlefield.

LTD 12: Kārttikeya and Kālī Enter the Battle

Chapter 12

Kārttikeya and Kālī Enter the Battle

The demigods returned to Lord Śiva and sought refuge in him. Disturbed, they cried out, "O Lord, please save us! Save us!"

Lord Śiva, noting the demigods' defeat and hearing their fearful cries, became greatly enraged. Glancing at the demigods sympathetically, he assured them of his protection. He ordered his son, the great hero Kārttikeya, to attack the enemy. Fighting courageously with the hosts of demons, Kārttikeya shouted angrily and roared heroically, killing one hundred akṣauhiṇīs in the battle. Then Kālī, her eyes like a red lotus, chopped off their heads, drank their blood, and rapidly ate their flesh. She fought in many ways, frightening both the demigods and the demons. Wherever she went, she drank the Dānavas' blood. With one hand she grabbed ten million elephants and ten million men and playfully shoved them into her mouth. Thousands of headless bodies appeared to be dancing on the battlefield. All the cowards were terrified by the overwhelming tumult.

Kārttikeya again became furious. Showering countless volleys of arrows, he struck thousands of demon leaders within a few seconds. Terrified, many of the Dānavas fled, but those who stayed were slain. The demons Vṛṣaparvan, Vipracitti, Daṇḍa and Vikampana fought with Kārttikeya by turns, and all of them were wounded by his spear. Kālī assisted Kārttikeya, and together they won the battle. In the heavens, the celestials pounded their drums and showered down flowers. Śaṅkhacūḍa saw the appalling spectacle wrought by Kārttikeya and Kālī; it appeared as terrible as the final dissolution of the world. Furious, he prepared for battle. Accompanied by many heroes, he climbed into his diamond-studded airplane, which was equipped with weapons and missiles. This enlivened and encouraged his men, especially when Śaṅkhacūḍa, sitting in the middle of the plane, drew his bowstring to his ear and discharged volleys of arrows. The shafts were terrifying and could not be endured. They resembled a shower of rain and covered the battlefield with intense darkness, relieved only by occasional flashes of fire.

At this, Nandiśvara and the other demigods fled, however, Kārttikeya stayed. Then the Dānava king showered mountains, serpents, pythons and trees so horrendously that they could not be resisted. Thus Kārttikeya looked like the sun covered by thick sheets of frost. Śaṅkhacūḍa broke Kārttikeya's car, cut to pieces his bow, chariot and horses, and

shattered his peacock carrier. Then he hurled his effulgent spear at Kārttikeya's chest, and the force of the blow caused him to fall unconscious.

Quickly regaining consciousness, Kārttikeya mounted his sturdy, bejeweled chariot, took up his weapons and missiles and fought awesomely. Using his mystic weapons, he furiously split the weapons that had been hurled at him, namely, the serpents, mountains, trees and rocks. Then he put out a fire with his water weapon, split apart the demon's bow and chariot, and killed his charioteer. Roaring and shouting repeatedly like a hero, he split Śaṅkhacūḍa's armor and crown, and then hurled his blazing spear at the demon's chest. Śaṅkhacūḍa collapsed unconscious.

But within a second that powerful asura regained consciousness and, with the strength of a lion, got up and roared. The demon grabbed another bow and more arrows and mounted another chariot. Foremost in the use of mystic powers, the demon caused a tremendous downpour of arrows on Kārttikeya that completely enshrouded him. Then the demon grabbed an invincible iron spear, which was filled with Lord Viṣṇu's energy; it was radiant like a hundred suns and looked like the vast fire that occurs at the end of the world. Śaṅkhacūḍa hurled it at Kārttikeya and it hit him with the impact of a massive fireball, causing him to drop unconscious.

Kālī immediately went to him, lifted her son to her breast and carried him to Lord Śiva. By virtue of his deep knowledge, Lord Śiva revived Kārttikeya and endowed him with inexhaustible strength. He then got up full of vigor but remained guarded by Lord Śiva.

Kālī, followed by Nandīśvara, the Gandharvas, the Yakṣas, the Rākṣasas and the Kinnaras, returned to the battlefield. Hundreds of war drums were pounded and hundreds of persons carried wine. When Kālī began to roar like a lioness, the demons fainted. Seeing this, she burst into cackles of laughter repeatedly, boding ill to the asuras. Then Kālī drank wine and danced on the battlefield, and the Yoginīs, Dākinīs and the demigods also drank, roaring and reveling. When Śaṅkhacūḍa saw Kālī, he hastened to the field. Though his men were frightened by her, he assured them of his protection.

Kālī then hurled a fire weapon and it shot over the field like the fire that manifests when the world is about to come to an end. But the king shot a water weapon at it and quickly extinguished it. Kālī hurled the varuṇa weapon at him but he baffled it with the Gāndharva weapon. Kālī threw the Māheśvara weapon, but he destroyed it with his Vaiṣṇava weapon. Then, after uttering some mantras, Kālī discharged the Nārāyaṇa weapon. Seeing it coming at him, the king jumped off his chariot and bowed down to it, causing the weapon to zoom upwards like the fire of final dissolution. The demon, full of devotion, fell prostrate on the ground. The goddess recited a mantra and hurled a brahmāstra at him, but he baffled it with his own brahmāstra. Then she threw a weapon at him that was eight miles long, but Śaṅkhacūḍa cut it to pieces with his celestial weapon.

Infuriated, the demon discharged celestial missiles at the goddess but she merely opened her mouth wide, swallowed them and roared with loud laughter. This terrified the demons. Śaṅkhacūḍa then hurled a weapon at her that was eight hundred miles long, but she shattered it into a hundred pieces with celestial missiles. He flung the Vaiṣṇava missile at the goddess, but she blocked it with a Māheśvara missile.

The fight continued for a long time and all the demigods and demons stood watching it.

Kālī was now infuriated. Just as she readied herself to throw the pāśupata weapon, a heavenly voice from the sky cried out, "O Goddess! Do not throw this missile at Śaṅkhacūḍa. So long as Lord Hari's amulet remains on his neck and his wife's chastity is not violated, the king cannot be killed-even by the never-failing pāśupata weapon. Lord Brahmā gave him this boon." Kālī heeded the voice and desisted from hurling the weapon. But out of hunger she devoured millions of demons. She then hastened to devour Śaṅkhacūḍa but he resisted her with his sharp celestial weapons. She next aimed a scimitar at him that flashed like the noonday sun but the king cut it to pieces. So she ran after him to swallow him. But the skillful demon prevented her by expanding his body.

Highly enraged, the dreadful goddess smashed his chariot, killed his charioteer, and hurled a terrible spear at him-one that looked like the awesome fire that occurs when the world is about to end. But the king caught it with his left hand. The goddess then angrily struck him with her fists and caused the demon enough pain to make him reel and fall unconscious for a moment. Regaining consciousness, he got up, but he would not engage in hand-to-hand combat with Kālī. Rather, he bowed down to her.

The goddess then threw other weapons at Śaṅkhacūḍa, but he partly cut them down and partly took them up and absorbed them, rendering them futile. Regarding her as his mother, he did not aim any weapons at her. Then Kālī caught hold of him, whirled him around repeatedly and angrily flung him into the sky. The demon came down with a tremendous crash, but he immediately got up and bowed to the goddess. Next, he gladly climbed up onto another stunning jeweled chariot and, feeling no fatigue at all from the battle, continued fighting.

Then Kālī, feeling hungry, began drinking the blood and eating the fat and flesh of the demons. After this the goddess returned to Lord Śiva and described to him in detail the progression of the war-from beginning to end. Hearing about the demise of the demons, Lord Śiva laughed. Kālī remarked that the only demons alive were the ones who crawled out of her mouth while she was chewing them, which amounted to about one hundred thousand. "And when I took hold of

the pāśupata weapon to kill Śaṅkhacūḍa, an invisible celestial voice cried, 'He cannot be killed by you.' Then the powerful demon stopped hurling weapons at me. All he did was shatter those which I hurled at him."

LTD 13: Lord Śiva Enters the Battle

Chapter 13

Lord Śiva Enters the Battle

After hearing the goddess' report, Lord Śiva, versed in the highest knowledge, went with his entire retinue into battle. He sat on his great bull and was encircled by Vīrabhadra and others, as well as the Bhairavas and the Kṣetrapālas, all equal to him in valor. As Lord Śiva entered the battle ground, he assumed a heroic form and shone well as the incarnation form of the destroyer.

When Śaṅkhacūḍa saw him, he alighted from his aerial chariot and offered obeisances to him by lying flat on the ground. Then he got up, quickly returned to his chariot, and, seizing his bow and arrows, readied himself for the fight. The fight lasted for a year. The two heroes showered arrows fiercely on one another the way clouds continuously pelt the earth with rain. When Śaṅkhacūḍa playfully shot dreadful arrows, Lord Śiva split them all with his own arrows. Lord Śiva hit the demon's limbs with various weapons. Śaṅkhacūḍa then grabbed his sword and shield, hastened toward Lord Śiva's sacred bull and hit it on the head. Seeing this, Lord Śiva smashed that sword and the shining shield by his kṣurapra weapon. Then the demon threw his spear but Lord Śiva shot an arrow at it and split it in half. Śaṅkhacūḍa, now infuriated, flung a discus, but Śiva punched it with his fist and splattered it. The demon threw his club vigorously at Lord Śiva, however Śiva split it apart and reduced it to ashes. Grabbing an ax, Śaṅkhacūḍa rushed toward Lord Śiva, but Śiva released such a volley of arrows at him that he fell unconscious.

The Dānava quickly regained consciousness and mounted his beautiful chariot. Covering the whole sky, he shone resplendently with his mystic weapons and arrows.

When Lord Śiva saw him coming toward him, he pounded his drum with enthusiasm and twanged his bowstring with a loud sound. Śiva filled all four quarters with the sound of his horn and then, roaring loudly, frightened the demons. Next, the noble bull bellowed thunderously, filling the sky, earth and eight quarters and shaming the proud trumpeting elephants. Lord Śiva surpassed all previous sounds by clapping the earth and the sky. The warriors emitted a raucous laughing sound, portending ill for the asuras. Śiva also roared in that mighty battle.

The demons were frightened by these piercing and dreadful sounds. However, the Dānava king became extremely angry.

Lord Śiva shouted, "O wicked one, stay! Stay!," and the gods and his companions quickly shouted, "Victory! Victory!" Śaṅkhacūḍa then hurled at Lord Śiva his awesome flame-shooting spear; as it traveled, it blazed brilliantly like a mighty fire. However, one of Lord Śiva's followers shot a meteor at it and stopped it. As the battle between Lord Śiva and the demon king continued, the heavens, earth, mountains, oceans and rivers shook and trembled. Lord Śiva split apart hundreds and thousands of Śaṅkhacūḍa's arrows, and the king did the same to Lord Śiva's shafts. Then the infuriated Śiva hit Śaṅkhacūḍa with his trident and knocked him unconscious. But quickly regaining consciousness, he grabbed his bow, discharged some arrows and hit Lord Śiva and his assistants. Then, by means of magic, the asura assumed ten thousand arms and quickly surrounded Lord Śiva with ten thousand discuses. But Lord Śiva shot wonderful arrows at them and split them all apart. Śaṅkhacūḍa next seized his mace and, accompanied by a massive army, charged Lord Śiva with the intention of destroying him. However, Lord Śiva split the mace, making the Dānava furious. The demon then seized a spear that, to the enemy, blazed unbearably; as he neared Lord Śiva, the latter hit him in the chest with his trident. Then, a huge, valorous being came out of the demon's chest and said, "Stand by, stand by." Lord Śiva laughed loudly and, with his sword, cut off the fearsome head that was emerging, and it fell to the ground.

Spreading her mouth wide open, Kālī angrily consumed countless demons, crushing their heads with her fierce fangs. The enraged Kṣetrapāla consumed many other demons, and Lord Śiva shot missiles at some and killed them. Others were just wounded. Vīrabhadra and Nandīśvara destroyed many other demons. Thus a major portion of Śaṅkhacūḍa's army was killed while many of his terrified troops cowardly fled the battlefield. But Śaṅkhacūḍa stood firm and said to Lord Śiva, "I'm here, ready to fight with you. Come on. So what if many of my men have been killed. Fight me, face to face!"

LTD 14: Lord Viṣṇu Appears

Chapter 14

Lord Viṣṇu Appears

Śaṅkhacūḍa threw mystic missiles at Lord Śiva. He also, like a cloud pouring rain, showered arrows on him. He used different kinds of illusory methods that were invisible and bewildering to the demigods and Lord Śiva's followers. Seeing this, Lord Śiva released his supernatural māheśvara missiles and these quickly destroyed the illusions, divesting them of their brilliance. Then the powerful Lord Śiva suddenly grabbed his trident—a trident that could not be withstood even by great persons—so as to slay Śaṅkhacūḍa. But to stop him, an unembodied heavenly voice boomed, "O Śiva, do not throw the trident now. Listen to this request... There is no doubt that you are able to destroy the universe in a

second. So what would be the difficulty in destroying this one Dānava, Śaṅkhacūḍa? Still you should not ignore the rules of the Vedas. O great one, rather make it truthful and fruitful. Understand that Lord Brahmā has stated that as long as Śaṅkhacūḍa wears the armor of Lord Viṣṇu -namely, the amulet around his neck-and as long as his wife maintains her marital faithfulness, he can neither die nor grow old. He is under these boons. Therefore, please make these boons truthful by not violating them."

Lord Śiva replied, "So be it."

At that moment Lord Śiva desired to see Lord Viṣṇu, and so Lord Viṣṇu appeared there. Lord Śiva told Him what he desired and Lord Viṣṇu agreed to help him.

So, dressed as an aged brāhmaṇa, Lord Viṣṇu, foremost in mystic power, approached Śaṅkhacūḍa and requested, "O King of the Dānavas, please grant my request. You give away in charity all kinds of wealth and riches, so please grant me what I desire. I am a quiet, peaceful, aged brāhmaṇa. I am very hungry and thirsty. But first make your promise, and then I will tell you what I want."

The king, with a kind face and a pleasing eye, swore to Him that he would give Him whatever He asked for. So the brāhmaṇa said affectionately, "I would like your amulet."

Śaṅkhacūḍa, a well-wisher of the brāhmaṇas who spoke the truth, thus handed over to the disguised Lord Viṣṇu his divine amulet.

Then Lord Viṣṇu assumed the form of Śaṅkhacūḍa and went to Tulasī Devī's palace. When He approached the entrance, He created the appearance of a victory homecoming, causing others to beat their drums and to shout, "Victory."

Tulasī Devī was awakened from sleep. On hearing the sounds, the chaste woman was ecstatic. She eagerly peeped through the windows onto the road. When she realized that her husband had returned, she observed all auspicious rites and offered cash gifts to the brāhmaṇas. Then she beautified herself.

Lord Viṣṇu went to Tulasī's apartment.

When she saw the Lord and thought He was her husband, she was gladdened. She bathed His feet, offered obeisances to Him, and sobbed. Then she had Him sit on the jeweled throne and handed Him the auspicious betel leaf that had been made fragrant with camphor. She said, "Today my life has become happy. For my beloved, who went to fight, has now returned home."

Drinking him in with wide eyes and a smiling face, Tulasī Devī sweetly asked him about the events of the battle. "My lord, how did you do in the battle with Lord Śiva? He is the protector of the demigods and the annihilator of countless universes. You have returned cheerfully after defeating the great lord. How did you beat him? Tell me all about it."

Lord Viṣṇu laughed and said sweetly, "When I reached the battlefield, there was a terrible clamor. A big battle then followed. The demigods fought the demons, and each side was eager for victory. The demigods defeated the demons. But then I fought the powerful demigods. Those whom I defeated sought shelter of Lord Śiva. Then Lord Śiva, to help them, fought me for a long time. My dear wife, Lord Śiva and I fought continuously for a year. All the demons were killed. Then Lord Brahmā made us agree to peace. Thus, at Lord Brahmā's order, the powers of authority were re-assigned to the demigods...So, I have come home and Lord Śiva has gone to Śivaloka. All have returned to health and normalcy. Thus the trouble has ended."

Lord Viṣṇu then lay down on the bed with Tulasī Devī and became close with her.

LTD 15: The Final Battle

Chapter 15

The Final Battle

At this time on the battlefield, King Śaṅkhacūḍa approached Lord Śiva without his armor. The latter seized his blazing trident to slay the demon. The trident's name was Vijaya, and it was as bright as a hundred summer suns. The front of it was presided over by Lord Nārāyaṇa, the middle by Lord Brahmā, the root by Lord Śiva, and the edge by Time. It was bright like the fire of devastation at the end of the world-dauntless, irresistible, fixed and destructive in its aim. In brilliance it equaled the sudarśana cakra, and it was the topmost of all weapons. No one but Lord Viṣṇu or Lord Śiva could wield it, and all but them were afraid of it. The trident was 14,000 cubits long and 100 cubits wide. One could not tell from where and how it proceeded. By its own will, this trident could destroy all the worlds.

Lord Śiva raised the trident high, aimed and hurled it at Śaṅkhacūḍa. Seeing it coming, the demon king dropped his bow and arrows, collected his mind, sat down in a yoga posture, and meditated on the lotus feet of Lord Kṛṣṇa with great devotion. The trident whirled around Śaṅkhacūḍa's head for a while. Then, at Lord Śiva's command, it smashed into the demon's head and burned him and his chariot to ashes. Thereafter, the trident returned to Lord Śiva, and then left for the airways at the speed of the mind, and finally returned with force and gladness to Lord Nārāyaṇa.

In the heavens, the celestials beat their drums, the Gandharvas and Kinnaras sang, the sages and demigods chanted eulogies and all the damsels danced. Flowers continuously rained down upon Lord Śiva, and Lord Viṣṇu, Brahmā, Indra and other notables praised him.

Out of compassion, Lord Śiva tossed the demon's bones into the sea and these bones became transformed into all the conches in the world. They are always considered very holy and favorable in the worship of the demigods. The water in the conch is also considered very sacred and satisfying to the demigods-as sacred as the water in any holy river. It can be offered to all the demigods but not to Lord Śiva. Wherever the conch is blown, Lakṣmī dwells there with great delight. If one bathes with the conch water, this is equivalent to bathing in all the holy rivers. Wherever the conch is placed, Lord Hari and Goddess Lakṣmī live there, and all inauspicious things disappear from that place. However, wherever the females and śūdras blow the conch, Goddess Lakṣmī becomes annoyed and, out of fear, travels to other places.

Lord Śiva then mounted his bull carrier and, with all his followers, returned to his own residence. All the demigods also returned to their abodes with great joy. Before leaving, Lord Śiva favored Śaṅkhacūḍa by releasing him from his curse, and thus he regained his original form as the cowherd boy Sudāmā.

Adorned with jewels, holding a flute, mounted on a divine chariot, and surrounded by numerous cowherd boys from Goloka Vṛndāvana, Śaṅkhacūḍa then flew to the spiritual sky, Goloka, which is full of devotees of Lord Kṛṣṇa who have various transcendental relationships with Him.

When Sudāmā saw Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī and Śrī Kṛṣṇa, he bowed down to Their lotus feet with devotion. Seeing him, the Divine Couple were filled with love for him and, with kind faces and joyful eyes, lifted him up and took him on Their laps.

LTD 16: Tulasī Curses Lord Viṣṇu

Chapter 16

Tulasī Curses Lord Viṣṇu

Meanwhile, at the palace, Tulasī Devī was still lying on the bed with Lord Viṣṇu, who was still disguised as Śaṅkhacūḍa. She suddenly realized that there was a distinct difference in the way her husband had expressed his affection to her in the past from the way he had just expressed it. This made her suspicious, and she began to wonder whether the man with whom she had just been intimate was really her husband. Then, not feeling the same happiness, affection and attraction, she looked at him distrustfully and said, "You're-you're not-" Realizing in the core of her heart that He was not her husband, she asked, "Who-who are you?"

Tulasī Devī became angry. "Yes, who are you? I want to know immediately. For I know you have deceived me to enjoy me! You have outraged my modesty! For this I shall curse you!"

Lord Viṣṇu then assumed His own true beautiful form. Tulasī saw the Lord of the demigods before her. His complexion was deep blue, like fresh rain clouds, His eyes were like autumnal lotuses, and He was decked with jewels and ornaments. His smiling face looked very gracious, and He wore a yellow robe. Seeing Vāsudeva's handsome form, Tulasī fainted.

A few moments later she regained consciousness and said, "O Lord, you are like a stone! You are merciless! You violated my chastity by deception. And by this means you have killed my husband. O Lord, you are merciless! Yes, Your heart is like a stone. Therefore, I curse you to become a stone. Those who call you holy are doubtlessly wrong. Your devotee committed no offense and yet, for the sake of others, You killed him! Why?"

Overpowered with grief and sadness, Tulasī cried loudly and repeatedly lamented.

Seeing her so upset, Nārāyaṇa, who is an ocean of mercy, tried to console her according to dhārmika rules. He said, "O exalted one, you performed austerities for a long time to get Me as your husband. And Śaṅkhacūḍa also performed austerities for a long time to get you as his wife. By that austerity, he fulfilled his wish. It was then necessary for Me to fulfill your wish. For this reason, I did what I did. Now leave your earthly body and assume a spiritual body-and be married to Me. Be like Lakṣmī. Your body will become a famous river known as Gaṇḍakī, a virtuous, pure and transparent river in this holy land of India. Your hairs will be transformed into holy trees; and since the trees will be born of you, they will be known as Tulasī trees. All the residents of the three worlds will perform worship with the leaves and flowers of this tree. Thus, you, Tulasī, will reign as the best among trees and flowers."

LTD 17: Blessings Tulasī Devī will Bestow

Chapter 17

Blessings Tulasī Devī will Bestow

Lord Nārāyaṇa continued....

"The sanctifying Tulasī tree will grow in Goloka, on the coast of the Virajā River, on the rasa-dance site, in the forests of Vṛndāvana, Bhāṇḍīra, Campaka, Candana, and in the groves of Mādhavī, Ketakī, Kunda, Mallikā and Mālatī. You will live in sacred places and bestow the highest religious merit. All the holy spots will converge and reside at the root of the Tulasī tree, and thus spiritual merits will accrue to all. O fair one, all the demigods and I will wait there to gather the falling Tulasī leaves.



"Whoever will be moistened or anointed with the water that has been sanctified by Tulasī leaves, will reap the benefits of having bathed in all the sacred rivers and performed all kinds of sacrifices.

"Lord Hari will not be as pleased with the gift of a thousand jars of honey as with one Tulasī leaf.

"Offering one such leaf as a gift will bring the same reward obtained by offering millions of cows.

"If one offers Tulasī leaves during the month of Kārttika, he gets the same rewards as those just mentioned.

"If, at the time of death, one drinks or gets the Tulasī-leaf water, one will be freed of all his sins and proceed to Vaikuṅṭha.

"Whoever drinks the Tulasī-leaf water daily will be redeemed in his lifetime and receive the benefit of a dip in the Ganges.

"Whoever plucks a Tulasī leaf, keeps it on his person, and then leaves his body in a holy place, will go to Viṣṇuloka.

"Anyone who worships Me with this leaf daily will reap the blessings of a hundred thousand horse sacrifices.

"Anyone who leaves his body holding a Tulasī leaf in his hands will be saved from all sins.

"Anyone who wears a necklace composed of Tulasī wood, will surely, at every step, get the reward of a horse sacrifice.

"Whoever breaks his promise while holding the Tulasī leaf will go to the Kālasūtra hell for as long as the sun and moon last.

"Anyone who gives false evidence in the presence of the Tulasī leaf, will go to the Kumbhīpāka hell for as long as the lifespans of fourteen Indras.

"Whoever at the time of death drinks or gets a little Tulasī-leaf water will certainly proceed to Vaikuṅṭha, leaving in a jeweled airplane.

"Lord Hari will decapitate that person who, on the day of the new moon or the full moon, or on the twelfth or last day of the lunar month, or after being anointed with oil just before taking a bath, or at noon, night, daybreak or sundown, or in a state of impurity or in one's night dress-will cull or pluck the Tulasī leaf.

"O chaste one, even if such a leaf is kept for three nights and becomes dry, it can still be employed in connection with funeral ceremonies, vows, gifts, consecration of temples and the worship of demigods.

"If Tulasī leaves that were offered to Lord Viṣṇu have fallen on the ground or on water are then properly washed, they may still be used for other sacred purposes.

"You will always be the presiding deity of the Tulasī plant here on Earth, and at the same time you will always sport with Śrī Kṛṣṇa in solitude in Goloka. You will also be the presiding deity of the Gaṅḍakī River, and thereby shower India with religious merit. You will further be the wife of the ocean of salt, which is My partial expansion. O chaste goddess, you will always remain personally by My side and enjoy My company, as Lakṣmī does.

LTD 18: Blessings of the Śālagrāma

Chapter 18

Blessings of the Śālagrāma

Lord Hari continued...

"As for Me, by your curse, I will become a stone and remain close to the bank of the Gaṅḍakī River. Millions of vajrakīṭa worms, with their sharp teeth, will make convolutions or rings in the stones there, representing Me. These will be known as Śālagrāmas or sacred stones.

"Those stones which have one entrance hole, four rings, are marked with a garland of wild flowers, and look like a fresh rain cloud, will be known as Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa mūrtis or forms.

"Those stones that have one entrance hole, four rings, look like fresh rain clouds but have no garland mark will be called Lakṣmī-Janardana cakras.

"Those that have two entrance holes, four rings, are impressed with the marks of cow-hooves but have no garland mark, will be called Raghunātha cakras.

"Those that are very small, have two rings, look like fresh rain clouds but have no garland mark will be called Vāmana cakras. They shall be auspicious to householders.

"Those stones that are very small, have two rings and a garland mark will be called Śrīdhara cakras. They will bring prosperity to householders.

"Those stones that are large, circular, have two rings but no garland mark will be known as Dāmodara cakras.

"Those that are medium-large, have two rings, have the marks of arrows and quivers will be known as Raṇa-rāma cakras.

"Those that are medium-sized, have seven rings, and have the marks of an umbrella and ornaments will be called Rājarājeśvara (king of kings) cakras, and give royal prosperity to the people.

"Those that are large, have fourteen wheels, look like fresh rain clouds will be called Ananta cakras. They will bestow the fourfold fruits-*artha*, *kāma*, *dharma* and *mokṣa* (wealth, pleasure, righteousness and liberation).

"Those that are spherical, beautiful, medium-large, have two rings, look like rain clouds, and are marked with cow hooves will be called Madhusūdana cakras.

"Those that have one ring will be called Sudarśana cakras.

"Those that have their rings hidden will be called Gadādhara cakras.

"Those that have two rings and the face of a horse will be called Hayagrīvas.

"Those that have two rings, their mouths very wide and extended, and look very terrifying will be called Nṛśimhas.

They will bestow detachment on their worshippers.

"Those that have two rings, extended mouths and garland marks (elliptical) will be called Lakṣmī Nṛśimhas. They will bestow blessings on the householders who worship them.

"Those that have, near their doors, two rings that are of equal size and beautiful, with manifested marks, will be known as Vāsudevas. They will fulfill all desires.

"Those that have a thin ring, look like fresh rain clouds, and have many fine holes within their wide gaping facets will be called Pradyumnas. They will give happiness to all householders.

"Those whose rings are united and whose backs are capacious will be called Saṅkarṣaṇas. They will always bestow happiness to householders.

"Those that look yellow, round and very beautiful will be known as Aniruddhas. They also will give happiness to householders.

"Wherever there are Śālagrāma stones, Lord Hari Himself exists. And wherever Lord Hari is, Goddess Lakṣmī and all the holy places also exist.

"By worshipping the Śālagrāma-śilā (stone), one destroys the sin of having killed a brāhmaṇa and any other type of sin.

"By worshipping Śālagrāma stones of the following shapes, the following effects take place:

"If the stone looks like an umbrella, one may obtain a kingdom.

"If the stone looks round, great prosperity.

"If it is cart-shaped, miseries.

"If its ends are spear-shaped, death.

"If its facets are distorted, poverty.

"If it is yellow, evils and afflictions.

"If its rings look broken, diseases.

"If its rings are split into fragments, certain death.

"If one observes vows, offers gifts, consecrates a temple, performs śraddha or funeral ceremonies, or worships the demigods before the Śālagrāma-śilā—all these acts become highly exalted.

"If one worships the Śālagrāma-śilā, one acquires the merits of bathing in all the tīrthas (holy rivers) and being initiated into all the Vedic sacrifices.

"Furthermore, one acquires all the merits acquired by performing all the Vedic sacrifices by visiting all the holy places, by fulfilling vows, by practicing all austerities and by reading all the Vedas.

"Whoever performs his abhiṣeka (bathing) ceremony always with Śālagrāma water-being sprinkled with this water at the initiation and installation ceremonies-acquires the spiritual merits gained by offering all sorts of gifts and walking around the entire earth.

"Without a doubt, the demigods are pleased with the person who daily worships the Śālagrāma-śilā. He becomes so holy that even all the holy places desire his touch. He becomes a jīvan-mukta (liberated while in his physical body) and very godly. Ultimately he goes to Vaikuṅṭha and serves Lord Hari there eternally. Any sin, such as the killing of a brāhmaṇa, flies away from him just as snakes flee at the sight of Garuḍa (Lord Viṣṇu's eagle carrier). The earth is consecrated by the dust of his feet. By his birth, he redeems one hundred thousand of his ancestors.

"Anyone who, while dying, drinks the Śālagrāma-śilā water, will be freed from all his sins and go to Vaikuṅṭha. He becomes completely freed from the effects of karma (material action and reaction) and, without a doubt, becomes forever absorbed in the vision of Lord Viṣṇu's feet.

"Anyone who lies while holding the Śālagrāma in his hands goes to Kumbhīpāka hell for as long as Lord Brahmā is alive (311 trillion and 40 billion earth years).

"If one breaks his promise while holding the Śālagrāma in his hand, he goes to the Asipattra hell for one hundred thousand manvantaras.

"He who worships the Śālagrāma-śilā without offering Tulasī leaves on it, or who separates the leaves from the stone, will have to suffer separation from his wife in his next birth.

"And if one does not offer the Tulasī leaves in a conch, he remains without his wife for seven births and becomes diseased.

"He who maintains the Śālagrāma-śilā, the Tulasī, and the conch in one place, becomes very dear to Lord Nārāyaṇa.

"It is painful for a person to separate from his beloved, whose company he once enjoyed. You were the dearest of Śaṅkha-cūḍa for one manvantara, so it is now very difficult for you to separate from him.

LTD 19: Tulasī Returns to the Spiritual World

## Chapter 19

### Tulasī Returns to the Spiritual World

When Lord Hari stopped speaking, Tulasī left her physical body, assumed a celestial form, and went to Vaikuṅṭha. Lord Hari also went with her, and there she frequented His heart, as did Goddess Lakṣmī.

As soon as Tulasī Devī quit her physical body, this body became the Gaṇḍakī River; and Lord Hari manifested Himself as the mountain on the bank of that river, giving spiritual merit to the people. The worms on that mountain cut and fashion, i.e. construct, various kinds of stones. Those that fall into the river and assume the color of clouds, without a doubt, yield results; but those that drop onto the dry land become brown by the sun's rays and unfit for worship.

Lord Hari duly honored Tulasī and began to sport with her along with Goddess Lakṣmī. He elevated Tulasī to the rank of Lakṣmī, making her blessed and glorious. Lakṣmī and Goddess Gaṅgā allowed and tolerated this new union of Lord Nārāyaṇa and Tulasī. However, Goddess Sarasvatī became angered and could not tolerate Tulasī's elevated position.

Once, in the presence of Lord Hari, the dignified Sarasvatī quarreled with Tulasī and hurt her. Tulasī, humiliated and insulted, disappeared. Then, out of anger, the wise and adept Tulasī became invisible even to Lord Hari.

When Lord Hari did not see Tulasī, he appeased Sarasvatī and, obtaining her permission, proceeded to the Tulasī forest-Vṛndāvana. He was very much disturbed by separation from her. There, he took a bath; then, with proper rites, he worshiped the chaste Tulasī with His whole heart, and then meditated on her with devotion, and uttered, "Obeisances to Tulasī Devī, Queen of Vṛndāvana Forest." During the worship, Tulasī was offered a lighted ghee lamp, frankincense, sandal flowers and sacrificial offerings. Anyone who worships Tulasī in this way will achieve complete perfection.

The Lord then began to praise His glorious devotee. "The Tulasī trees collect in many groups, thus the paṇḍitas call it Vṛndā. I praise that dear Tulasī. Long ago she appeared in the Vṛndāvana forest and is thus known as Vṛndāvanī. I adore that auspicious and glorious one. She is always worshiped in countless universes and so is known as Viśvapūjītā-one who is worshiped throughout the world. I worship that Viśvapūjītā.

"Countless universes are made pure and holy by her contact. She is therefore called Viśvapāvanī-one who purifies the whole universe. Remembering her, I am suffering from separation from her. Though other flowers be heaped upon the demigods, they are not satisfied unless Tulasī is offered. Thus she is considered the essence of all flowers and is called Puṣpasārā. Now I am anguished and troubled and very eager to see her-she who is purity incarnate. I crave the favor of that goddess. Because attainment of her brings faith and joy, she is called Nandinī. O may she be pleased with Me. In the whole world she is incomparable, thus she is called Tulasī. I take refuge of that dear Tulasī. Very chaste and dear, she is the life of Kṛṣṇa and so is known as Kṛṣṇajīvanī. O may that goddess save my life."

After Lord Hari finished the ceremony and prayers, Tulasī was pleased and came out of a tree. She immediately took refuge at Lord Hari's lotus feet. He blessed her by saying, "O Tulasī, you will be worshiped by all throughout the world. Dearest, I will hold you on my head and in my heart; and all the demigods will hold you on their heads."

When Lord Hari saw that the dignified Tulasī was weeping because her feelings had been hurt by Sarasvatī, He clasped her to His breast, took her to Sarasvatī and reconciled their differences. Then He blessed Tulasī, saying, "You will be worshiped by all, honored by all, and respected by all. And all will carry you on their heads. I also will worship, honor and respect you and carry you on My head."

Tulasī was now very happy. Sarasvatī then embraced her and seated her by her side. Lakṣmī and Gaṅgā, smiling, also hugged her, and then took her home.

LTD 20: Worship of Tulasī Devī

## Chapter 20

### Worship of Tulasī Devī

Whoever worships Tulasī Devī with her eight names and their meanings-Vṛndā, Vṛndāvanī, Viśvapāvanī, Viśvapūjita, Tulasī, Puṣpasārā, Nandinī, and Kṛṣṇa-jīvanī, and properly sings this hymn of eight verses, acquires the merit of performing an aśvamedha (horse) sacrifice.

Because Tulasī was born on the lunar day of the full moon in the month of Kārttika, Lord Hari prescribed this day for her worship.

Whoever worships her on this day will be freed from all sins and go to Vaikuṅṭha.

Whoever, out of reverence, gives Lord Viṣṇu a Tulasī leaf in the month of Kārttika, will gain the same benefit obtained by giving the gift of ten million cows.

By hearing or recalling the Tulasī hymn, a son will be born to a sonless woman, a wife will be obtained by a wifeless man, health will be restored to a diseased person, freedom will be given to a prisoner, fearlessness will be bestowed upon a terrified person, and salvation will be given to a sinner.

In the Kāṇva-śākhā branch of the Vedas, the method of worshiping and meditating on Tulasī Devī is described. Without invoking the goddess, one can reverentially meditate on her and adore her with sixteen ingredients in the following way:

"Of all flowers, Tulasī is the best. She is worshipable and beautiful, and burns up the fuel of sins like a flame of fire. Of all the goddesses, she is the most sacred. Because no one can compare to her, she is called Tulasī. I worship this goddess who is entreated by all. She is placed on the heads of all, desired by all, and makes the universe holy. She bestows liberation from this world and devotion to Lord Hari. I worship her." After this meditation and worship, the wise should read her praises and bow down to her.

LTD 20a: How to Care for Tulasī Devī

How to Care for Tulasī Devī

The author does not pretend to be an expert on this complex subject. However, he has gleaned from one excellent professional source enough information to help the reader cultivate and maintain a beautiful Tulasī plant. This source is a booklet entitled *The Art of Caring for Śrīmatī Tulasī Devī*, by Īśāna Devī-dāsī. The author recommends it highly, as it contains even more information than is contained in this book, especially in the area of specific pests and diseases that may attack a Tulasī plant. Īśāna Devī-dāsī is not only the caretaker of Tulasī Devī in the New Dvārakā community, but also holds a Ph.D degree in botany from an accredited US university. Persons may obtain her booklet by writing to her at the Los Angeles Temple, ISKCON, 3764 Watsaka Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90034 USA or to the Vṛndāvana Trust, Krishna Balaram Mandir, Raman Reti, Vrindavan, Dist. Mathura, India.

The author thanks the anonymous artist of *The Tulasī Handbook* for the use of some of his/her illustrations to depict this section of the book.

There are two types of Tulasī plants. One, grown in direct sunlight, develops purple leaves and stems, and dark purple to pink flowers-this is called a Kṛṣṇa Tulasī. The other, whose leaves and stems never turn purple and whose flowers are pure white, is called a Rāma Tulasī.

Tulasī's Latin name is *Ocimum sanctum* L. *Ocimum* means she is related to the basil herb, and *sanctum* means "holy." Thus she is also known as the "Holy Basil." There is also a Lakṣmī Tulasī or Tulasā. She is a tree basil and her Latin name is *Ocimum gratissimum* var. *suave* (Wild) Hook f. In worship, she is used as a substitute when Tulasī is not available.

Whoever cultivates and cares for a Tulasī plant purifies oneself, gives pleasure to Lord Kṛṣṇa, and obtains Tulasī Devī's mercy, namely, devotional service to and pure love of Kṛṣṇa.

Starting a Tulasī Plant from Seed

1. Either obtain a seed-starter kit from a local nursery, or if you use your own soil, mix of one part potting soil and one part sand. (See soil section below.)
2. Place these into peat-moss cups or into flat containers at least two inches deep.
3. Remove the four Tulasī seeds from the calyx by shaking them gently or pushing them out with the blunt eye of a needle.
4. Place the seeds singly on top of the soil.
5. Sprinkle soil finely over them-an amount equal to the diameter of the seed. They should be able to receive light. If planted too deeply, they will not be able to sprout.
6. Each seed will germinate into a Tulasī plant, so use only an amount of seeds that you are prepared to care for.
7. Do not water the seeds from above as the water could dislodge them.
8. Water the containers from below by placing them in a tray of lukewarm water until moist spots manifest on the surface of the soil.
9. Let the containers drain completely.
10. Place a pane of glass over the containers or place them in a clear plastic bag to increase their humidity.
11. Provide them with bright illumination, but not direct sunlight, and keep them in a warm environment.
12. Daily remove the moisture that collects on the inside of the pane or bag, and let fresh air circulate about the containers.
13. Most Tulasī seeds germinate in three to five days, but some take longer.
14. When germination starts, remove the pane or bag. However, keep the seedlings in a humid place, but do not let the planting medium get soggy. (See section on humidity below.)
15. For a number of days, as the roots begin developing, the young seedlings will have only two seed leaves.
16. If at this stage Tulasī turns purple, she is probably receiving too bright a light. Therefore, the light should be filtered.
17. If by chance Tulasī is bent over at the soil line and her stem there is brown and pinched, she has been assailed by a fungus. To overcome this:
  - a. Increase the circulation of air.
  - b. Reduce the amount of humidity
  - c. Sprinkle fine, hot sand onto the soil surface.

18. When the Tulasī seedling sends up a shoot with two additional leaves, and then another two, she is ready to be transplanted.
19. If the seedling is in a peat-moss container or peat-moss pellet:
  - a. When her roots begin to come out of the bottom and the sides of the container, it is time to transplant her.
  - b. Transfer the container to a clay pot that is slightly larger and contains the proper amount of potting soil. (See section on soil below.)
  - c. Make certain that the new soil line is the same as the line in the container, neither higher nor lower.
20. When two Tulasīs are in the same container and you want to transplant each in a separate pot:
  - a. First, the seedlings should have at least two or three sets of leaves.
  - b. Gently tease apart the container and tease apart the soil mass until the Tulasīs separate.
  - c. When two Tulasīs refuse to disentangle, soak them in room-temperature water.
  - d. Once the plants are separated, make certain that each has as much soil as possible around the roots. Re-plant at once and water them completely.
21. When the Tulasī seedling is in a seed flat:
  - a. Scoop out the seedling, taking as much soil around it and below it as possible.
  - b. Place her in a small pot and water her completely.
22. For several days, keep the seedlings in mild shade. Then gradually increase the light.
23. From this point on, the seedling should grow quickly.
24. The tip of Tulasī's stem will grow higher and higher till a flower cluster or mañjarī will begin to manifest.
25. Sometimes, before this happens, Tulasī becomes fairly tall. When this happens, and she is still young and her stem not yet woody, she may need to be staked.
26. Because wooden dowels rot fast, use bamboo rods or plastic coated steel rods for stakes.
27. Place the stake at the edge of the inside of the pot, not near Tulasī's stem, which may injure her roots.
28. Take a piece of clean cloth or kite string and, without interfering with her branches, tie it to her stem. Then tie the other end to the stake. Use as many stakes as required to keep her upright.
29. If Tulasī is becoming too top heavy and you wish to terminate her upward growth:
  - a. Pinch away the tiny apical growing point on the top of the stem.
  - b. This will cause the small buds at the meeting point of each leaf and stem to grow into branches.
  - c. When these branches have developed three to four sets of leaves, you can again pinch away the apical growing points. This will cause more side shoots to develop on the branches.
  - d. The result? A very compact Tulasī plant.
30. Tulasī may never be pruned, to shape her, as is done with ordinary plants, except when doing so will save her life. According to the Padma Purāṇa, it is offensive to cut a living Tulasī branch, and Lord Kṛṣṇa feels this as a pain in His heart.
31. Under ideal conditions Tulasī can flower throughout the year. But she develops the greatest amount of flowers during the spring and summer months.
32. Tulasī produces clusters of flowers called mañjarīs. The total length of an entire cluster may grow to ten inches.
33. Although flowering occurs throughout the year, she generally produces seeds in late spring through summer.
34. If you wish to collect Tulasī's seeds, let the seeds turn brown but cut the mañjarī before the seeds start falling from the calyx. Store these mature mañjarīs with their seeds in a cool, dry, airtight container.
35. As a Tulasī plant matures, her new leaves may be smaller, and her stem will become thicker and woody. Most Tulasīs reach an adult height of three to four feet, however some grow to nine feet.
36. The duration of most Tulasī plants is about five years.
37. After Tulasī leaves her body, her wood can be carved into chanting beads or be employed in fire sacrifices and cremation ceremonies.

For further information about how to properly remove and store Tulasī's leaves and mañjarīs and use them in worship, see the section on worship.

#### Keeping Your Tulasī Plant Healthy

Tulasī Devī's physical health all year round depends on proper light, water, temperature, humidity, soil, nutrients, pot size, and on remaining free from pests and diseases. Here are some of the basics that should be followed.

##### LTD 20b: Light

##### Light

1. Tulasī Devī develops and is maintained best in natural sunlight.
2. Ideally, she should be given three to five hours of direct sunlight daily.

3. The morning to early afternoon sunlight is best.
4. The results of insufficient light are:
  - a. Thin weak stems.
  - b. Long-stemmed branches between the leaves.
  - c. Large pale green leaves, and few or no flowers.
  - d. Leaves that may fall and branches that may die.
5. Tulasī Devī can thrive well indoors when placed before a window that gets the required amount of sunlight.
6. Daily, turn Tulasī Devī's pot about one fourth of its circumference. This will enable her to grow straight and her branches to develop symmetrically (as opposed to leaning over onesidedly in the sun's direction).
7. When you don't have a window that offers adequate light:
  - a. Use daylight tubes and natural white florescent tubes; or daylight tubes with "gro-lux" or "gro-lite" tubes.
  - b. She has to be encircled by light.
  - c. In three separate lighting fixtures, hang two forty watt tubes above, to the left, and to the right of her. Place them very close, but without touching, her.
  - d. Leave these lights on fourteen to sixteen hours daily (but less if she is getting some sun).
8. When Tulasī Devī has been indoors all winter and the weather becomes warm enough to take her outside for direct sunlight, make the transition gradually:
  - a. At first, allow her to stay outside an hour or so daily.
  - b. Increase the length of her stay gradually.
  - c. Otherwise, too much sun too fast will "sunburn" and shock her.
  - d. This results in her leaf areas turning bronze or white, then dying and turning brown; sometimes her lower leaves may even suddenly fall off.

#### LTD 20c: Water

##### Water

1. The ideal time to water Tulasī Devī is in the early morning.
2. Water her gently without upsetting her soil. Otherwise, root disease and soil aeration problems could arise.
3. To avoid city-water chemicals, use purified or distilled (bottled) water.
4. If this is not possible, allow your city water to stand overnight in a non-corrosive container. This will permit the chlorine and possibly other chemicals to disperse.
5. Pour the water from one container to another, aerating it.
6. Do not use "hard" water to which chemicals have been added to make it "soft."
7. No less than once each week water Tulasī Devī completely. Some of the water should flow out of the drainage hole in the bottom of the pot.
8. Whenever her topsoil feels dry, she should again be watered, with enough to keep her moist all day but not drenched.
9. She should never be so wet that when more water is added, it immediately flows out of the bottom of the pot.
10. Waterlogging can cause fungal disease and death of the roots. In turn, the leaves will be affected, turning pale or brownish before dropping.
11. Soil that is constantly too dry will also harm the roots. This may cause Tulasī's leaves to become faintly greyish or bronzed or pale green, slowing down her growth;
12. It may also cause the soil to pull away from the sides of the pot, resulting in the water not pervading the soil. If this happens:
  - a. Plunge the pot in a bucket of water so that the soil may absorb the water; or
  - b. Add small quantities of water to the soil surface; let it soak in; then slowly add more till the soil reaches its necessary moisture level.
  - c. Should Tulasī begin wilting from inadequate soil moisture, withdraw her from the sun and heat and administer water to her. However, this shock could cause her to drop her lower leaves.
  - d. Another way you can determine if Tulasī's soil is too dry is by lifting her pot. If it feels especially "light," then she may very well need water.

#### LTD 20d: Temperature

##### Temperature

1. During Tulasī's growing season, she does best in temperatures ranging from 80 degrees F (27 degrees C) in the day to about 65 degrees F (18 degrees C) during the night. She can withstand temperatures over 100 degrees F (37 degrees C) and even in the low 50s (12 degrees C); but these can cause her stress and will slow her growth.
2. Tulasī can overheat and wilt in extremely warm weather, notwithstanding having an adequate amount of soil water. If this happens:

- a. Don't water her-this will drench her soil.
- b. Take her out of the sun and into filtered light.
- c. Reduce her temperature by spraying a fine mist of water over her.
- d. When the humidity is very low, increase it around her (see humidity section). This will lessen the amount of water she loses from her leaves.
- e. When the humidity is very high and water cannot evaporate from her, heat doesn't dissipate very well. Therefore, try to improve the circulation of air around her.
3. Tulasī Devī is very sensitive to cold weather. When night temperatures are regularly in the forties, she may have great difficulty surviving.
4. To protect her from the cold, bring her indoors.
5. If that isn't possible, and your area isn't harshly cold, build a simple greenhouse around her:
  - a. Use galvanized water pipes as a frame. Place 4 mm clear plastic over them and tape it with duct tape that is weatherproof.
  - b. To keep her warm, an electric heater may be placed inside.
  - c. The greenhouse must be sufficiently ventilated to avoid build up of heat in the sun.
6. If you keep Tulasī Devī inside in a heated area, make certain that she is in a spot that is devoid of cold and hot drafts.
7. In a very cold climate, remove her from the window area at night. The coldness from the window could shock her enough to make her give up those leaves and branches that are close to the window.
8. Do not place her in the line of direct heat from a heater or cold from an air conditioner.
9. Hot drafts could cause her leaves to drop, shrivel up, turn black overnight, or even destroy complete branches or the entire Tulasī plant.
10. In homes, heated air is often dry, so make certain that Tulasī Devī is not affected.
11. Extreme temperature changes between day and night, or any sudden temperature change creates stress on her. This can cause her to wilt. On such mornings, expose her to the sun gradually, let her warm up slowly, and keep a high level of humidity around her.

#### LTD 20e: Humidity

##### Humidity

1. Dry air may cause Tulasī's leaves to sacrifice water to the air faster than she can absorb water through her roots.
2. This results in her leaves curling and/or the edges of her leaves dying (becoming brown and crisp).
3. Also, her flower buds may dry up and drop off without ever opening. And she may appear somewhat shriveled, notwithstanding sufficient water in her soil.
4. To remedy this situation increase the humidity around her by any or all of the following:
  - a. In a greenhouse or on a patio, spray the floor with water. As it evaporates, it will travel through her leaves.
  - b. Place her in a waterproof tray that can hold a layer of gravel or sponge rock (perlite) and water.
    - (1) Place the bottom of Tulasī's pot on the gravel but above the level of the water.
    - (2) Or better yet, raise the pot on slats above the gravel so that air can circulate freely under the pot.
  - c. Spray her mildly (mistily).
  - d. Place two or more Tulasīs near each other-each will benefit from the water vapor emitted from their leaves.
  - e. Create a miniature greenhouse over her by placing a clear plastic bag over a wire frame.
    - (1) When Tulasī is in direct sunlight, partially remove the bag or she will be harmed by too much heat.
    - (2) When there is steam in the bag, it is too hot for her. In this case, restrict use of the bag to nighttime (when there is no sunlight).

#### LTD 20f: Soil

##### Soil

1. To remain healthy, plant roots require oxygen, and they receive it from the air spaces in the soil. In over-watered soil, the soil spaces fill up with water and deprive the roots of oxygen.
2. When this occurs, the roots may begin to die, and the leaves may yellow or form brown margins.
3. Tulasī thrives well in sterilized commercial potting soil, such as Unigro or Supersoil.
4. Avoid brands that are sawmill by-products, and that list "sludge" (a sewage-treatment by-product) as an ingredient.
5. For rich soil with excellent drainage capacity, you can make your own soil mix as follows:
  - a. To two parts potting soil, add one part compost, leafmold, earthworm castings or other decomposed organic matter, and one part clean coarse sand, such as masons' sand. You may substitute perlite or sponge rock for coarse sand. Do not use beach sand, as it has too much salt.
  - b. Add one tablespoon of pulverized phosphate rock and one tablespoon of potash rock (granite dust or green sand).

c. When compost is unavailable, use vermiculite; however, be prepared to give Tulasī more nutrients, as mentioned in the next section.

6. It is not a good idea to use soil straight from a garden because the soil may contain disease organisms.

7. Do not place earthworms in Tulasī Devī's pot because they are apt to damage her roots.

8. Occasionally, the force of watering may compact the soil. This will hinder the water and the air from penetrating the soil. To allay this, each month turn over the top inch of soil with a small instrument (such as a fork), but be careful not to poke at or upset her roots.

LTD 20g: Nutrition

Nutrition

1. Even in the best of soils, a potted Tulasī will need additional nutrients to replace those she uses.

2. Generally, in a pot, nitrogen is the first nutrient that requires replacement.

3. Nitrogen evaporates from soil especially in hot weather while Tulasī is growing.

4. When Tulasī has an inadequate supply of nitrogen, her lower leaves will turn yellow and fall off.

5. To replace nitrogen and most other important elements, add a one-inch layer of aged cow manure to the top layer of her soil.

6. Or water Tulasī every other week with a tea made by soaking overnight one part dried manure or other composted material in three parts water (mixed to a weak tea color). Never use fresh manure as this will burn her.

7. After these applications, Tulasī's leaves should become green in two to three days.

8. In very hot weather, cow manure alone does not always furnish nitrogen quickly enough. Therefore, use fertilizers such as "Miracle Gro," whose nutrients come from natural sources. Avoid fertilizers with slaughterhouse or sewer-treatment facility by-products.

9. Notwithstanding the above, Tulasī may still require extra iron treatments several times a year, especially when her upper leaves and mañjarīs are pale yellow-green instead of deep green.

10. Do not over-fertilize a potted Tulasī. If the concentration of nutrients becomes too high, "fertilizer burn" will occur and she will wilt. This is because the excess salts prevent her from absorbing water from the soil.

11. Consequently, the branch tips will quickly turn black and die, and black patches will manifest at both edges of her young leaves before they fall. As soon as this begins to happen:

a. Flush Tulasī with a large quantity of fresh water to wash the excess salts from the soil.

b. Take at least fifteen minutes to do this, allowing the water to flow out.

c. This should stop the spread of the black areas; however, the blackened tissue cannot be saved.

12. To prevent fertilizer burn, water Tulasī once weekly and let the water run out of her drainage hole. Also, heed the instructions on packaged soil supplements.

13. Give Tulasī extra nutrients only when she is growing and can use them. This means reduce or even halt the introduction of supplements during autumn and winter when she has stopped growing.

LTD 20h: Transplanting

Transplanting

1. Your Tulasī plant, if she is healthy and growing, will at some point require a larger pot.

2. Examine the bottom of her pot. If her roots are pushing out of the drainage hole, she may need to be transplanted.

3. Water her and allow her to drain completely. Then, with her stem between your index and middle fingers, and your palm on the soil at the base of the stem, turn her pot upside down.

4. Rap the rim of the pot on the edge of a table. The entire Tulasī plant should move out of the pot.

5. Examine her roots. If they do not fill the pot, so that the rootball is in the shape of the pot, just replace her in the same pot.

6. But if the roots do fill the soil area of the pot, she should be transplanted.

7. When Tulasī looks too large for her pot and she wilts between regular waterings, it is then beyond the right time for transplanting.

8. When it is time to transplant, select a pot that is one or two sizes larger than her present one. However, if it is past the time for transplanting and Tulasī has greatly outgrown her pot, use a pot that is larger than two sizes, about one third to one half of her plant height.

9. Do not plant in a larger-than-needed size pot because the excess soil in it will retain too much water and cause problems in Tulasī's root development.

10. Use a pot made of unglazed clay which has a drainage hole. The unglazed clay permits air to move through the sides of the pot (Do not use plastic pots or glazed-clay pots).

11. Do not transplant under strong, hot sunshine. Do it when the weather is cool and overcast or after four p.m., and always protect Tulasī from drying winds.

12. Here is how to transplant her:



- a. Plunge the new clay pot in water till it ceases bubbling.
  - b. Place broken pottery chips over the drainage hole to prevent the soil from flowing out of the bottom of the pot. But do not block it completely-water must drain out. A layer of gravel may be placed on the bottom of large pots.
  - c. Place an adequate amount of soil on the bottom of the new pot.
  - d. If possible, carefully separate and straighten any roots that are twisted in circles; then gently lower her into her new pot, keeping her straight and upright.
  - e. Add new soil all around her and tamp it gently.
  - f. The soil level should be the same as her previous level.
  - g. If her soil level is lower than the previous level, her roots will become exposed and rot; if it is higher, her stem may rot.
  - h. Between the soil level and the top of the pot, always leave a one-half inch to one-inch space. This is to allow for watering.
13. Water her fully and place her in a shady place for a few days. After this period, you can place her in the direct sunlight again.
14. The next time you water her should be when the soil is dry, for the new pot contains a substantial amount of reserve water.

#### LTD 20i: Keeping Tulasī Healthy

##### Keeping Tulasī Healthy

1. The place where Tulasī stays should always be very clean.
2. Collect all of her fallen leaves regularly.
3. Use a proportion of 3:1 bleach:water solution to sterilize any pots, trowels, scissors, and other implements you may be using to maintain her.
4. Even though you may take all precautions, your Tulasī plant may be attacked by pests.
5. Such pests should be counter-attacked immediately to prevent terrible damage to Tulasī. Some pests carry fungal, bacterial, and viral diseases that can be fatal to her.
6. Pruning Tulasī is forbidden except in the following emergencies: when her roots have been attacked by a pest(s), her life is at stake, and she can be saved by this. (Reducing her size may allow a reduced root system to adequately nourish the rest of the plant.)
7. Tulasī should be examined daily for pests.
8. If Tulasī is kept clean, she will remain healthy. She can be kept clean by bathing her as follows:
  - a. Spray her gently with a hose to remove dust and insects from her leaves.
  - b. Give her a bath with vegetable-based (castile) soap made with potassium salts. These salts are deadly to insects.
  - c. Small Tulasī plants are bathed as follows:
    - (1) Cover the pot and soil with plastic.
    - (2) Place your hand on her soil and her stem between your index and middle finger for her support.
    - (3) Tip her upside down, lower her into the soapy water, and swish her gently for five to ten seconds only.
    - (4) Slowly withdraw her from the soap.
    - (5) Rinse her in a bucket of clean water or under a fine garden-hose spray.
    - (6) Shake off the excess water and slowly turn her over; else, that water may make her heavy and cause her to droop or maybe break.
  - d. Large Tulasī plants (that do not fit in a bucket) are bathed as follows:
    - (1) Cover her soil with plastic, wrap it tightly around her stem, and spray her with soap.
    - (2) Make certain you spray on the underside of the leaves, where most insects hide.
    - (3) When Tulasī is indoors and spraying is difficult, spray each leaf with a squirt bottle, or wipe each leaf with a soft cloth.
    - (4) Or remove her to an outer balcony or just outside your front door and spray her.
    - (5) One-gallon pump sprayers are available from most garden stores.
9. Especially in the summer, bathe Tulasī Devī daily.
10. As a preventive measure, it is useful to bathe her with soap weekly or bi-weekly. But if you prefer, you may soap her only when she has been attacked by insects.
11. When you soap-spray her, be certain to wash off the soap or it might burn the margins of her leaves.
12. If, in spite of bathing her, Tulasī is still attacked, you can use certain natural sprays derived from plants that repel or destroy insects. They are non-toxic and environmentally safe. Here are some of them:
  - a. Pyrethrum: Derived from chrysanthemum flowers, it fights aphids, whiteflies, and caterpillars. Apply in late afternoon or evening-never in the sun-and don't use it with soap.
  - b. Rotenone: Derived from the derris plant root, it acts as a stomach poison on aphids, spider mites, ants, and true bugs.

c. Diatomaceous earth: Silica fragments derived from the skeletal re-mains of small sea animals called diatoms. These lacerate the insect, causing it death from dehydration.

d. Hot chile peppers mixed with water: These discourage chewing in-sects.

e. Neem oil: Derived from the Neem tree, it suppresses appetite and inhibits growth in aphids, mites, mealybugs, and whiteflies. (Marketed in US as Bio-Neem by Safer, Inc.)

f. SunSpray Oil: A parafin based oil, it may be sprayed on Tulasī's leaves without harming them. It acts against mealybugs, scales, spidermites, and aphids. Only this type of spray oil may be used on Tulasī. (Never use petroleum-based sprays.)

13. There are certain insects that do not eat plants but thrive only on plant-eating insects. These assist in keeping Tulasī free of harmful ones. Here are a few:

a. The ladybug: Both the adults and larvae eat aphids, mealybugs, and scales. They can roam directly on Tulasī or in her area.

b. The green or brown lacewings: These eat aphids, spider mites and mealybugs.

c. The assassin bug, ambush bug, praying mantis, and various spiders are helpful.

14. These insect-eating insects may be obtained at a local nursery or an insectary.

15. If you need more assistance in solving a pest problem, you can obtain it from your local nursery or agricultural extension agent. These persons identify local crop pests and diseases.

16. Further information is provided in the book The Art of Caring for Tulasī Devī.

LTD 20j: How to Worship Tulasī Devī

How to Worship Tulasī Devī

1. The assembled devotees should offer obeisances to Tulasī Devī with the Tulasī-praṇāma-mantra, which is chanted three times:

om vṛndayai tulasī-devyai

priyāyai keśavasya ca

kṛṣṇa-bhakti-prade devī

satyavatai namo namaḥ

"I offer my repeated obeisances unto Vṛndā, Śrīmatī Tulasī Devi, who is very dear to Lord Keśava. O goddess, you bestow devotional service to Kṛṣṇa and you possess the highest truth."

2. The assembled devotees then recite the Tulasī-pūjā-kīrtana prayer in English:

"O Tulasī, beloved of Kṛṣṇa, I bow before you again and again. My desire is to obtain the service of Śrī Śrī Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Whoever takes shelter of you has his wishes fulfilled. Bestowing your mercy on him, you make him a resident of Vṛndāvana. My desire is that you will also give me a residence in the pleasure groves of Śrī Vṛndāvana-dhāma. Thus within my vision I will always behold the beautiful pastimes of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. I beg you to make me a follower of the cowherd damsels of Vraja. Please give me the privilege of devotional service and make me your own maidservant. This very fallen and lowly servant of Kṛṣṇa prays, "May I always swim in the love of Śrī Śrī Rādhā and Govinda."

3. Next, the devotees sing the Tulasī-pūjā-kīrtana song in Bengali:

namo namaḥ tulasī kṛṣṇa-preyasi namo namaḥ

rādhā-kṛṣṇa-sevā pābo ei abilāṣī

ye tomāra śaraṇa loy, tara vāñchā pūrṇa hoy

kṛpā kori' koro tāre vṛndāvana-vāsi

mora ei abhilāṣa, vilāsa kuñje dio vāsa

nayana heribo sadā yugala-rūpa-rāṣī

ei nivedana dhara, sakhīra anugata koro

sevā-adhikāra diye koro nīja dāṣī

dīna kṛṣṇa-dāse koy, ei yena mora hoy

śrī-rādhā-govinda-preme sadā yena bhāsi

4. As the song is sung, one of the devotees, acting as the priest or pūjārī, cleanses his hands and mouth. Then he offers Tulasī Devī incense, next the ghee lamp, and then flowers.

5. When the song is finished, the devotees should walk or dance around Tulasī Devī at least four times. During the circumambulation, the following mantra is chanted:

yāni kāni ca pāpāni brahma-hatyādikāni ca

tāni tāni praṇasyanti pradakṣiṇaḥ pade pade

6. As the circumambulation is proceeding, one or more devotees should approach the Tulasī plant. One of them should, with his right hand, take the spoon from the water cup and, with water on it, pour the water on his right hand to cleanse it. (This may also be done for the devotee by the pūjārī.) One should then return the spoon to the cup. Then, using the right hand, one should take the spoon from the other cup and, with water on it, pour three drops on Tulasī

Devī's soil. This process should be followed by each devotee, one by one, while the other devotees are circling Tulasī Devī. After each devotee has watered the Tulasī plant, he should offer obeisances, reciting his guru-praṇāti mantra. Then he should rise and stand to the side of the circling area or, if he wishes, continue to circumambulate Tulasī Devī.

7. After the devotees have chanted the circumambulation mantra three times, they should proceed with a brief Hare Kṛṣṇa kīrtana. The circling of Tulasī may be continued during this kīrtana.

8. When the kīrtana is finished, the devotees should again offer obeisances to Tulasī Devī with the Tulasī-praṇāma-mantra.

LTD 20j1: The Complete Tulasī Devī Worship

The Complete Tulasī Devī Worship  
The following procedures are derived from the book Arcanā-paddhati, The Process of Deity Worship, which itself is an abridgement of the book Hari-bhakti-vilāsa by Sanātana Gosvāmī. Śrīla Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvatī Gosvāmī Mahārāja commissioned the Arcanā-paddhati in order to regularize the worship in the temples he had established, and the book was compiled under his his order.

The following worship of Tulasī Devī should be performed by the Tulasī pūjārī after the morning worship of the other Deities is completed, or, if this is not possible, at another time during the morning.

1. First one should recite the prayer:

nirmatā tvaṁ purā devair

arcitā tvaṁ surāsuraiḥ

tulasī hara me 'vidyāṁ

pūjāṁ gṛhṇa namo 'stu te

"O Śrīmatī Tulasī Devī, you were previously created by the demigods and worshiped by both them and the demons. O Śrīmatī Tulasī Devī, kindly take away my ignorance and accept my worship. I offer you my humble obeisances again and again."

2. Then, while sprinkling water on Śrīmatī Tulasī Devī, one should chant the following mantra:

om govinda-vallabhāṁ devīm

bhakta-caitanya-kāriṇīm

snāpayāmi jagat-dhātrīm

kṛṣṇa-bhakti-pradāyinīm

"I am bathing goddess Tulasī Devī, who is very dear to Govinda and who brings life to all the devotees. She is the mother of the universe, and the bestower of devotion to Lord Kṛṣṇa."

3. Then, taking some arghya mixture (candana mixed with camphor, flower petals and water) from an arghya-pātra (a bowl) with a kuśī (spoon) and pouring some on her soil, one should chant:

śrīyaḥ śrīye śrīya-vāse

nityaṁ śrīdharaṁ sat-kṛte

bhaktyā dattaṁ mayā devi

arghyaṁ gṛhṇa namo 'stu te

"O goddess Tulasī, I offer my obeisances unto you, who are the shelter and residence of all beauty and opulence. You are even worshiped by the Supreme Lord. O Tulasī, please accept this arghya water which is offered by me with devotion."

4. Then one should perform the following:

a) One should offer a flower mixed with sandalwood pulp to Śrīmatī Tulasī Devī with the mantra:

idaṁ sagandha-puṣpaṁ om tulasyai namaḥ.

b) One should offer the bath water of Śrī Kṛṣṇa to Tulasī Devī with the mantra:

idaṁ śrī-kṛṣṇa-caraṇāmṛtaṁ om tulasyai namaḥ.

c) One should offer garlands and flowers offered to the Lord with the mantra:

idaṁ mahā-prasāda-nirmālyādikaṁ sarvaṁ om tulasyai namaḥ.

d) One should offer ācamana (water with ground nutmeg and cloves) to Śrīmatī Tulasī Devī with the mantra:

idaṁ ācamanīyaṁ om tulasyai namaḥ.

5. Then one should sing the praise of Śrīmatī Tulasī Devī as follows:

mahā-prasāda-janani sarva-saubhāgya-vardhini

ādhivyādhi-hare nityaṁ tulasī tvāṁ namo 'stu te

"O Śrīmatī Tulasī Devī, I offer my repeated obeisances unto you. You are the mother of mahā-prasāda, the increaser of the good fortune of all, and you take away all diseases and anxieties."

6. Following this, one should offer obeisances to her with the Tulasī-praṇāma mantra:

om vṛndayai tulasī-devyai

priyāyai keśavasya ca  
kṛṣṇa-bhakti-prade devī  
satyavatai namo namaḥ

"I offer my repeated obeisances unto Vṛndā, Śrīmatī Tulasī Devi, who is very dear to Lord Keśava. O goddess, you bestow devotional service to Kṛṣṇa and you possess the highest truth."

7. Then, with his right hand, one should very carefully, one by one, pick the Tulasī leaves or soft Tulasī-mañjarīs along with their stems while repeatedly uttering the Tulasī-cayana-mantra:

om tulasī amṛta-janmāsī sadā tvam keśava-priyā  
keśavārthaṁ cinomi tvām varadā bhava śobhana

"O Tulasī, you are born from nectar. You are always very dear to Lord Keśava. Now, in order to worship Lord Keśava, I am collecting your leaves and mañjarīs. Please bestow your benediction on me to serve the Lord."

It is best to remove only the older leaves near the stem, especially those she is about to release and which can be taken with a slight pull. Do not remove many leaves from a small plant, or she will suffer. All her leaves are offerable for worship, even dry, brown leaves. In an emergency, one may even offer pieces of her wood.

8. Special care should be taken to ensure that no pain is caused to Śrīmatī Tulasī Devī, and, when one is finished, one should recite the kṣamā-prārthanā-mantra, begging her pardon:

cayanodbhava-duḥkhaṁ ca  
yad hṛdi tava vartate  
tat kṣamasva jagan-mātaḥ  
vṛndā-devī namo 'stu te

"O Tulasī Devī, I offer my respectful obeisances unto you. Kindly forgive me if I have caused you pain by picking your leaves and mañjarīs, O mother of the universe."

Devotees are restricted from picking Tulasī leaves on dvādaśī (the twelfth day after a new or full moon), the day following ekādaśī. Even if Tulasī's leaves have become dry due to having been cut on the previous day or cut in the morning, they may be used in Deity worship. Tulasī may be offered only to viṣṇu-tattva Deities, i.e., Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma, Lord Caitanya, etc.

LTD 20j2: Clipping and Storing Her Leaves and Mañjarīs

Clipping and Storing Her Leaves and Mañjarīs

Clip the stalk below the first set of leaves at the base of the mañjarī or mañjarī unit (these may be small leaves) but as close as possible to the second set of leaves. When clipping, do not leave a small twig on her, as she will have to use energy to discard this now useless tissue. It is best to store the mañjarīs in large Tupperware containers so that they can "breathe" and not dry out. They should keep for several days.

In India, mañjarīs are broken off with the fingers of the right hand. Fingernails are not used. However, Westerners may have difficulty removing the mañjarīs cleanly, therefore a very small, sharp scissors, used only for Tulasī, is recommended. When making a Tulasī garland, never use a needle to pierce her. Instead, knot or wrap the thread around the mañjarīs.

Store the leaves in a bowl of fresh water or in plastic, airtight containers-and place them in the refrigerator. When using an airtight container, wash the leaves and pat them dry before placing them inside, as too much moisture will cause them to rot rapidly.

Eight Names of Śrīmatī Tulasī Devī

Vṛndāvanī: She who appears in Vṛndāvana forest.

Vṛndā: She who appears in many plants and trees.

Viśva-pūjitā: She who is worshiped in countless universes.

Puṣpasārā: The topmost of all flowers.

Nandini: She who, when attained, brings faith and joy.

Kṛṣṇa-jīvanī: She who is the life of Lord Kṛṣṇa.

Viśva-pāvanī: She who purifies the whole universe.

Tulasī: She who is incomparable.

It is very auspicious to chant these eight names.

LTD 21: Excerpts from the VedaBase

Excerpts from the VedaBase

From The Books, Classes, Morning Walks, Room Conversations, and Letters Of Śrīla Prabhupāda

Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta

Ādi-līlā, Chapter 3, Texts 103-110

103. While He [Advaita Ācārya] was thinking about how to propitiate Kṛṣṇa by worship, the following verse came to mind.

104. "Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who is very affectionate toward His devotees, sells Himself to a devotee who merely offers a Tulasī leaf and a palmful of water."

This is a verse from the Gautamīya-tantra.

105-106. Advaita Ācārya considered the meaning of the verse in this way: Not finding any way to repay the debt He owes to one who offers Him a Tulasī leaf and water, Lord Kṛṣṇa thinks, "There is no wealth in my possession that is equal to a Tulasī leaf and water."

107. Thus the Lord liquidates the debt by offering His own self to the devotee. Considering this, the ācārya began worshipping the Lord.

Purport

Through devotional service one can easily please Lord Kṛṣṇa with a leaf of the Tulasī plant and a little water. As the Lord says in Bhagavad-gītā (9.26), a leaf, a flower, a fruit or some water (patram puṣpam phalam toyam), when offered with devotion, very much pleases Him. He universally accepts the services of His devotees. Even the poorest of devotees in any part of the world can secure a small flower, fruit or leaf and a little water, and if these offerings, and especially Tulasī leaves and Ganges water, are offered to Kṛṣṇa with devotion, He is very satisfied. It is said that Kṛṣṇa is so pleased by such devotional service that He offers Himself to His devotee in exchange for it. Śrīla Advaita Ācārya knew this fact, and therefore He decided to call for the Personality of Godhead Kṛṣṇa to descend by worshipping the Lord with Tulasī leaves and the water of the Ganges.

108. Thinking of the lotus feet of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, He constantly offered Tulasī buds in water from the Ganges.

109. He appealed to Śrī Kṛṣṇa with loud calls and thus made it possible for Kṛṣṇa to appear.

110. Therefore the principal reason for Śrī Caitanya's descent is this appeal by Advaita Ācārya. The Lord, the protector of religion, appears by the desire of His devotee.

Antya-līlā, Chapter 3, Text 100

100. Haridāsa Ṭhākura constructed a cottage in solitary forest. There, he planted a Tulasī plant, and in front of the Tulasī he would chant the holy name of the lord 300,000 times daily. He chanted throughout the entire day and night.

Purport

Without difficulty one can sit down anywhere, especially on the bank of the Ganges, Yamunā or any sacred river, devise a sitting place or cottage, plant a Tulasī, and before the Tulasī chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa mahā-mantra undisturbed....

We can follow his [Haridāsa Ṭhākura's] example, however, by chanting sixteen rounds of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mahā-mantra on beads every day and offering respect to the Tulasī plant. This is not at all difficult for anyone, and the process of chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa mahā-mantra with a vow before the Tulasī plant has such great spiritual potency that simply by doing this one can become spiritually strong. Therefore we request the members of the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement to follow Haridāsa Ṭhākura's example rigidly. Chanting sixteen rounds does not take much time, nor is offering respects to the Tulasī plant difficult. The process has immense spiritual potency. One should not miss this opportunity.

Antya-līlā, Chapter 3, Text 122

122. After offering her obeisances to the tulasī plant and Haridāsa Ṭhākura, she [the prostitute] sat down at the door. Hearing Haridāsa Ṭhākura chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra, she also chanted, "O my Lord Hari, O my Lord Hari."

Purport

Herein one can clearly see how a Vaiṣṇava delivers a fallen soul by a transcendental trick....

The conclusion is that associating with a Vaiṣṇava, chanting the holy name of the Lord and offering obeisances to the Tulasī plant or a Vaiṣṇava all lead one to become a transcendental devotee who is completely cleansed of all material contamination.

Antya-līlā, Chapter 3, Text 137

137. "Chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra continuously and render service to the Tulasī plant by watering her and offering prayers to her. In this way you will very soon get the opportunity to be sheltered at the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa."

Antya-līlā, Chapter 6, Text 295-297

295. Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu continued [to Raghunātha dāsa], "Worship this stone in the mode of goodness like a perfect brāhmaṇa, for by such worship you will surely attain ecstatic love of Kṛṣṇa without delay.

296. "For such worship, one needs a jug of water and a few flowers from a Tulasī tree. This is worship in complete goodness when performed in purity.

297. "With faith and love, you should offer eight soft Tulasī flowers, each with two tulasī leaves, one on each side of each flower."

Antya-līlā, Chapter 13, Text 134

134. When Raghunātha Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī was absorbed in remembrance of Lord Kṛṣṇa, he would take the Tulasī garland and the prasāda of Lord Jagannātha given to him by Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, bind them together and wear them on his neck.

Antya-līlā, Chapter 15, Texts 33, 39-41

33. [The gopīs said:] "O all-auspicious Tulasī plant, you are very dear to Govinda's lotus feet, and He is very dear to you. Have you seen Kṛṣṇa walking here wearing a garland of your leaves, surrounded by a swarm of bumblebees?"

39. "They will certainly tell us where Kṛṣṇa has gone, since they have seen Him personally." Guessing in this way, the gopīs inquired from the plants and creepers, headed by Tulasī.

40. "O Tulasī! O mālatī! O yūthī, mādhavī and mallikā! Kṛṣṇa is very dear to you. Therefore He must have come near you."

41. "You are just like dear friends to us. Kindly tell us which way Kṛṣṇa has gone and save our lives."

Madhya-līlā, Chapter 1, Text 35,

Purport

35. The subject matter of Hari-bhakti-vilāsa by Śrī Sanātana Gosvāmī was collected by Śrīla Gopāla Bhaṭṭa and is known as vaiṣṇava-smṛti. This vaiṣṇava-smṛti-grantha was finished in twenty chapters, known as vilāsas... In the ninth vilāsa, there are descriptions about collecting Tulasī leaves, offering oblations to forefathers according to Vaiṣṇava rituals, and offering food.

Madhya-līlā, Chapter 3, Text 103

103. Śrī Advaita Ācārya fed the two Lords cloves and cardamom mixed with Tulasī flowers. Thus there was a good flavor within their mouths.

Madhya-līlā, Chapter 15, Texts 9-10

9. Śrī Advaita Prabhu would also place a flower garland around the Lord's neck and Tulasī flowers [mañjarīs] on his head. Then, with folded hands, Advaita Ācārya would offer obeisances and prayers unto the Lord.

10. After being worshiped by Advaita Ācārya, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu would take the dish containing flowers and Tulasī and, with whatever paraphernalia remained, would also worship Advaita Ācārya.

Madhya-līlā, Chapter 15, Texts 254

254. Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu finished eating, Bhaṭṭācārya washed his mouth, hands and legs and offered Him flavored spices, Tulasī-mañjarī, cloves and cardamom.

Madhya-līlā, Chapter 17, Texts 141-142

141. [In the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam Sūta Gosvāmī says:] "Apart from the pastimes of Lord Kṛṣṇa, when Tulasī leaves are offered at the lotus feet of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, even the aroma of the leaves attracts the minds of self-realized persons.

142. [Sūta Gosvāmī states what Śrī Maitreya said to Vidura in the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (3.15.43)] "When the breeze carrying the aroma of Tulasī leaves and saffron from the lotus feet of the lotus-eyed Personality of Godhead entered through the nostrils into the hearts of those sages [the Kumāras], they experienced a change in both body and mind, even though they were attached to impersonal Brahman understanding."

Purport

....Simply by seeing the Lord and smelling the aroma of Tulasī and saffron from His lotus feet, the Kumāras became devotees and abandoned their long-cherished impersonalism. Thus the four Kumāras were turned into Vaiṣṇavas simply by smelling the aromatic Tulasī mixed with saffron. Those who are actually on the platform of Brahman realization and who have not offended the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa can immediately become Vaiṣṇavas simply by smelling the aroma of the Lord's lotus feet. However, those who are offenders or demons are never attracted to the Lord's personal feature....

Madhya-līlā, Chapter 17, Text 193

193. Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu visited the different forests, including Madhavana, Tālavana, Kumudavana and Bahulāvana. Wherever He went, He took His bath with great ecstatic love.

Purport

The word vana means "forest." Vṛndāvana is the name given to the forest where Śrīmatī Vṛndā Devī grows profusely.

Madhya-līlā, Chapter 22, Texts 124-125

124. [Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu said:] "One should (23) attend arati and festivals, (24) see the Deity, (25) present what is very dear to oneself to the Deity, (26) meditate, and (27) serve those related to the Lord.

125. Tadiya means the Tulasī leaves, the devotees of Kṛṣṇa, the birthplace of Kṛṣṇa, Mathurā, and the Vedic literature Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam. Kṛṣṇa is very eager to see his devotee serve Tulasī, Vaiṣṇavas, Mathurā and Bhāgavatam.

Purport

After item twenty-six (meditation), the twenty-seventh is to serve Tulasī...

Madhya-līlā, Chapter 24, Texts 260-261

260. [Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu said:] "Nārada Muni continued, 'Leave your home and go to the river. There you should construct a small cottage, and in front of the cottage you should grow a Tulasī plant on a raised platform.

261. " 'After planting the Tulasī tree before your house, you should daily circumambulate that Tulasī plant, serve her by giving her water and other things, and continuously chant the Hare-Kṛṣṇa mahā-mantra.' "

Purport

....In any condition, any man can live in a small cottage, plant a Tulasī tree, water it in the morning, offer it prayers, and continuously chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa mahā-mantra. Thus one can make vigorous spiritual advancement.... Taking the advice of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu and our spiritual master, Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Gosvāmī Mahārāja, one can go to any part of the world and instruct people to become devotees of the Lord by following the regulative principles, worshipping the Tulasī plant and continuously chanting the Hare Kṛṣṇa mahā-mantra.

Madhya-līlā, Chapter 24, Text 336

336. ....The Śālagrāma-śilā should be worshiped with Tulasī where a sufficient quantity of Tulasī leaves are available.

Worship of Śālagrāma-śilā should be introduced in all ISKCON temples....

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam,

Canto 3, Chapter 15, Text 49

49. [The Kumāras said:] O Lord, we pray that you let us be born in any hellish condition of life, just as long as our hearts and minds are always engaged in the service of Your lotus feet, our words are made beautiful [by speaking of Your activities] just as Tulasī leaves are beautiful when offered unto Your lotus feet, and as long as our ears are always filled with the chanting of Your transcendental qualities.

Purport

....Here the sages pray that their words may always be engaged in glorifying the Supreme Lord. One may speak very nicely with ornamental language or one may be expert at controlled grammatical presentation, but if one's words are not engaged in the service of the Lord, they have no flavor and no actual use. The example given here is that of Tulasī leaves. The Tulasī leaf is very useful even from the medicinal or antiseptic point of view. It is considered sacred and is offered to the lotus feet of the Lord. The Tulasī leaf has numerous good qualities, but if it were not offered to the lotus feet of the Lord, Tulasī could not be of much value or importance....

Canto 3, Chapter 16, Text 20-21

20. [The four Kumāras said:] The goddess of fortune, Lakṣmī, the dust of whose feet is worn on the head by others, waits upon You, as appointed, for she is anxious to secure a place in the abode of the king of bees, who hovers on the fresh wreath of Tulasī leaves offered at Your feet by some blessed devotee....

Purport

As previously described, Tulasī has attained all superior qualities due to being placed at the lotus feet of the Lord. The comparison made here is very nice. As the king of bees hovers over the Tulasī leaves offered to the lotus feet of the Lord, so Lakṣmī, the goddess who is sought by the demigods, brāhmaṇas, Vaiṣṇavas and everyone else, always engages in rendering service to the lotus feet of the Lord. The conclusion is that no one can be the benefactor of the Lord; everyone is actually the servant of the Lord. ... The goddess of fortune, Lakṣmī, is sometimes envious of the Tulasī leaves which are placed at the lotus feet of the Lord, for they remain fixed there and do not move, whereas Lakṣmī, although stationed by the chest of the Lord, sometimes has to please other devotees who pray for her favor. Lakṣmī sometimes has to go to satisfy her numerous devotees, but Tulasī leaves never forsake their position, and the Lord therefore appreciates the service of the Tulasī more than the service of Lakṣmī.

Canto 4, Chapter 8, Text 55

55. One should worship the Lord by offering pure water, pure flower garlands, fruits, flowers and vegetables, which are available in the forest, or by collecting newly grown grasses, small buds of flowers or even the skins of trees, and if possible, by offering Tulasī leaves, which are very dear to the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

Purport

It is specifically mentioned herein that Tulasī leaves are very dear to the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and devotees should take particular care to have Tulasī leaves in every temple and center of worship. In the Western countries, while engaged in propagating the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement, we were brought great unhappiness because we could not find Tulasī leaves ... Tulasī leaves are very important for satisfying the Lord, so as far as possible an arrangement should be made for growing Tulasī leaves.

Canto 5, Chapter 3, Text 6

Supreme Lord, You are full in every respect. You are certainly very satisfied when your devotees offer you prayers with faltering voices and in ecstasy bring You Tulasī leaves, water, twigs bearing new leaves and newly grown grass. This surely makes You satisfied.

Purport

Quoting from the Gautamiya-tantra, the Hari-bhakti-vilāsa states: "Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who is very affectionate toward His devotees, sells Himself to a devotee who offers merely a Tulasī leaf and a palmful of water." The Supreme Lord is causelessly merciful upon His devotee, so much so that even the poorest of men can offer Him a little water and a flower in devotion and thus please Him. This is due to His affectionate dealings with His devotees.

Canto 5, Chapter 25, Text 7

7. Appearing as white as the heavenly king Indra, He wears a golden belt around His waist and a vaijayantī garland of ever-fresh Tulasī blossoms around His neck. Bees intoxicated by the honeylike fragrance of the Tulasī flowers hum very sweetly around the garland, which thus becomes more and more beautiful. In this way the Lord enjoys His very magnanimous pastimes.

Canto 7, Chapter 5, Texts 23-24

Purport

...Service to the Vaiṣṇava, Tulasī, Ganges and Yamunā are included in pāda-sevanam. All these processes of pāda-sevanam help one advance in spiritual life very quickly. ...In the same Skanda-Purāṇa, Reva Kāṇḍa, it is said that one who recites prayers to Tulasī or sows a Tulasī seed is also freed from all offenses. Similarly, one who worships the Śālagrāma-śilā can also be relieved of offenses.

Canto 9, Chapter 4, Texts 18-20

Mahārāja Ambariṣa always engaged his mind in meditating upon the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa, his words in describing the glories of the Lord, his hands in cleansing the Lord's temple, and his ears in hearing the words spoken by Kṛṣṇa or about Kṛṣṇa. He engaged his eyes in seeing the Deity of Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa's temples and Kṛṣṇa's places like Mathurā and Vṛndāvana, he engaged his sense of touch in touching the bodies of the Lord's devotees, he engaged his sense of smell in smelling the fragrance of Tulasī offered to the Lord, and he engaged his tongue in tasting the Lord's prasāda.

Purport

... In other words, if one wants to understand the Supreme Personality of Godhead in completeness, one must follow the prescriptions given by Kṛṣṇa by following in the footsteps of Mahārāja Ambariṣa....

December 19, 1970, Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam Class, Surat

Prabhupāda: Somebody asked me, "Swamiji, why are these Tulasī beads on your neck or on your devotee's neck?" So I replied, "Just as a pet dog has got a collar, similarly we are pet dogs of God. So we have got this collar. And Yamarāja, the Lord of Death will understand that he-the devotee-is God's dog; he should not be shot down."

Feb. 22, 1973, Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam Class, Auckland, New Zealand

Devotee: How is it possible that Tulasī Devī is a pure devotee, what we might call a plant?

Prabhupāda: That you cannot know in your impure state. You just become pure. You will understand ... When you become a devotee, you will understand what kind of devotee Tulasī is. So long as you are not a devotee, you cannot understand. Don't expect to. Therefore we have to accept the authority. That is the beginning. The śāstra says, "Tulasī is the greatest devotee of Kṛṣṇa." We have to accept, that's all. Authority. How she is so great a devotee, that you will understand when you become a devotee. You come to that platform; then you will understand; not before. Now chant.

April 28, 1973, Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam Class, Los Angeles

Prabhupāda: So we come under the influence of the three modes of material nature, and by the current of such nature, we are being washed away ... For one who has learned how to see Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet and offer a little Tulasī and sandalwood pulp, this current will stop.

June 28, 1974, Room Conversation, Melbourne

Prabhupāda: Just like we worship Tulasī. Why? Because it is very dear to Viṣṇu. tadiyaham. Viṣṇu likes it, Kṛṣṇa likes it... When the Tulasī leaf is offered to Kṛṣṇa, He becomes very pleased. Therefore we love Tulasī because He likes her.

January 3, 1975, Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam Class, Bombay

Prabhupāda: The devotee begins offering Tulasī leaves with sandalwood pulp and offering them to the lotus feet of the Lord. That is his vilāsa, enjoyment. Yad-pāda-pankaja-palāśa-vilāsa. They enjoy. That is transcendental bliss-offering a little sandalwood pulp and Tulasī leaves on the lotus feet of the Lord.

February 4, 1975, Morning Walk, Hawaii

Siddha-svarūpānanda: Tulasī grows profusely in Hawaii.

Prabhupāda: That's a good sign.

Siddha-svarūpānanda: Yes, many people, hundreds of people, are worshiping Tulasī. Even people we don't know, they, somehow or other, have gotten Tulasī and they are worshiping.

Prabhupāda: Very good. They will become devotees. Without fail, they will become devotees. If they chant Hare Kṛṣṇa and worship the Tulasī leaf, they will be liberated without fail and they will become devotees.

August 1, 1975, Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam Class, New Orleans

Prabhupāda: Unless there is bhakti, this Tulasī plant will not grow... Worshiping the Deity and watering the Tulasī plants, chanting at least sixteen rounds, and observing the rules and regulations-the regulative principles-will make



your life successful. Don't neglect these. Continue them very seriously. And in this one life you will go back home, back to Godhead...

August 28, 1975, Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam Class, Vṛndāvana, India

Prabhupāda: Flowers and Tulasī leaves are not offered on the face of Kṛṣṇa; they are offered on the feet.

March 16, 1976, Morning Walk, Māyāpur, India

Prabhupāda: (summarized) It is an offense to use a lota that has been or is being used for one's personal cleansing for the purpose of watering the Tulasī plant.

June 11, 1976, Morning Walk, Los Angeles

Prabhupāda: We are worshipping the Tulasī plant. Why? Because Tulasī is liked by Kṛṣṇa. Similarly, it is better to worship anything that is connected with Viṣṇu [Kṛṣṇa], than to worship Viṣṇu Himself.

Letter dated March 26, 1968, from San Francisco, to Balai dāsī, New York

Yes, Śrī Tulasī is the eternal consort of Kṛṣṇa and the most pure devotee, and therefore the Tulasī plant is worshiped by Vaiṣṇavas.

Letter dated April 7, 1970, from Los Angeles, to Govinda dāsī, Hawaii

Please take care of the Tulasī plants in the following way. This is the best season for growing Tulasī plants. From the 15th April to the 15th of June is the best season for growing this plant. Now I understand that the seedlings are coming out, so the whole spot if possible may be covered by some net because the seedling-stage creepers being very delicate are sometimes eaten up by the sparrows. All the devotees should pour water at least once in the morning before taking prasādam. The watering should not be very much in quantity, but it should be poured just to keep the ground soft and moist. Sunlight should also be allowed. When the creepers are grown at least 7 inches high, then you can take them out from the planting soil and transplant them in a row in a different place. Then go on watering and they will grow like anything. I think this plant cannot grow in cold countries, but if the plants are dispatched from your place [Honolulu] and if the devotees take care of the plant with a little care in a flower pot, then it may grow.

The Tulasī leaf is very, very dear to Viṣṇu. All viṣṇu-tattva Deities require Tulasī leaves profusely. Tulasī leaves mixed with sandalwood pulp and placed on the lotus feet of the Lord is the topmost worship. But we must be very careful that Tulasī leaves are not placed on the feet of anyone else except Lord Viṣṇu and His different forms. Tulasī leaves cannot be placed even on the lotus feet of Rādhārāṇī or on the lotus feet of the spiritual master. It is entirely reserved for being placed on the feet of Kṛṣṇa [Viṣṇu]. However, we can place Tulasī leaves in the hands of Rādhārāṇī for the purpose of being placed on the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa....

I am giving you herewith three mantras for Tulasī Devī as follows:

This mantra is for offering obeisances, bowing down (pancanga pranam) to Tulasī Devī.

vṛndāyai tulasī-devyai priyāyai keśavasyasa ca  
kṛṣṇa-bhakti-prade devī satyavatyai namo namaḥ

I offer my repeated obeisances unto Vṛndā, Śrīmatī Tulasī Devī, who is very dear to Lord Keśava. O goddess, you bestow devotional service to Kṛṣṇa and possess the highest truth.

And when collecting leaves from the plant, the following mantra should be chanted:

tulasī amṛta-janmāsi sadā tvam keśava-priyā  
keśavārtham cinomi tvām varadā bhava śobhane

O Tulasī, you are born from nectar. You are always very dear to Lord Keśava. Now in order to worship Lord Keśava, I am collecting your leaves and mañjarīs. Please bestow your benediction on me.

The mantra for circumambulating the Tulasī tree is as follows:

yāni kāni ca pāpani brahma-hatyādikāni ca  
tāni tāni praṇāsyanti pradakṣiṇa pade pade

By circumambulation of Śrīmatī Tulasī Devī all the sins that one may have committed are destroyed at every step, even the sin of killing a brāhmaṇa.

So there are three mantras: one for bowing down, one for circumambulating, and one for collecting the leaves [from the Tulasī plant]. The collecting of leaves should be done once in the morning for worshipping and for putting on the plates of foodstuff to be offered. On each bowl or plate there should be at least one leaf... Regarding the installation of the Deities for which you are preparing, I wish to go there as soon as there are many Tulasī leaves grown. You are trying to grow mango very soon, but it will be better if you can grow soon the Tulasī leaves. This is more important than growing mangoes. So give your best attention for this purpose and as soon as you inform me that there is a regular bush of Tulasī plants, then I shall immediately start for Hawaii and install your Deities. I think this will satisfy you.

Letter dated November 5, 1970, from Bombay, to Govinda dāsī

I know that both you and Gaurasundara are sincere devotees and you have done your best in Hawaii in accordance with my desire, and the luxurious growing Tulasī Devī is giving evidence of your sincere devotion. Kindly take care of Guru-

Gaurāṅga, Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa and Tulasī Devī and be happy. Try to make others also happy by spreading this Kṛṣṇa consciousness....

Letter dated November 30, 1970, from Bombay to Karandhara dāsa, Los Angeles

Simply all the devotees offer a little water every morning, and in the evening offer obeisances and ghee lamp (one wick) and circumambulate three times repeating the mantras that I have given you. The plant may remain in the garden....

Letter dated December 29, 1970, from Surat to Jagadīśa dāsa Toronto.

The presence of Tulasī is proof of a true devotional atmosphere there. Please offer her all respects and carefully tend [her], and Śrīmatī Tulasī will be pleased with you in gaining the auspicious favor of the Lord....

Letter dated April 11, 1971, from Bombay to Kṛṣṇakānti dāsa

Tend Tulasī very nicely and your devotion towards Kṛṣṇa will increase. In the evening a lamp should be offered to the Tulasī plant, and in the morning each devotee should offer a little water and offer obeisances....

Letter dated May 28, 1971, from Calcutta, to Govinda dāsī, Honolulu

I always speak to many gentlemen how strenuously hard you have worked to introduce Tulasī in the Western countries, and I am hearing from everywhere that Tulasī is growing very luxuriantly. May Tulasī be kind upon you and introduce you to Kṛṣṇa, to be one of the assistant maidservant gopīs in Vṛndāvana....

Letter dated August 9, 1971, from London, to Indirā dāsī, St. Louis

So you should induce other centers to cultivate Tulasī. One circular should be sent to every center that they should import Tulasī Devī from either St. Louis or Hawaii, and as soon as possible each center should arrange to care for Tulasī Devī nicely according to the instructions of you or Govinda Dāsī, who have become expert....

Letter dated November 20, 1971, from New Delhi, to Govinda dāsī, Honolulu

All should wear Tulasī kunti beads, not less than two strands; or three or four strands; my Guru Mahārāja had five strands....

Letter dated January 6, 1972, from Bombay, to Rādhāvallabha Dāsa

Tulasī Devī is a pure devotee of Kṛṣṇa and she should be treated with the same respect given to all Kṛṣṇa's pure devotees. Simply by worshiping her faithfully a devotee can get himself free from all material miseries. In the Nectar of Devotion I have given two verses from the Skanda Purāṇa: "Tulasī is auspicious in all respects. Simply by seeing, simply by touching, simply by remembering, simply by praying to, simply by bowing before, simply by hearing about, or simply by sowing the tree, there is always auspiciousness. Anyone who comes in touch with the Tulasī tree in the above mentioned ways lives eternally in the Vaikuṅṭha world." So from this verse we can understand how pure is the service which Tulasī offers to Śrī Kṛṣṇa. So we should always endeavor to become the servant of Tulasī Devī.

I do not know who has taught you that part of a Tulasī plant may be cut off and then replanted. From the Tulasī plant you can cut off leaves only for offering them to Kṛṣṇa, never for cutting and planting. That is an offense. The mañjarīs may be offered in water and it makes the water fragrant and tasteful. And the mañjarīs can be planted for growing new Tulasī plants.... Tulasī Devī never goes back to Godhead; she is always with Godhead. She is a pure devotee and thus she has appeared on this planet to render service to Kṛṣṇa by being offered in all temples throughout the world...to the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa....

Letter dated February 17, 1973, from Sydney, Australia, to Govinda dāsī

I can understand that proportionately as your Tulasī plants are growing, your devotion and love is also growing. Please continue in this way....

Letter dated December 6, 1973, from Los Angeles, to Kirtida Kanyaka dāsī

Thank you very much for the Tulasī leaves offered to Lord Caitanya's lotus feet. If one is fortunate enough to receive such holy prasādam, then all sinful reactions are immediately purified within the heart and pure devotional service is very easily obtained.

....The more you devote yourself to her service, the more you will understand and relish Kṛṣṇa consciousness....

Letter dated May 31, 1975, from Honolulu, to Kīrtanānanda, New Vrindaban

I think you can close the doors to the Deity room during Tulasī pūjā and then open them again afterwards.

Letter dated July 26, 1975, from Los Angeles, to Vṛndā dāsī, Winnipeg

But one thing is that no sprays can be used [on the Tulasī plant], none at all. Tulasī is a worshipable plant, so there is no question of using any sprays. The best thing is to daily water Tulasī Devī and keep her clean. Nothing else is required.

Letter dated October 25, 1976, from Vṛndāvana, to Vidyā dāsī, Los Angeles

If it is not possible for the Tulasī plant to survive the winters when planted in the ground, then a suitable house should be provided for her. Even in the Canadian temples which are in a much colder climate are keeping Tulasī nicely. Why should there be so much difficulty in Los Angeles, which has such a nice climate. Just do everything very carefully.

Tulasī flourishes where there is love and devotion.

The following questions were asked by Vidyā Dāsī in her September 27, 1976 letter to Śrīla Prabhupāda and answered by him as follows:-

1. Vidyā dāsī: Is each Tulasī plant a separate jīva soul or an expansion of one pure devotee?

Prabhupāda: Tulasī is one devotee who appears wherever there is devotion to Kṛṣṇa.

2. Vidyā dāsī: Where does her spirit soul go when she leaves this body?

Prabhupāda: Tulasī's body is spiritual.

3. Vidyā dāsī: May we place jewelry in her soil or just moon stones?

Prabhupāda: Yes, jewelry is all right.

4. Vidyā dāsī: When Tulasī is being cared for by householders in their home, must two arotikas still be offered?

Prabhupāda: If possible.

5. Vidyā dāsī: When Tulasī is being cared for by householders in their home may they use her leaves and mañjarīs on their home offerings or should they take them to the temple?

Prabhupāda: Tulasī leaves should be offered to the Deity.

6. Vidyā dāsī: When Tulasī is being offered arotika by the householders must she have a ghee lamp?

Prabhupāda: If possible.

7. Vidyā dāsī: Is it offensive to turn the baby Tulasīs back into soil when they appear?

Prabhupāda: Yes.

8. Vidyā dāsī: There have been questions concerning Tulasī's arotikas. We have always offered her incense, ghee lamp and flower. Is this correct?

Prabhupāda: Yes.

9. Vidyā dāsī: In the manual, it states that Tulasī should not be pruned. Does this also mean trimming the branches which no longer have leaves or life fluids flowing through them?

Prabhupāda: You may cut the dead branches but what is the necessity?

10. Vidyā dāsī: We were told you once spoke the "4 regulative principles of Tulasī care" which will keep her from getting sick: a) keep her moist; b) keep her clean; c) give her morning sunlight (at least); d) give her two arotikas a day. Is this bona fide?

Prabhupāda: I never said that.

11. Vidyā dāsī: May Tulasī be made into a tea after she has been offered?

Prabhupāda: No.

12. Vidyā dāsī: May devotees carve Tulasī wood for Deity paraphernalia?

Prabhupāda: Yes.

13. Vidyā dāsī: When Tulasī leaves her body and the body is too soft for carving beads, how should she be used? Should a small fire sacrifice be performed?

Prabhupāda: Use the wood for beads as far as possible, the balance may be placed within the earth.

14. Vidyā dāsī: We have a letter from you requesting that no sprays be used on Tulasī Devī. May we use a spray of buttermilk, whole wheat flour dissolved in water which coats her leaves to keep spider mites from causing Tulasī to leave her body?

Prabhupāda: I said no chemical sprays.

15. Vidyā dāsī: Does Tulasī sleep? Should she be left undisturbed after nightfall?

Prabhupāda: Undisturbed means what?

16. Vidyā dāsī: Is it permissible to use scissors to cut her mañjarīs, and when transplanting, to use knives to loosen her from her pot?

Prabhupāda: Use common sense, and if you have none, then consult with others.

17. Vidyā dāsī: Is it an offense to step on or across her shadow (or the shadow of any pure devotee)?

Prabhupāda: Yes. [originally, Śrīla Prabhupāda had answered "No", however, in a subsequent letter he corrected himself and replied Yes.]

18. Vidyā dāsī: For two years we have been awaiting permission to use the following two prayers plus translations and translation of the already existing prayer. Please tell us if these are bona fide:

1)

om govinda-vallabhām devīm bhakta-caitanya-kārinīm

snāpayāmi jagad-dhātrīm hari-bhakti-pradāyinīm

Now I am bathing the mother of the universe, the bestower of Kṛṣṇa bhakti, the enlivener of the living force of the devotees and the dear one of Govinda.

2)

cayanodbhava-duḥkham ca yad hṛdi tava vartate

tat kṣmasva jagan-mātaḥ vṛndā devī namo 'stu te

O mother of the universe, please forgive whatever misery exists in your heart caused by the cutting of your leaves. O Vṛndā Devī, let me offer my obeisances unto you.

3)

om tulasī amṛta-jamāsi sadā tvaṁ keśava-priya  
keśavārtham cinomi tvām barada bhava śobane

O Tulasī, you are born from nectar and always dear to Lord Keśava. Now, for the service of Keśava, I am picking your leaves, O one who is shining brightly.

Prabhupāda: Don't try to introduce something new. The most important thing is the love and devotion....

LTD 21a: Letter dated December 9, 1973, from Los Angeles, to Babhru

Letter dated December 9, 1973, from Los Angeles, to Babhru

That Gaurasundara and Siddha-svarūpa have sold the temple in Hawaii and abandoned the beautiful Tulasī plants there is a great fall-down on their parts....

Yes, you may return to Hawaii with Sudāmā Mahārāja and take charge of caring for Tulasī Devī there. I cannot understand how Govinda Dāsī could abandon Tulasī Devī. Kindly try to induce her to return....

LTD 22: Vṛndā-kuṇḍa

Vṛndā-kuṇḍa

The following information has been circulated by the Vṛndā Trust of Vṛndāvana, India.

When Śrī Kṛṣṇa concluded His transcendental pastimes on earth, His great grandson, King Vajranabha of Mathurā, established many of the holy places as villages named after the lilās of Kṛṣṇa. He installed many Deities of Kṛṣṇa and revealed many kuṇḍas (sacred places) where Śrī Kṛṣṇa performed His pastimes. In the course of time, however, these places were concealed. No one cared to discuss or remember them or the Lord's pastimes there.

Much later Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya, Vrajendra-kumāra Himself, went to Mathurā and indicated the locations of those lost holy places. He described everything about them to Sanātana and Rūpa Gosvāmī, who sought evidence of their importance from the scriptures.

After collecting scriptural references, they traveled to each of the holy places in Vraja (Vṛndāvana). With utmost care they re-established many of the lost kuṇḍas and villages. Because of their sincere endeavor to reveal them, we can now know the glories of each location in Mathurā.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Śrī Balarāma enjoyed Their pastimes throughout the twelve forests of Mathurā. They lived at the home of Nanda Mahārāja, called Nandīśvara. One half mile to the east of Nandīśvara is Vṛndā-kuṇḍa, the sacred place of Vṛndā Devī.

In the book Bhakti-ratnakara by Narahari Ṭhākura, Vṛndā-kuṇḍa is described: "A little distance from this place [Nandīśvara], in a secluded spot, Vṛndā Devī would consider in her mind how to arrange the meeting of the Divine Couple [Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa]. After arranging Their meeting, she would float in happiness. Who would not glorify the qualities of Vṛndā Devī?"

Adjacent to Vṛndā-kuṇḍa is Gupta-kuṇḍa, where Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa secretly enjoy Their morning pastimes. Bhakti-ratnakara states: "This is Gupta kuṇḍa, where Kṛṣṇa and His friends headed by Subāla secretly played various games as they wandered through the forest."

King Vajranabha installed the original deity of Vṛndā Devī at Vṛndā-kuṇḍa nearly 5,000 years ago. This Deity was later broken during a Muslim attack and could no longer be worshiped. Gradually, Vṛndā-kuṇḍa and Gupta-kuṇḍa were forgotten; only the local villagers of Nandīśvara, or Nandagrāma, remembered the holy place.

It is said in the book Caitanya-bhāgavata by Vṛndāvana dāsa Ṭhākura that Caitanya Mahāprabhu's disciples would keep a Tulasī tree beside Him, and He would sit taking darśana of Śrīmatī Tulasī Mahārāṇī and chant His prescribed number of japa rounds. Caitanya Mahāprabhu would say, "Just as a fish cannot live when taken out of its environment, water, so I cannot remain alive in separation of Tulasī Mahārāṇī."

In the 1980s, one highly respected Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava, Bābā Mādhava dāsa, was researching the Nandagrāma area to locate the many kuṇḍas there. He had been working on a project to protect Mathurā's holy places from construction companies who were about to destroy some of the mountains and kuṇḍas for commercial enterprise.

When Bābā Mādhava first heard about Vṛndā-kuṇḍa and Gupta-kuṇḍa, they were inaccessible by road, but once finding them, he decided to restore the two kuṇḍas because of their great spiritual significance. The village council of Nandagrāma encouraged him in this work, and gave him full rights to the place.

To carry out the excavation of the kuṇḍas, he sought help from local Vaiṣṇavas and government officials in the Mathurā district. Then, to build the ghāṭas around the kuṇḍas, he approached mine owners in Rajasthan for donations of stone slabs. Once the kuṇḍas were restored, he had a Vṛndāvana artist in Kāmyavana Forest carve a new marble Deity of Vṛndā Devī, and constructed a small temple between the two kuṇḍas for her worship. Vṛndā Devī was again brought to Vṛndā-kuṇḍa, and since then she has been worshiped, and prasādam has been distributed regularly.

When Bābā Mādhava das grew too weak to continue his work, he requested the ISKCON devotees of the Śrī Kṛṣṇa Balaram Mandir in Vṛndāvana to maintain Vṛndā Devī's worship. There were some devotees interested in the project. The Bābā, who had resided in Vṛndāvana for over fifty years, gave the kuṇḍas to ISKCON in 1989, and left this world on March 27, 1990 at Kṛṣṇa-Balaram Mandir. His samādhi is fittingly located at Vṛndākuṇḍa. In 1992 under the auspices of ISKCON, devotees formed the Vṛndā Trust, a private charitable trust, to carry on the work of restoration. The Aims of the Vṛndā Trust

1. To carry out the order of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda to promote the glorification of Tulasī Devī (Vṛndā Devī) worldwide.
2. To make Vṛndā-kuṇḍa an international self-sufficient place of pilgrimage and represent ISKCON'S interest at Vṛndā-kuṇḍa.
3. To hold annual festivals and cultural programs at Vṛndā-kuṇḍa.
4. To establish and renovate other holy places and temples in Vraja (Vṛndāvana).
5. To purchase property in Vraja.
6. To establish ashrams in Vraja.
7. To distribute spiritual literature and prasādam.

These sacred, transcendental kuṇḍas are being developed and maintained by ISKCON devotees. All devotees are welcome to help in this service and receive the mercy of Vṛndā Devī by writing to:

The Secretary

Vṛndā Trust

Śrī Krishna Balarama Mandir

Bhaktivedanta Swami Marg

Raman Reti,

Vṛndāvana, U.P., 201124

INDIA