**The Original Sin: False Ambition**

By Narasimha das

**How Living Entities Become Conditioned**

It will difficult to properly understand the controversy in ISKCON regarding spiritual initiations and the bona fide spiritual master unless we first carefully consider the fundamentals of *guru-tattva* and authorized explanations regarding the cause of conditioned consciousness.

**“In the beginning, from clear consciousness, or the pure state of Krishna consciousness, the first contamination sprang up. This is called false ego, or identification of the body as self. The living entity exists in the natural state of Krishna consciousness, but he has marginal independence, and this allows him to forget Krishna. Originally, pure Krishna consciousness exists, but because of misuse of marginal independence, there is a chance of forgetting Krishna. This is exhibited in actual life; there are many instances in which someone acting in Krishna consciousness suddenly changes.”** (*SB*. 3.23-24, Purport)

In an attempt to understand *why* a living being in the spiritual world falls under the influence of material nature and material time, some devotees have resorted to logic and philosophical speculation. Logic and philosophical speculation are not bad as long as we carefully hear the conclusions the self-realized *acharya*, one who is undisturbed by the actions and reactions of the modes of material nature. (*Iti shushruma dhiranam*.) Basically two groups of pundits fall into this category of speculator who indulge in what Prabhupada calls, “*crow-and-tal-fruit logic*.”

One group preaches that the fallen conditioned soul was never in direct contact with Krishna but only in contact with His *brahmajyoti* at the threshold of Vaikuntha Dhama. There is some evidence in *sastras* that seems to support this idea. For instance, in His purports in *Srimad-Bhagavatam,* Srila Prabhupada comments that Jaya and Vijay were at the *gates* of Vaikuntha and did not fall from positions on a Vaikuntha planet. Nor were they actually forced to fall down due to a curse of Brahmin *rishis*. Srila Prabhpada concludes in his purports to this pastime that the whole incident was arranged by the Supreme Lord as a prelude to His *lila* in the material world. Jaya and Vijaya descended to help the Supreme Lord in His pastimes. In our Gaudiya Vaisnava *siddhanta* presented by Srila Prabhupada and our *param-guru*, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura, it is admitted that living beings fall from the platform of Brahmanat the threshold of Vaikuntha, but the conclusion they have given is that before that fall, the living being was with Krishna Himself. This conclusion is given throughout Srila Prabhupada’s books and in Srila Bhaktisiddhanta’s purports in *Sri Brahma-samhita*. **“Because he falls down from *Brahma-sayuja*, he thinks that this may be his origin, but he does not remember that before that even, he was with Krishna.”** (Letter, June, 1972)

Another group of pundits say that the conditioned soul was put into the material world only to help fulfill the *lila* of the Supreme Lord, Who descends to the world of *mahamaya* to exhibit His compassion for the fallen souls. Unless there existed fallen souls, they reason, how would Krishna exhibit is most wonderful quality of compassion? There is also some *sastric* evidence to support this view. For instance: **“It is stated in the previous verse that the material energy was accepted by the Supreme Personality of Godhead in order that He might exhibit pastimes for the living entities who wanted to enjoy and lord it over the material energy. Why this material world was created for the sufferings of conditioned souls is a very intricate question. There is a hint in the previous verse in the word *’lilaya’*, which means ‘for the pastimes of the Lord’.”** (*SB*.3.26, Purport) Nonetheless, Srila Prabhupada and Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura have given emphasis to the idea that the fallen *jivatma*, due to his minute independence, has fallen under the covering of *maya* because of his desire to enjoy independently. **“Even with Krishna the desire for sense gratification [in the *jiva*] is there. There is a dormant attitude for forgetting Krishna and creating an atmosphere for enjoying independently**.” (Letter, June, 1972)

Although it may not be very useful to argue about *why* the *jiva* fell into material consciousness, we should clearly understand, in principle, the cause of material consciousness. Sometimes Srila Prabhupada explains that a soul’s fall was due to his desire to imitate the all-attractive position of Krishna, and sometimes He explains that it is simply due to the *jiva’s* marginal nature and misuse of his minute independence. Evidence also supports the idea that the material world was created for the Supreme Lord’s pastimes, and that the fall of the *jivatma* never really happened but is rather is a momentary dream. **“The living entity’s condition is simply the influence of the material energy; actually he has not fallen. …the living entity, because he is a spark of the Supreme, has not fallen. But he is thinking, ‘I am fallen. I am material. I am this body.’”** (Lecture, Tokyo, April 20, 1972) In all cases, Srila Prabhupada gives emphasis to the understanding that the cause of a *jiva’s* suffering in material consciousness began with his false ambition to enjoy independently. Unless the *jiva* is marginal and able to exist either in illusory consciousness or in Krishna consciousness, there would be no meaning to his independence and free choice to love Krishna. Without freedom, or free will, Srila Prabhupada explains, we could have no true loving relationship with the Supreme Lord. In this way, to satisfy the logical and philosophical minds of his disciples, Srila Prabhupada has explained the inconceivable, as far as is possible for us to understand in our present state.

**“This falldown is due to false ego. From the status of pure consciousness, the false ego is born because of misuse of independence. We cannot argue about why false ego arises from pure consciousness. Factually there is always the chance that this will happen, and therefore one has to be very careful.”** (*SB*. 3.23-24, Purport)

**Hear From Authority or Learn the Hard Way**

Unless we accept responsibility for our sufferings under the modes of material nature, there is danger we will take lightly our free will and the concomitant responsibility it entails, including our neglect of Krishna’s direct service and our consequent suffering in material consciousness. Unless we are repentant about our mistake of accepting a platform of false enjoyment and our longtime avoidance of devotional service to Krishna, advancement on the path of self-realization is troublesome and slow. The best course is to accept the conclusions and remedies offered by the self-realized *acharya,* Srila Prabhupada. He knows what is best for us all, and he knows exactly how to administer just the right medicine for our cure from the disease of material consciousness.

As *Srimad-Bhagavatam* aptly notes, in the name of establishing the truth, various pundits argue as proponents and counter-proponents without coming to any real conclusion and forget the welfare of their own eternal souls. To acquire perfect knowledge there is no alternative but to hear carefully from the undisturbed authorities who have clearly explained the Absolute Truth.*Iti shushruma dhiranam, ye nas tad vicacaksire. (Sri Isopanishad*, Mantra 13) And we must carefully chant Krishna’s holy names in a humble state of mind.

The difficult thing for conditioned souls to grasp is how a pure living being who was with Krishna became covered by *maya* due to envy of Krishna’s exalted status. Srila Prabhupada has explained that the *jiva* has a dormant, minute propensity to be a supreme enjoyer in imitation of Krishna, and therefore this propensity sometimes becomes manifest in a very minute minority of spiritual beings. He said that material consciousness begins due to two things: the desire to enjoy independently in imitation of Krishna and envy of Krishna’s supreme position. **“These two things: desire to be the Lord and envy of the Lord are the beginning cause of material bondage.”** (*SB*. 3.27.20, Purport) Both things are due to false ambition for a position that is apart from our constitutional nature. But why would the Vaikuntha *jiva* become maliciously envious towards Krishna, the most lovable Person, the very Self or his own self? There is, in fact, no evidence to suggest that the first beginnings of the soul’s fall into material consciousness was due to malicious envy or aversion to Krishna’s service. It may, in fact, have been due to some very subtle, seemingly innocent curiosity: *“What would it be like to be Krishna, the supreme enjoyer?”* When such a thought arises, the *jivatma* begins his descent into the dream world of *mahamaya.* Srila Prabhupada has explained that in the hearts of the pure devotees of Vaikuntha or Goloka even a hint of an illusory spirit of enjoyment cannot exist. In the spiritual world there is nothing false, even in imagination, and Krishna has no competitor.

Srila Prabhupada has further explained that Krishna three times asks the *jivatma* not to leave Vaikuntha Dhama or Goloka Dhama, but if he insists, Krishna allows him to fulfill his curiosity. Srila Prabhupada tells a simple story to illustrate this point using the example of his own small child who wanted to touch a moving fan blade. Srila Prabhupada told him not to do it several times, but because the child was insistent, Prabhupada reduced the speed of the fan and finally agreed to let him touch it. When the child was thus startled by the mild pain of touching the slowing moving fan blade, he learned by direct experience that he should never desire to touch the moving blades of fans.

**No One Falls From Vaikuntha**

Jaya and Vijaya, the gatekeepers who were cursed by the Four Kumaras at a gate to Vaikuntha, became immensely powerful demons to assist Krishna in His pastimes in the material world. Their births as demons were due to their specific desire to return quickly to Vaikuntha and due to a special arrangement of the Supreme Lord. Ordinarily, however, the first birth of the *jivatma* in the material world is as Lord Brahma, an empowered avatar of Krishna. In this way, the *jiva* gets the opportunity to play the part of supreme lord without becoming degraded by the material energy of the Lord*.* Krishna’s allowing the *jiva* to come to the material world as Lord Brahma is similar to Srila Prabhupada letting his son touch the fan blade after reducing the fan’s speed.

As Lord Brahma, the non-envious *jivatma* has the opportunity to be the lord of the universe under Krishna’s direct supervision and empowerment. From this somewhat safe position, Lord Brahma gets the opportunity to witness firsthand the miseries of material existence without becoming contaminated. If, however, Lord Brahma becomes falsely ambitious, he comes under the influence of the modes of nature and material time. In this way he falls from his position above the modes of nature and is born again in the material world in a lesser position. Thus it may be understood that the *jivatma* first descends as an avatar; he does not actually fall from Vaikuntha. The real fall of the *jiva* is from the level of Brahma, or from a position on the level of Brahman realization. This is due to false ambition and its immediate reaction: forgetfulness of one’s constitutional position as menial servant of Krishna. Unless he is rectified by Lord Krishna, as was Brahma in at least two *lilas* related in *Krsna Book,* or Tenth Canto *Srimad-Bhagavatam*, Brahma may fall from his exalted status.

Lord Brahma is considered almost on the level of the Supreme Personality of Godhead because Brahma is Krishna’s empowered representative. As Krishna’s direct representative, Lord Brahma is above the modes of nature and the influences of even *kala*, time itself. **“The influences of time, which manifests as past, present and future, cannot touch higher personalities like Brahma and other demigods. Sometimes demigods and great sages who have attained such perfection are called *tri-kala-jna.*”**(*SB*. 3.15.3, Purport) **“The pure status of consciousness, or Krishna consciousness, exists in the beginning; just after creation, consciousness is not polluted.”** (*SB*.3.26.22, Purport)

In spite of being given all opportunities to be lord of the universe as servant of Krishna, some Lord Brahmas do not return immediately to the spiritual world after the final cosmic dissolution. Some fall to lower positions in the material world and thus become subservient to *kala* and the modes of material nature. Due to the all-powerful influence of *kala,* the original innocence of the Vaikuntha soul is covered, and he gradually becomes degraded to the level of a lesser demigod, a demon, a human, an animal, or even an insect. **“So, even Lord Brahma is still material and wants to lord it over the material world. He may come to down to become a germ, but then he may rise up to become Krishna conscious and go back home, back to Godhead.”** (Letter, June, 1972) This degradation begins with false ambition, which arises from the desire to imitate Krishna’s position as supreme enjoyer, but such degradation cannot take place in Vaikuntha Dhama.

Therefore the *jiva* who is curious about the position of supreme lord, or has some slight desire to imitate Krishna, as a child may desire to imitate his father, descends as an avatar in the service of Krishna. In most cases Lord Brahma and most other exalted residents of Brahmaloka are promoted back to the spiritual world after their lives in Brahmaloka and are not degraded by material existence. This is the verdict of *Srimad-Bhagavatam*. Their only misery is their feelings of compassion for fallen conditioned souls. Nonetheless, unlike the residents of Vaikuntha, the inhabitants of Brahmaloka must eventually suffer tribulations and die. They may even fall to lower forms in material existence. As Lord Krishna warns is *Bhagavad-gita*, Brahmaloka is ***not the eternal abode*** of complete bliss and knowledge.

**“The conclusion is that no one falls from the spiritual word, or Vaikuntha planet, because it *is the eternal abode*.”** (*SB*.3.16.26, Purport)