

“Unspoken Obstacles On the Path to Bhakti”

by Purnacandra Das

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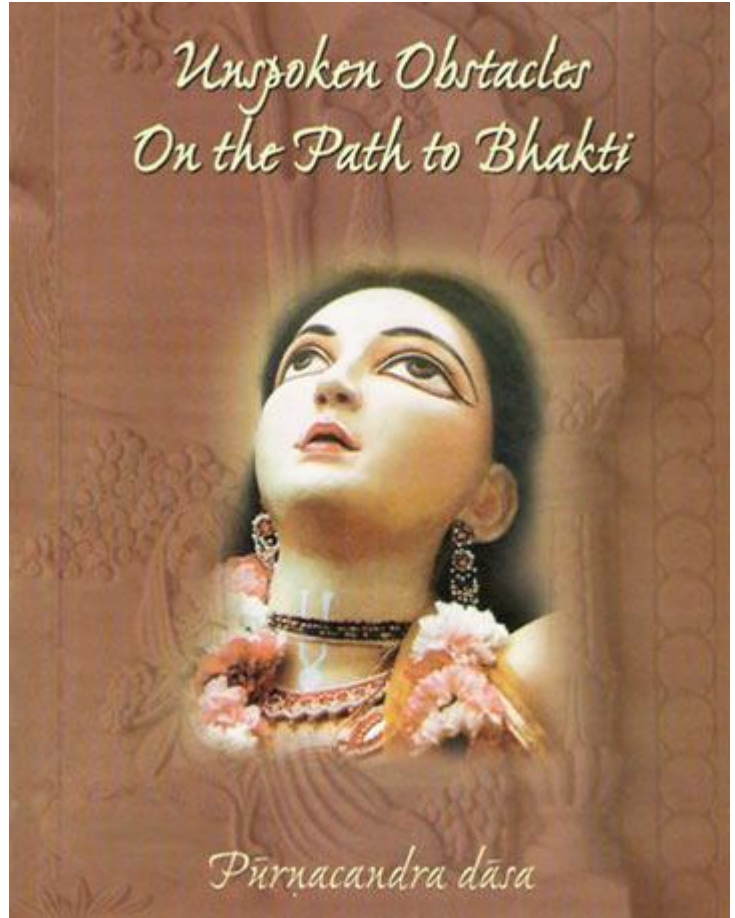
INTRODUCTION

This is an in-house book for practitioners of *bhakti* and for leaders within ISKCON. It deals with philosophical and sociological issues. Many of the observations discussed herein may also be applied to other spiritual or devotional organizations. Far from being a complete analysis, only a few topics are discussed since the subject is vast. I am not a sociologist, but I have studied and practiced *bhakti-yoga* for twenty-six years.

During these years of practicing *bhakti-yoga*, teaching *bhakti-śāstras* and counseling devotees, I have perceived certain behavioral patterns and conceptions, some of which are damaging to the cultivation of devotion. Pointing them out may be thorny, but there is a constructive purpose in my doing so. Abraham Lincoln once said, “He has a right to criticize who has a heart to help.”

Constructive criticism will only be appreciated by the intelligent, who feel relief, hope and faith, because they see truth emerging from darkness, and that is their main concern. Still, I humbly request that you overlook any faults that you may stumble across in the pages to come. If you find any truths, however, please embrace them.

ISKCON is a growing society and grapples with many internal problems. Recently, some members have left to join other organizations, splinter groups or *bābājis*. The problems, however, are not due to ISKCON itself or the process that Śrīla Prabhupāda established within it. Like the holy River Yamunā, ISKCON is pure and transcendental, always able to purify and grant devotion. It is a divine vehicle for Lord Caitanya’s mercy. Unfortunately, we dump refuse into it and pollute it with our coarse habits and



previous conditioning, both gross and subtle. This book explores some of these forms of conditioning, and my hope is that it will stimulate introspection and improvement, individually and collectively.

In other words, the goal of this book is to invoke social and spiritual reform within ISKCON. Why? Well, for one, because I live within the Society and want to see its problems solved. ISKCON is Śrīla Prabhupāda's legacy, his mission, his creation or child. Any disciple naturally desires to protect, maintain and rectify his master's mission.

If someone is ill, the first step in curing him is to diagnose the disease. This usually includes checking the tongue, testing the blood pressure and jabbing for blood samples—none of which is pleasant. Without these tests, the doctor cannot ascertain the problem and neither he nor the patient will know what to do.

I do not presume, however, the role of a doctor. Nevertheless, a steady patient on the road to recovery has some ability to understand the process of cure. Therefore, I leave it to you, the reader, to evaluate the observations and conclusions on their own merit.

“For ordinary religious persons, whatever contradicts the principles of religion is sin. For devotees of the Supreme Lord, however, everything which stands in the way of pure devotional service is sin.”

Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī,
Bṛhad-Bhāgavatāmṛta 2.7.124 purport

CHAPTER ONE – Fundamentals of Devotion

Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī in the beginning of his famous work *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, which should be referred to when analyzing *bhakti*, defines the fundamental principles of *bhakti-yoga*. I will not review all of his statements here. There are some principles, however, that will serve to substantiate the following chapters.

Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī’s *paribhāṣā-sūtra* acts as a powerful substratum for the *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* (1.1.11). That *sūtra* states that pure devotion (*uttama-bhakti*) can be attained only by one who (1) has no habitual or integral desire other than to please the Lord, (2) has not allowed *jñāna*, *karma* and so forth to cover or eclipse his devotion, (3) performs service favorably, (4) serves Kṛṣṇa, His avatars, expansions or pure devotees and (5) cultivates *bhakti* continuously with the body, mind and speech.

anyābhilāṣitā-śūnyam
jñāna-karmādy-anāvṛtam
ānukūlyena kṛṣṇānu-
śīlanam bhaktir uttamā

Here *jñāna* means philosophical speculation with impersonal leanings or conclusions. It is not that one must completely reject all philosophical speculation, but if one’s philosophical interests become more prominent than one’s devotional activity, they will cover the devotional attitude and disqualify him from pure devotional service.

The word *karmādi* is also significant. It consists of two words: *karma* and *adi*. *Karma* indicates the contamination of fruitive activities or fruitive rituals, and *adi*, meaning “and so forth,” indicates other obstructions such as *sāṅkhya-yoga*, being lazy, dry artificial renunciation, or obsession with *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* or *varṇāśrama-dharma*. The point is that certain actions, desires or even subtle conceptions may overshadow or eclipse one’s pure devotion.

Let us consider an example of this eclipsing. Your sister is getting married, and she naturally invites you to the wedding. All of your relatives expect you to attend the ceremony—and if you don’t, they will be disturbed. Probably, they will begin to wonder about your newfound religion. You decide to attend so that you do not disturb them. That’s fine. With this mentality, there is no harm to your devotion. If you think, however, that your attendance is necessary for your devotion or your devotion will be harmed if you don’t go, then that misconception—that *bhakti* is dependent upon a social ceremony—is an obstacle to pure devotion. It’s subtle, but it is still an obstacle. Again, the point is that subtle conceptions can hinder the development of devotion.

Another example may be a devotee’s obsession with *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*. ISKCON has some members who practice *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* daily. They generally perform it for health reasons or perhaps as an aid to calming the mind before *japa* but not as a means for self-realization. They know that *bhakti-yoga* is far

superior. If, however, someone becomes obsessed with *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* and begins to use it as a substitute for his devotional service, or if his interest in it becomes more prominent than his devotional service, then that will cover his devotional attitude and hinder his progress. The same reasoning can also be applied to astrology or other Vedic and neo-Vedic practices.

The performance of these various activities may sometimes seem quite similar to pure devotional activities, and one would have to be experienced to judge the difference.

Śrīla Prabhupāda warns us of this principle of similarity in his purport to *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* (Madhya 19.159): “All these obstructions have been described in this verse as unwanted creepers. They simply present obstacles for the real creeper, the *bhakti-latā*. One should be very careful to avoid all these unwanted things. Sometimes these unwanted creepers look exactly like the *bhakti* creeper. They appear to be of the same size and the same species when they are packed together with the *bhakti* creeper, but in spite of this, the creepers are called *upaśākhā*. A pure devotee can distinguish between the *bhakti* creeper and a mundane creeper, and he is very alert to distinguish them and keep them separate.”

To develop pure *bhakti*, one must first understand this principle and then practice it. One must allow *bhakti* to grow freely without anything obstructing it or eclipsing it, just as a new creeper must be free from obstruction for it to grow. A sapling may have strings tied to it so that it grows straight, but no one would place an obstruction directly over it. That would be foolish.

The potential for *bhakti* dwells deep within everyone’s heart. It is waiting to appear in the active, waking world. It simply needs to be revived by the proper practice. Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī in his *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* (1.2.2) defines this practice:

*kṛti-sādhyā bhavet sādhyā-
bhāvā sā sādhanābhidhā
nitya-siddhasya bhāvasya
prākāṣyaṁ hṛdi sādhyatā*

“When transcendental devotional service, by which love for Kṛṣṇa is attained, is executed by the senses, it is called *sādhana-bhakti*, or the regulative discharge of devotional service. Such devotion eternally exists within the heart of every living entity. The awakening of this eternal devotion is the potentiality of devotional service in practice.”

This revival process is easy and sublime. It begins with hearing and chanting. It activates the lost consciousness of the soul, reawakening his original state, just as the memory of someone with amnesia may be reawakened by visiting his home, family or work place. A major tenet of *bhakti-yoga*, which we must clearly understand, is that one must begin to use one’s senses to please Kṛṣṇa.

Śrī Nārada Muni offers his definition, which is also a *sūtra*, in the *Nārada-pañcarātra*. Rūpa Gosvāmī quotes this same verse in *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* (1.1.12):

*sarvopādhi-vinirmuktaṁ
tat-paratvena nirmalam
hṛṣīkeṇa hṛṣīkeśa-
sevanam bhaktir ucyate*

“*Bhakti*, or devotional service, means engaging all our senses in the service of the Lord, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, the master of all the senses. When the spirit soul renders service unto Him, there are two side effects—one is freed from all material designations, and, simply by being employed in the service of the Lord, one’s senses are purified.” Engaging the senses is necessary for success in *bhakti-yoga*. This includes the subtle senses: the mind and intelligence.

Śrīla Prabhupāda explains this point in a lecture: “Spiritual life does not mean without senses. Otherwise, why it is said *hr̥ṣīkeṇa*? *Hr̥ṣīka* means *indriya*, senses. The senses are purified, not the senses are gone. Just like if you have got cataract, if it is operated, the cataract is taken away, not the eye is taken away. Eyes must remain there. Then what is the use of treatment? Similarly, our senses, at the present moment they are contaminated. You have to make it purified.” (Bhāg 1.2.7 November 1973 Delhi)

Śrīla Prabhupāda further explains this point in a purport to *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (5.5.27): “This is the conclusion of *bhakti*. All the time, Lord Ṛṣabhadeva has been stressing devotional service, and now He is concluding by saying that all the senses should be engaged in the Lord’s service. There are five senses by which we gather knowledge and five senses with which we work. These ten senses and the mind should be fully engaged in the Lord’s service. Without engaging them in this way, one cannot get out of the clutches of *māyā*.”

The mind is the coordinative sense and must also be engaged and purified. Engaging and purifying the mind is the key to all paths of *yoga*. The mind is a subtle and sensitive instrument; it requires the right atmosphere, spiritual atmosphere. It also needs to explore, analyze, contemplate and reflect. Śrīla Prabhupāda said that we should understand the philosophy from different angles of vision, and that our movement is meant to make men independently thoughtful. This requires a certain amount of freedom. Chapters Three and Four discuss the importance of freedom.

The mind is the king of the senses, and the other senses follow it as ministers follow the king. The mind’s functions are thinking, feeling and willing. Devotees desire to feel Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s presence and to ultimately develop pure love for Him. This is Kṛṣṇa consciousness. It is not an artificial or mechanical process, which is only intellectual. By practicing *bhakti-yoga*, the presence of Kṛṣṇa awakens within the heart.

In the conditioned state, our individual nature or *bhāva* is determined by our *antaḥ-karaṇa* or internal senses, which basically means the mind. The material modes that dominate our heart determine our present nature or *bhāva*. The process of Kṛṣṇa consciousness is primarily aimed at changing that nature from material to spiritual. That change is gradual, not abrupt.

Śrīla Prabhupāda discusses transforming our *bhāva* or nature in a lecture: “*Hr̥ṣīkeśa-sevanam*. That *bhāva* is changed. *Bhakti* means to change the *bhāva*. At the present moment we are in a different *bhāva*. It has to be cleansed, *parisuddha-bhāva*. *Prakṛṣṭa-rūpena* or *parisuddha*, clarified, cleansed *bhāva*. We have nothing to reject. Simply we have to change the *bhāva*.”

“The *bhāva* must be there. The whole Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement is to purify the *bhāva*. That is stated here. *Parisuddha-bhāva*. We are not negating everything. We are simply changing from material *bhāva* to spiritual *bhāva*. That’s all.... To change the *bhāva*, that is required. That is a very important thing.” (Bhāg 7.9.36 March 1976 Māyāpura)

The nature, feelings, attitude or sentiments of a devotee are of utmost importance. We should therefore acknowledge them, understand them and then learn how to engage them in a healthy way.

Here are a few quotations that support this statement:

“... devotional service is dependent on nothing other than the sentiment or desire for such service. It requires nothing more than sincerity.” (NOD Ch.14)

“To those who are constantly devoted to serving Me with love, I give the understanding by which they can come to Me.” (Bg. 10.10)

“Two things [are required]: dedication to Kṛṣṇa and dedication to the devotee of Kṛṣṇa.” (Lecture Bhāg. 6.1.16 May 1976 Honolulu)

“In his *Durgama-saṅgamaṇī* commentary to the *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī has revealed that the word *anuśīlanam* has two meanings. First, it means the cultivation of one’s endeavors to engage and disengage one’s body, mind and words. Second, it means the cultivation of the sentiments of the heart and mind.” (*Bhakti-tattva-viveka* by Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura)

In conclusion, *bhakti* must not be eclipsed or covered by anything, however subtle. One must also engage all of one’s senses in devotional service. This includes the mind and the intelligence. Our nature gradually transforms as we perform *bhakti*. Sentiments, feelings and attitudes, such as sincerity, loyalty, dedication and love, are an integral part of devotional life.

“Therefore, in all spheres of devotional service, freedom is the main pivot. Without freedom there is no execution of devotional service.”

Śrīla Prabhupāda,
Bhāg. 1.6.37 purport

CHAPTER TWO – Bhakti is Independent

Bhakti is independent. That is its intrinsic quality. It does not depend upon any other process of religion or *yoga*. One may be very pious but may not become a devotee. On the other hand, one may be very impious but may become a devotee.

Years ago, a young man would wait on the streets to meet devotees distributing books. Upon meeting a devotee, he would act very innocently as if he had never met devotees before. When handed a book, he would rip it in half and throw it on the ground. Then he would wait again for another opportunity.

Gradually, this young man became a devotee; perhaps it was due to his touching so many scriptures. In fact, years later he became a *sannyāsī*. Surely, his entrance into the realm of *bhakti* was not due to pious acts.

Anyone may become a devotee of Kṛṣṇa. There are no material prerequisites. A devotee may be young or old, beautiful or plain. A devotee may be a man or a woman, highly intellectual or rather dull, very successful or a ten-time loser. There is no material way to calculate the appearance of *bhakti*.

Once, another young man was drinking beer in an English pub. A stranger joined him, and after some time they began discussing religion. The stranger said, “You know, when it comes to religion—the Hare Kṛṣṇas—they’re the tops.” The young man became convinced by the words of his drinking partner, found his way to Bhaktivedanta Manor and joined the temple.

Śrīla Prabhupāda comments upon the principle of these occurrences in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (1.6.37): “The transcendental system of devotional service is also free. It may or may not develop in a particular person even after he undergoes all the detailed formulas. Similarly, the association of the devotee is also free. One may be fortunate to have it, or one may not have it even after thousands of endeavors.”

The only statement about *bhakti* that one may make with certainty is that it is elusive and transcendental. Traditionally, the process of enlightenment or self-realization requires someone else’s association. *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (11.22.10) states: “Because a person who has been covered by ignorance since time immemorial is not capable of effecting his own self-realization, there must be some other personality who is in factual knowledge of the Absolute Truth and can impart this knowledge to him.”

The classic example is that of Śrī Nārada Ṛṣi. In his previous life, as a boy, he assisted his mother in a *dharmaśālā*. He served a group of Vaiṣṇavas, took their food remnants, and heard them talk and sing about the Lord. After his mother died from a snakebite, he journeyed alone throughout the

countryside. Soon he attained *bhāva-bhakti*, an elevated state of consciousness, wherein the Lord revealed Himself, first in the heart, and then vocally to the young boy.

In his next life, Nārada became a powerful transmitter of *bhakti-śakti*. He granted *bhakti* to Prince Dhruva, a boy of only five years. He also enlightened the forest-dweller Mṛgāri, a lowly hunter, who was sorely lacking in social graces and religious acts. Mṛgāri was half-killing the forest animals, causing them great pain as they slowly died. Still, Nārada brought him to the path of pure *bhakti*.

There are other extraordinary examples of someone receiving *bhakti* from a devotee, which some readers may find hard to believe. One example is that of the sixteenth-century Bengali saint Śrī Rasikānanda, who fearlessly confronted a mad elephant. He lovingly preached to that violent beast, which had killed many men and destroyed many homes. With tears in his eyes, the elephant fell at Rasikānanda's feet and then respectfully circumambulated him. Rasikānanda initiated the elephant with a *mantra* and named him Śrī Gopal. Afterwards, the elephant never attacked anyone and was very humble and gentle.

Thus, *bhakti* is very often transmitted in the traditional way, although sometimes extraordinarily so, as are the other Vedic processes of self-realization like *jñāna-yoga* or *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*. This supports the above-quoted verse from *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, which states that one is not capable of effecting his own self-realization.

However, *bhakti* is supra-transcendental. So much so that it may even transcend the usual transcendental means of transmission. Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī presents a few examples of this in his *Bhakti-sandarbha* (*Anuccheda* 139). There he states that devotional service is the Lord's potency and is self-manifest. To confirm this he quotes the following words from *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (5.14.45): "Even though in the body of a deer, Mahārāja Bharata did not forget the Supreme Personality of Godhead; therefore, when he was giving up the body of a deer, he loudly uttered the following prayer: 'The Supreme Personality of Godhead is sacrifice personified. He gives the results of ritualistic activity. He is the protector of religious systems, the personification of mystic *yoga*, the source of all knowledge, the controller of the entire creation, and the Supersoul in every living entity. He is beautiful and attractive. I am quitting this body offering obeisances unto Him and hoping that I may perpetually engage in His transcendental loving service.' Uttering this, Maharaja Bharata left his body."

Even though Bharata was in the body of a deer, at the time of death he was able to speak this eloquent prayer. A *jñāni* or a *yogī* could not do so. If they failed in their practice and took birth as an animal, they would not be able to perform their practice as they had in their previous life. In addition, Mahārāja Indradyumna in his next life, as the elephant Gajendra, offered prayers to the Lord.

In *Bhakti-sandarbha* (*Anuccheda* 152), Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī also describes how *bhakti* is transmitted through accidental occurrences and how even a dim reflection of *bhakti* destroys all sins and brings one to Viṣṇuloka. He offers an example from the Nārada Purāṇa. Two intoxicated drunkards once waved sticks that had rags tied on as they danced in an old abandoned temple of the Lord. These drunkards attained the result of raising a flag in the Lord's temple, and in this way, they returned to the Lord's transcendental abode.

Similarly, a bird that had been killed by a hunter was taken up in the mouth of a dog. When the dog ran around a temple, the bird attained the result of circumambulating the Lord's temple. It also returned to the Lord's abode.

The Nṛsimha Purāṇa says that in his previous birth Prahlāda Mahārāja had an argument with a prostitute on the holy day of *Nṛsimha-caturdasi*. Arguing with her all day and night, he neither ate nor slept, and because he accidentally fasted and kept an all-night vigil on that holy day, he became a great devotee of the Lord.

These three acts, raising a flag in the temple, circumambulating the Deity and fasting on a holy day, are *aṅgas* or limbs of *bhakti* and can sometimes, albeit rarely, bring one the desired result even without one's knowledge of their value. These are miraculous examples that do not occur with every devotee or in every circumstance. They factually occurred and are quoted by our *ācāryas* to illustrate the power of those particular *aṅgas* of *bhakti*.¹ I have quoted them, however, for a different purpose—to illustrate the independent nature of *bhakti*.

The conclusion is that *bhakti* is completely free and independent just as the Supreme Lord, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, is free and independent. That is its intrinsic nature.

1. Some may feel that these accounts make devotional success seem whimsical or the Lord seem partial. That is not the case, because only the Supreme Lord knows what has occurred in one's previous lives, and He always reciprocates proportionately with each spirit soul. He may sometimes give extraordinary mercy to someone on seeing that person's helpless and pathetic condition, because without such mercy there is no hope. He may also make an extraordinary arrangement for His eternally liberated servants to illustrate the power of a limb of *bhakti*, as He did in the case of Prahlāda and Nārada. Thus, we must not ignore the Lord's ultimate judgment.

“Liberty is certainly the father of all progress. Holy liberty is the cause of progress upwards and upwards in eternity and endless activity of love. Liberty abused causes degradation, and the Vaiṣṇava must always carefully use this high and beautiful gift of God.”

Śrīla Bhaktivīnoda Ṭhākura,
The Bhāgavata

CHAPTER THREE – Freedom and Trust

Bhakti is free and the practitioner of *bhakti* must also be free. One must perform *bhakti* of one’s own volition, not out of fear, or under oppression or intimidation. The lotus flower of *bhakti* does not grow in the lake of coercion. It grows only in the waters of freedom.

In *Bhagavad-gītā*, Lord Kṛṣṇa preaches to His friend Arjuna. He presents many philosophical points from different transcendental disciplines. His arguments are very strong and convincing. However, after everything is said, Kṛṣṇa gives freedom to Arjuna, freedom of choice so that *bhakti* may take birth in his heart. Kṛṣṇa knows that this is necessary. Thus, He speaks the following verse:

*iti te jñānam ākhyātāṁ
guhyād guhyataram mayā
vimṛśyaitad aśeṣeṇa
yathecchasi tathā kuru*

“Thus I have explained to you knowledge still more confidential. Deliberate on this fully, and then do what you wish to do.” (Bg. 18.63)

Śrīla Prabhupāda comments, “Here the words *yathecchasi tathā kuru*—‘As you like, you may act’—indicate that God does not interfere with the little independence of the living entity.... Before surrendering, one is free to deliberate on this subject as far as the intelligence goes; that is the best way to accept the instruction of the Supreme Personality of Godhead.”

The best way to accept the instructions of the Lord is to freely deliberate on them and then surrender. Freedom is required. Kṛṣṇa does not try to coerce Arjuna or instill fear in him. He did not say, “You had better do as I say Arjuna. I am the Supreme Lord, you know. If you don’t surrender, I’ll send you to hell.”

This point is essential, and Śrīla Prabhupāda followed this principle and wrote about it in his commentary to *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (1.6.37): “Every living being is anxious for full freedom because that is his transcendental nature. And this freedom is obtained only through the transcendental service of the Lord. Illusioned by the external energy, everyone thinks that he is free, but actually he is bound up by the laws of nature. A conditioned soul cannot freely move from one place to another even on this earth, and what to speak of one planet to another. But a full-fledged free soul like Nārada, always engaged in chanting the Lord’s glory, is free to move not only on earth but also in any part of the universe, as well as in any part of the spiritual sky. We can just imagine the extent and unlimitedness of his freedom, which is as good as that of the Supreme Lord. There is no reason or obligation for his traveling, and no one can stop him from his free movement. Similarly, the transcendental system of devotional service is also free. It may or may not develop in a particular person even after he undergoes all the detailed formulas. Similarly, the association of the devotee is

also free. One may be fortunate to have it, or one may not have it even after thousands of endeavors. Therefore, in all spheres of devotional service, freedom is the main pivot. Without freedom there is no execution of devotional service. Freedom surrendered to the Lord does not mean that the devotee becomes dependent in every respect. To surrender unto the Lord through the transparent medium of the spiritual master is to attain complete freedom of life.”

It is interesting to note that he used the word “free” or “freedom” in almost every sentence.

Again, in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (3.9.33), Śrīla Prabhupāda comments: “In transcendental loving service, the servitor is as free as the Lord. The Lord is *svarāṭ*, or fully independent, and the servant is also fully independent, or *svarāṭ*, in the spiritual atmosphere because there is no forced service. There the transcendental loving service is due to spontaneous love.”

It is logical and natural that *bhakti* requires freedom since *bhakti* means loving devotional service, and love requires freedom. If there is some external force to love, then it cannot be called love. Love must spring forth from the heart without any extraneous cause or ulterior motive. Although there will always be an impetus to love, such as one’s attraction to the beloved’s beauty, kindness, wit, power, humor, artful talents, selflessness, tenderness and so on, there should be no ulterior, selfish motive.

To give a crude example, if a criminal points a pistol at you and demands that you love him, he may get you to utter the words “I love you,” but what is the value of those words?

One may say that only a maniac would act in such a way, but such behavior appears daily, in subtle ways, within many apparently sane persons. Whenever there is fear, group pressure, alienation, psychological intimidation or any other material motivating factor, a similar phenomenon is in effect. These are external forces or motives that come from others and impede the free flow of *bhakti*.¹ A job may be done but without any devotion. What is the value of such work?

It cannot satisfy Lord Kṛṣṇa. Nor can it satisfy the devotee who performs it. Such a devotee will aggravate others since he’s not satisfied or peaceful. If this situation continues, he will either abandon devotional service or search out an alternative atmosphere.

There are also internal motivating factors that arise from our desires for wealth, power, fame or followers. These internal, individual motivating factors are often discussed and analyzed within devotional circles, as in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* class: one should not mix material desires with *bhakti*. But the external ones, such as alienation or psychological intimidation, are generally not discussed. Why?

There may be many reasons, but one reason is that they’re subtle; they’re hard to pin down. Another reason is that they often occur *en masse* and thus seem acceptable since everyone accepts them. Lastly, many of the external factors are often initiated by unqualified leaders. Thus fear comes into play—fear of alienation, fear of rejection or failure, or fear of losing benefits or a post within an organization.

Our fundamental definition of *bhakti* is given in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (1.2.6): *ahaituky apratihātā yayātmā suprasīdati*, “*bhakti* must be unmotivated and uninterrupted to completely satisfy the self.” If spiritual leaders knowingly or unknowingly use negative motivating tactics, they are hindering the

tender creeper of *bhakti* from growing and are thus committing violence to those under their care. Of course, subordinates do not have to submit to coercive behavior. They may instinctively feel that there's something amiss, but if they are new to the world of devotion, blind submission may be imposed upon them in the name of humility. Thus, they may allow a vital part of their devotional life to be injured.

Freedom is needed for *bhakti*, but freedom depends on trust. You do not allow someone to exercise their freedom if you don't trust them. Of course, full trust must be earned, but in the beginning, the leaders must invest some trust in the followers to get the process moving. Gradually the trust invested increases as an individual proves himself or herself in the arena of *bhakti*.

We left the Lord and are now trying to re-establish our relationship with Him. He loves us and wants to trust us. And we want to be trusted by Him. When we feel that He trusts us, we get tremendous energy. We feel accepted once again, and we feel hope to actually regain our eternal relationship.

I once attended a seminar on counseling, where the teacher said that we must invest trust in the person that we are counseling. I thought, "How do you invest trust in someone that you're meeting for the first time?" During the class he answered that you must assume that the person you are counseling is basically a good devotee. He's sincere. He may have some problems, but he's a good person deep inside. I knew that this was the right answer, but I also felt that this attitude or approach was lacking in our Society.

In the beginning of our movement, Śrīla Prabhupāda empowered his disciples not only with his mystic *bhakti-śakti* but also by his practical dealings. His dealings were infused with love, trust, encouragement and deep appreciation. Devotees felt that he really cared for them. We wanted to be as good as Prabhupāda wanted us to be. He trusted us to do a service nicely and so we thought, "I must do it nicely, no matter what." Trust shifts *bhakti* into high gear.

Once I had dealings with a temple authority who did not trust me. He constantly checked on everything I did, often by asking others about me, rather than by speaking to me directly. He sometimes stepped into my service, took over and later left, leaving everything for me (I affectionately refer to this as octopus management). I felt mistrusted and had an interesting realization at the time. I imagined Lord Rāmacandra requesting Hanumān to jump to Laṅkā to find Sītā and give her a message of consolation, as depicted in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Lord Rāma took out a valuable golden ring that once adorned the beautiful hand of Sītā. He began explaining to Hanumān how, after showing the ring to Sītā, she would be convinced that he was actually Rāma's confidant. But suddenly, Lord Rāma changed His mind about entrusting the ring to Hanumān. He reconsidered that Hanumān was, after all, just a monkey, and therefore shouldn't be given such a valuable token. Turning to Hanumān, Rāma ordered, "Jump Hanumān! Jump anyway—without the ring. All right?" How would you feel in this circumstance?

The story of Bhaktin Alexandra is another example that illustrates the necessity of freedom and trust in the arena of *bhakti*. She was one of my brightest students while I was teaching *bhakti-śāstras* in England. After serving at Bhaktivedanta Manor for some years, she was invited to New York by a friend. Upon her arrival, the resident *sannyāsī* asked her what service she would like to do. She was dumbfounded and didn't know what to reply. He suggested that she give it some thought.

Later she had the answer: she wanted to train new recruits in philosophy. It was a revelation for her. She had never been encouraged to think about what she desired to do. Her new authority then asked if she was prepared to begin, and she replied that she needed to study *Śrī Īsopaniṣad* in order to complete her training since she had left before finishing the *bhakti-śāstra* course. “How would you get that done?” he asked. She said that she must return to England. Therefore, she flew back to London to finish her studies.

I was happy to see her, but I was also surprised that she had not thought about her creative talents for teaching until she had crossed the Atlantic and was asked, “What do you want to do for *guru* and *Kṛṣṇa*?” The desire to teach was suppressed within her until someone trusted her and gave her freedom. Her *bhakti* arose with her freedom.

Another consideration is that of two well-known preachers in ISKCON: H.H. Rādhānātha Swami and H.H. Bhakti Tīrtha Swami. They both developed their own preaching fields in somewhat unconventional ways.

In Chowpatty, Rādhānātha Swami insisted on very high standards for the *brahmacārī aśrama*. He also developed various committees within the community to care for the spiritual and material needs of the members of all *āśramas*. The committees covered the following topics: health, housing, employment, marriage, vocational guidance, financial assistance and spiritual counselors. This care of the devotees is unprecedented as most of our communities do little, if anything, for such needs. He also encouraged the development of a hospital as part of the community. This took much insight since it has never been attempted before.²

Bhakti Tīrtha Swami also developed his community in a slightly different way than most ISKCON communities. I should first mention that he is an Afro-American Vaiṣṇava, and he often wore African robes when he lived and preached in Africa. In America, his preaching is often couched in New Age or Christian jargon. This suits his congregation, which consists largely of New Age professionals.

Both of these devotees began their own styles of preaching while they were temporarily outside of ISKCON.³ They were later invited to return to ISKCON and were appreciated for their successes. Someone might ask the following questions: “Would they have had enough freedom to develop their projects had they been within ISKCON at the time? Can we encourage other preachers to higher levels of success by giving them more freedom? Do we now have preachers who are stifled by a lack of freedom?”

Yet freedom has its parameters. One must be responsible and perform his duties, both material and spiritual. And everyone has *some* distasteful duties. Performing them, without considering one’s own pleasure, purifies the heart of deeply ingrained selfishness and passion. Ironically, we find our freedom through strict adherence to the regulative principles and regular duties. Such discipline is an important aspect of our spiritual progress and cannot be whimsically discarded. One initially accepts these duties and principles of one’s own volition and continues to carry them out freely by one’s own choice.

Bhakti Tīrtha Swami writes about this dichotomy in his book *Spiritual Warrior II*, “Healthy, constructive boundaries allow people enough room to grow and serve God in their own individual ways without interference. At the same time, effective boundaries recognize the importance of spiritual

guidelines to help society develop properly in alignment with divine principles. A wise leader treads a fine line, neither violating the rights of others nor allowing anarchy to reign.”

Later in the same book he writes, “...to be effective, laws must not repress our energies or constrict us unnaturally. Instead, they should protect us, inspire creativity and enhance our sense of well-being.”

It is clear that laws and duties must exist even within a family, what to speak of within an organization. But if there is an inordinate emphasis on them, it indicates insecurity and a lack of love and trust. This undue emphasis hinders creativity and growth. Unfortunately, some leaders care more about rules than they do about people.

Some may feel that we need strong laws to protect the innocent from ill-motivated persons. That’s true, but those laws should not hinder the freedom of well-motivated persons. Freedom does not mean a free-for-all in the sense of loose, hedonistic behavior. A healthy balance must be struck in order to succeed, and this should be instilled with the principle of gradually increasing one’s freedom as one matures and develops. It should be obvious that a devotee who has been strictly practicing and preaching for twenty years should have more freedom than a new devotee of two years;⁴ and that is generally how we operate now, but this principle is belated or set back a few steps.

Śrīla Prabhupāda also spoke about freedom in the following lecture: “So they are not *anyābhilāṣitā-śūnyam* [Cc. Madhya 19.167]. They have desires. So how they can be *bhakta*? How they can be devotee? Because devotee is pure, he has no... *Akāmah*. Why it is recommended? The recommendation is there also for demigods. That is freedom. The *śāstra* is giving you all freedom. ‘If you like, you do this.’ But ultimately gives this instruction... Just like Kṛṣṇa. He has spoken so many things, *jñāna-yoga*, *dhyāna-yoga*, *karma-yoga*. But at the end He says, *sarva-dharmān parityajya mām ekaṁ śara...* [Bg. 18.66]. ‘You give up all this nonsense, simply surrender unto Me.’ That is the ultimate instruction. So that means *śāstra* gives you freedom, at the same time gives you chance. *Śāstra* is not... Just like we are free, and the state laws are there, and we are free to violate it or to abide by it. Similarly, all the *śāstras*, everything is there. And the freedom is also there. Not, I mean to say, the ultimate freedom, but there is freedom, small freedom. We can make our choice.” (Bhāg. 2.3.10 May 1972 LA)

Our freedom is certainly minute because we are finite spirit souls, far different from the Supreme Lord. Still, freedom must exist within a devotional society. We cannot, however, create our own path of religion, nor can we deviate from the standard practice within the Sārasvata Gauḍīya tradition and particularly the path given by our founder-*ācārya*, Śrīla Prabhupāda. These are our parameters. As long as we adhere to these, we may freely travel back home, back to Godhead.

1. Someone who has attained higher stages of *bhakti* will not be affected by any external influence, but all devotees must first pass through the lower stages. It is during these lower stages that someone may be disturbed and leave the path.

2. As expected, some devotees questioned this approach since Śrīla Prabhupāda spoke strongly against opening hospitals and other types of altruistic activities, but that was in the context of the

Māyāvādīs doing material welfare work as a substitute for devotional service. This Chowpatty project, however, is quite different from the Māyāvādī idea.

3. Bhakti Tirtha Swami had not officially left ISKCON, but he had withdrawn from communicating with the administration for some years.

4. The number of years in devotional service does not solely determine maturity, but it plays a major factor.

"A master's leadership based on love and respect is better than leadership based on fear and coercion, but leadership is best when people say, 'We have done this ourselves.'"

Lao Tsu

CHAPTER FOUR – Authority and Freedom

While conducting a seminar in Tbilissi, Georgia, I explained that *bhakti* requires freedom. A local devotee told how once, in his earlier years, he was pushed by his authority to perform book distribution although he did not really want to do it. He said this was the happiest time in his life. He wanted to know how he could have experienced such happiness although he was pushed into it, seemingly without freedom.

The answer was simple. I asked him, "Did you have a good relationship with that leader?"

"Yes," he replied.

"Did you feel that he was acting in your best interest?"

"Yes."

"So you responded to his push, because he pushed you with care and love. Isn't it?"

"Yes, I guess I did."

We concluded at the seminar that when someone pushes you with real concern for your welfare, then he is not using coercion or fear but another force called love. Love is the most powerful force, which can inspire anyone to do almost anything.

Srila Prabhupada mentioned this principle in a class he delivered in Bombay, April 1976: "It is not an artificial thing. The *brahmacārī*, the disciple, must have genuine love for the guru. Then he can be under his control. Otherwise why one should be under the control of another person?... This can be possible when one is very thickly related with the guru. Otherwise, ordinary relationship will not do."

Many years ago, during a tour of India, Śrīla Prabhupāda and some of his disciples were on a train. While the train was sitting in the station in New Delhi, Prabhupāda suddenly directed some disciples, headed by Guru dasa, to get off the train and start a temple somewhere in the city. This happened on the spot without any previous notice. The disciples happily and lovingly took up the challenge.

Śrīla Prabhupāda explained a similar principle in correcting others. He gave the example of the potter, who shapes the metal pots that one sees village women in India carry on the head. With the right hand, the potter wields the hammer, which does the main work of shaping the pot. And with the left hand, which is kept inside the pot, the potter supports the pot so that it doesn't crack.

The right hand is compared to the correction or rebuking, and the left hand to the loving relationship between the two persons. Without the hammer of correction, the pot will not be shaped properly, and without the supportive relationship, the pot could easily crack under pressure. This is the right formula

for correcting others and for gently but firmly pushing others to perform acts beyond their inclinations. This formula requires love.

Śrīla Prabhupāda had integrated the principle of freedom and love in his practical dealings. Here is one such example from H.H. Mukunda Goswami: “I was talking with Śrīla Prabhupāda when another devotee brought in a tall glass of tea. I accepted it, but Prabhupāda said, “Why are you drinking this tea?” He used a semi-reprimanding tone. I replied that I was taking it because a devotee had offered it to me. Prabhupāda said that tea is for taking if you have a cold; it is not to be taken otherwise. I was holding the glass of tea in my hand, and instead of just putting it down I looked at Prabhupāda and said, “Then I shouldn’t take it?” I was thinking that it really wasn’t so serious and that unless Prabhupāda really insisted, I could go ahead and take it anyway. When Prabhupāda understood my mood, that I wasn’t really taking the whole thing very seriously, he chose to be lenient and said that I could take it this time but not again. I didn’t want to sit there and drink it slowly in front of Prabhupāda, so I drank the whole glass down very quickly. Then I began to feel guilty.

“After drinking the tea, while I was talking to Prabhupāda, my face began to perspire profusely and I felt embarrassed for that also. Prabhupāda appeared to flow with everything, and I had a strong sense that he was just tolerating me. I knew that he was never compromising in his principles, yet I felt that it was very wonderful that he was willing to experience new, different things in different people and that he was a very lenient and flexible person. I considered this a part of his greatness, and I think it’s mainly because I knew that he actually, inwardly, was not making any compromises at all. But we all felt very grateful and enlivened with the way Prabhupāda was interacting with us and relating with us.”

There is no doubt that a person in a position of authority will have to sometimes push others to get things done, but this must be done with great care, always being aware of the individual freedom of the person. Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself never interferes with a soul’s minute independence; who are we to do it? Do we think ourselves greater than Lord Kṛṣṇa?

Please pause a moment and ask yourself the following questions: “What makes Lord Kṛṣṇa the highest authority? Is it simply because He is God?” Certainly, that is His absolute ontological position, but is that the only reason you accept Him as the highest authority?

Imagine for a moment that there was a God who did not care about you, who did not love you. Would such a God still be the ultimate authority for you? The Vraja *gopīs*, of course, love Kṛṣṇa whether He loves them or not, but here we are not discussing such higher-dimensional love. Besides, Kṛṣṇa does love the *gopīs*, and this is one of the unlimited factors that increase their selfless love for Him.

The point is that the word “authority” not only indicates a position, but it also means that love is present. To be true authorities, parents must love their children. To get a proper response, a teacher must love his students. To help his disciples, a *guru* must love them. A king must love his subjects, and a husband must love his wife for her to accept his authority.

Often when discussing this topic, temple managers get a bit unnerved. They think, “Freedom? Love? Come on. How could I manage and get things done if everyone is so free? Furthermore, someone may accuse me of not being loving enough and refuse to do what they’re asked. There’ll be chaos!”

My reply to temple managers is, “Granted, there must be a certain amount of hierarchical cooperation when it comes to daily management; there’s no argument. We’re not proposing anarchy. Nevertheless, the points presented here are general principles for long-term application. How you apply them is up to you. You also have freedom. Your success lies in your application. But if someone is such an untrustworthy character—so much so that you cannot give him freedom—then should he be living with the inner core of devotees?”

“Freedom and love accelerate and amplify devotional enthusiasm. They are godly, uplifting and energizing forces. Therefore, whenever and wherever possible, pull instead of push. Always supply devotees under your care with choice, with freedom. Let them consider what they would like to do. Your work will be much easier if your service arena is filled with persons who are rightly placed and satisfied. Trust that they will make the right choice. If they make the wrong one—they will learn from it—and they’ll always remember and appreciate how you gave them freedom.”

In December 1972, Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote in a letter to Karandhara, one of his top managers, about freedom and love, “Our leaders shall be careful not to kill the spirit of enthusiastic service, which is individual and spontaneous and voluntary. They should try always to generate some atmosphere of fresh challenge to the devotees, so that they will agree enthusiastically to rise and meet it. That is the art of management: to draw out spontaneous loving spirit of sacrificing some energy for Krishna.”

I have discussed some basic principles of working in devotion: freedom, trust and love. Without them, there is no devotion. Without them, another energy is required to get things done, but this energy is not positive, pure or godly. In fact, it is negative and destructive. It causes distrust, bitterness and frustration.

The communist leaders in the Soviet Union of yesteryear harnessed that negative energy. They started a system whereby common people became informers, reporting anyone or anything that seemed contrary or critical to Soviet doctrine. A reported person was immediately considered guilty and tagged *vrag naroda*, or enemy of the state. Without a trial, simply on the strength of a report, the person was either killed, or arrested and sent to a Siberian work colony.

People lived in constant fear. They were extremely careful what they said and to whom they spoke. They forgot what it was like to express themselves freely. That’s what the word *glasnost* is all about—freedom of expression. Today many people suffer psychological scars from that era.

Of course, shades of gray exist between these dark and brilliant systems of ruling others, but basically there are these two approaches to motivating people. As there are two kinds of people—*sura* or *asura*—there are also two approaches to governing people—by fear or by love. Fear means the absence of love. When there is fear, there is no love.

When someone is afraid to trust others, it indicates that he has little or no faith in God. He’s insecure, and feels that he must govern by force. “Might makes right” is his slogan. He does not trust or love himself; therefore he cannot trust or love others. He becomes dependent on props such as fame, wealth, followers and power.

These items are not themselves negative. The negative factor is one's dependence on them. To assess one's independence of them, one could shun them for some time and observe the mind. Even highly elevated souls become victims to dependence on these props. Therefore, one should not be overly confident about conquering one's attachment to them. It is more difficult than it seems.

Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura quotes from *Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* in his *Bhaktyaloka*:

*sarva tyāge 'py aheyāyāḥ sarvānartha bhuvāś ca te
kuryuḥ pratiṣṭhāviṣṭhāyā yatnam asparsāne varam*

“Even if one can give up all material desires, the desire for fame is very difficult to give up. This desire for fame, which is compared to stool, is the root cause of all *anarthas*. Therefore one should carefully avoid touching this stool-like desire for fame.”

Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura gives the same idea in his *Mādhurya Kādambinī*: “As many weeds grow along with the main plant, along with *bhakti* appear wealth and other facilities, worship and respect by others, and a comfortable position and fame—*lābha*, *pūjā* and *pratiṣṭhā*. These weeds grow powerful and overwhelm the devotee with their influences.”

Taking the role of an authority means representing God Himself. How could anyone think this an easy task? There is nothing more difficult.

Here is an interesting quote from a New York writer and social psychologist, Don Richard Riso: “Freedom is one of the keynotes of healthy functioning and, with freedom, individuality. People who are healthy are truly most themselves, and they are never more themselves than when they are transcending themselves. Thus, we discover a paradox: in self-transcendence we find our deepest freedom and deepest self. And the reverse is equally true: as we deteriorate down the Levels of Development into neurosis, we gradually lose our freedom and become increasingly un-free and ‘compulsive.’”

Riso links freedom with healthy functioning and individuality. Accepting this premise, we could say that insufficient freedom assists our own archenemy—impersonalism. Would you say that the amount of warmth and personalism in your community is sufficient? If your answer is no, then here is one possible reason—a lack of freedom.

I remember once, many years ago, my leader, who had sometimes dealt with me as his possession, found out that I had gone to another leader's region. When I called him on the telephone, he tried to corner me by using an insistent, intimidating tone of voice. Having experienced many years of such encounters, I unknowingly adopted the same mood. This is similar to an abused child who later abuses others. Recently, I experienced this mood rising within me when dealing with a younger devotee in my preaching field. We spoke about it, and I had to face my own *anartha*. It was embarrassing and painful, but that is one way to get rid of deep, negative behavioral patterns.

These subtle attitudes or expectations can become quite a burden. By expecting others to act toward us in certain ways, usually based on our external positions, we unknowingly steal away the other person's ability to act freely from the heart, thus crushing any chance for *bhakti* to be expressed.

The irony is that we often do this to people who are dear to us such as our disciples, subordinates, or family members.

The principle is that if someone is responding to another's expectations, which can be forceful though subtly expressed by body language, intonation or even a look, then those expectations are the motivating factors of his response, not love. And devotees want to feel and express devotional love both in their service to God and to the Vaiṣṇavas. Giving them freedom offers them a great reward in spiritual life—the opportunity to perform devotional service with love.

“In this verse both blind following and absurd inquiries are condemned.”

Śrīla Prabhupāda, Bg. 4.34 purport

CHAPTER FIVE – Blind following

In our discussion on authority, I mentioned two paths—one of love and one of fear. Blind following accompanies the path of fear. They are partners and work well together. Combined they create an authoritarian atmosphere, which is opposed to individual freedom of thought and action.

Śrīla Prabhupāda condemns blind following in the following lectures: “Yes. Blind following and absurd inquiries. These things are condemned in this verse. Blind following means: ‘Oh, there is a swami. So many thousands of people are following. Let me become his disciple.’ This is called blind following. You do not know what is that swami, whether he is a swami or a rascal. You do not know. But because everyone is going, ‘Oh, let me become his disciple.’ This is blind following, without any knowledge, blind following.” (Bg. 4.34–39 January 1969 LA)

“We discuss this *Bhagavad-gītā* only for understanding that we are not blindly following a principle. It is a science. It is based on philosophy and science. But we have made the process easy, that’s all, by following great stalwart personalities. But it is not that it is a blind following.” (Bg. 7.28–8.6 October 1966 NY)

“*Vicāra* means you just try to understand the gift of Lord Caitanya by logic, *vicāra*. Don’t follow blindly. Following blindly something, that is not good. That will not stay. But one should take everything with logic.” (Bhāg. 6.2.1–5 January 1971 Calcutta)

Today, leadership principles are being discussed in ISKCON. Devotees are attending meetings and seminars, and reading books on leadership. However, Śrīla Prabhupāda, as far as we know, did not attend seminars or read books on leadership, but was, nevertheless, a perfect leader. Even secular circles deem him so.¹ How could Prabhupāda be so naturally good at leading?

Leading means authority, and authority comes from Kṛṣṇa. Because Prabhupāda was directly connected with the Supreme Lord, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, he was empowered by the energy of devotion, *bhakti-śakti*. Being fully imbued with devotion, Prabhupāda understood the principles that engender devotion. Therefore, he ensured that a devotional ethos or mood was always present in his Society. What came naturally to him must be acknowledged, learned and practiced by us.

There is a big difference between authoritative and authoritarian. Here are definitions taken from Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, which are used throughout this book. Authoritative means having or proceeding from authority. An authoritative person or group is entitled to credit or acceptance.

Authoritarian has two meanings according to Webster’s. The first favors blind submission to authority, and the second favors a concentration of power in leaders who are not constitutionally responsible to the people. In other words, the leaders are not held accountable for the society’s problems and are to be respected, regardless of their behavior.

Due to internal spiritual potency, a true spiritual leader is authoritative. He is not dependent on blind submission, title or ecclesiastical conventions. He is always striving to improve himself internally and knows that he can carry the weight of his position only by being open, pure and selfless. He cares about others, because he feels others' connection with Śrī Kṛṣṇa, knowing that all souls are parts and parcels of the Lord. Such a leader always feels responsible for the people. If people are distressed, complaining or have misconceptions, he feels personally responsible. He tries his best to understand how he has contributed to the problem and how to solve it. People naturally follow such a leader, and he invokes their heartfelt respect.

ISKCON now has large internal schisms such as the Ṛtvikvādīs, who are generally seen as deviant. Furthermore, the recent exodus of devotees toward other Gauḍīya institutions has shocked ISKCON's members. Some leaders feel that they should somehow combat these problems, but many have not considered that they themselves may well have created them in the first place.

If a *guru* is humble, thinking himself merely a priest, and simply tries to help his flock, then his disciples and others will respect and appreciate him. If, however, he thinks himself superior to others, being proud of his followers and position, then a group of people may appear to insist that he is just a priest, not a *guru* in the full sense of the term. This is poetic justice and may even be arranged by the Lord to teach him a lesson.

During the time of Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, the *mahāntas* or temple leaders, due to greed, developed *jāti-gosāi* contamination and tried to covet a monopoly on worshipping the *sālagrāma-silā* and giving initiations. They claimed that only they could perform these activities due to their high brahminical lineage. After Śrīla Sarasvatī Ṭhākura challenged them, the *mahāntas*, along with hired thugs, attacked his Gaura-maṇḍala parikramā party in Navadvīpa. Consequently, many of the townspeople, seeing their own *mahāntas* attacking innocent Vaiṣṇava pilgrims, lost faith in their own orthodox Gauḍīya religion, and deviant *apasampradāya* sects sprouted up like anything.

There is a Bengali saying that a fish rots from its head. This means that religious leaders are responsible for deviations in their lineage or institution. Self-interest, authoritarianism and pride have created problems in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava history and have contributed to today's problems in our communities. History often repeats itself.

Genuine Submission

If a spiritual leader does not have the same amount of spiritual potency that Śrīla Prabhupāda exhibited, he should not expect the same amount of surrender from his subordinates. That is humility. A leader may think, "I have taken up Prabhupāda's mission and inherited his legacy. Therefore, subordinates should surrender to me in the same way as devotees surrendered to him." This is a false assumption and expectation. Often devotees feel this false expectation, and it sours their devotion. Such an approach could indicate that a leader is more dependent on his institutional post instead of his purity or character.

In this regard, there are four general possibilities: (1) a person possessing both character and a post, (2) a person possessing character but no post, (3) a person possessing a post but no character, and (4) a person without a post or character. By "character," I mean purity or integrity. The first two

scenarios are good; the fourth is unfortunate yet acceptable, but the third is unacceptable. Mark Twain once said, "It is better to deserve honors and not have them than to have them and not deserve them."

Of course, if one is approaching a *guru* for shelter and one sees God's mercy in him, then one's surrender will gradually develop and become full, but the *guru* or spiritual leader does not expect this immediately or from everyone; even Śrīla Prabhupāda did not expect it immediately. Full surrender is a very special circumstance. Surrender will grow naturally, based upon faith. Full surrender can only be gently encouraged through loving dealings, training and practical advice.

I previously mentioned how love, trust and freedom are all important to create the right mood. Otherwise, relationships and community atmosphere become stiff, stifling and stultified. Ideal spiritual leaders are fixed in the Absolute Truth and therefore exhibit great integrity in their dealings. Thus, they are never insecure, apathetic or selfish, but rather they exhibit competency, caring and selflessness.

Intelligent Following

The opposite of blind following is intelligent following, which is desired. Next are two quotations that describe using one's clear head and open eyes in devotional service:

"As recommended by the *brāhmaṇa avadhūta*, one can strengthen the teachings received from one's *ācārya* and avoid transgressing his orders by observing ordinary things in nature. One should not mechanically receive the teachings of one's *guru*. The disciple should be thoughtful and with his own intelligence realize in practice what he has heard from his spiritual master by observing the world around him." (Bhāg. 11.9.31 purport)

"If one receives the teachings of one's *ācārya* but keeps them locked up in his brain as theoretical dogma, one will make little advancement. To develop steady, complete knowledge one must see the teachings of one's *ācārya* everywhere; thus a Vaiṣṇava offers all respects to anyone or anything that gives him further enlightenment in the path of worshiping his bona fide *ācārya*, who is nondifferent from Lord Kṛṣṇa." (Bhāg. 11.9.31 purport)

These statements are clear; mechanical reception of the philosophy leaves one weak, making it difficult to advancement properly. As mentioned in Chapter One, the senses, including the mind and intelligence, must be engaged in devotional service. Proper engagement requires a certain amount of freedom. When blind following and fear take hold, there is no scope for such freedom, and the devotional creeper wilts.

This principle is amplified proportionately according to increased individual intelligence. In other words, intelligent people particularly abhor conclusions being drawn for them if they are not given a chance for their own reflection. Persons with less intelligence do not mind quite as much, but they still appreciate the chance to think things over, even if they cannot draw their own conclusions. After grappling with a problem, they will naturally go to someone who can advise them and then wholeheartedly accept wise advice.

Foolishness of Blind Following

To illustrate the foolishness of becoming a blind follower, Prabhupāda told the story about the death of Sargal Singh. Sargal Singh was very much loved by a merchant, and when Sargal Singh died, the merchant shaved his head and wore dark clothes. When a man came into the merchant's shop, he asked who had died. "Sargal Singh has died," said the merchant. The visitor had never heard of Sargal Singh, but he also shaved his head and wore dark clothes. Other people in town blindly followed, not wanting to appear ignorant. When asked who had died, they replied, "Sargal Singh has died."

When a minister of the king saw so many citizens in mourning he also wore dark clothes and shaved his head. But when the king saw the minister, he inquired, "Why are you mourning? Who has died?"

"Sargal Singh," the minister replied.

The king asked, "Who is he?"

When the minister couldn't answer, the king told him to find out. The minister then inquired and inquired and finally reached the merchant. "Who is Sargal Singh?"

The merchant replied, "Sargal Singh was my donkey, whom I loved very much." In this story, the citizens followed suit, but the king intelligently questioned the situation.

Another example of blind following is the five monkeys that were placed in a cage that had bananas hanging at the top. There were stairs leading up to the bananas, and whenever a monkey tried to climb them, all of the monkeys were hosed with freezing-cold water at high pressure. Soon the little fellows learned that climbing the stairs meant great suffering, and whenever one of them approached the stairs, the others viciously attacked him.

After some days, one of the monkeys was removed from the cage and replaced by a new recruit. The new recruit was uninformed and enthusiastic. Thus, after viewing the tantalizing bananas, he made his way towards the stairs, but the others attacked him. Later, another replacement came and made the same mistake. All of the monkeys attacked him too, including the newer one, who didn't know exactly why he was attacking. He simply followed the others. Gradually, one replacement after another came until all of the monkeys from the original group were gone. All the new monkeys were unaware of the reason for attacking the one who approached the stairs, yet they all blindly continued their aggression.

Monkeys are not the only creatures that are subject to conditioning by the material energy. Human beings can also act in this way.

Components of Education

Now we will look at the components of education and their importance in our discussion of devotion. Devotion is more than just education, but devotion also includes educational principles. When one is truly educated, he cannot be a blind follower, because true education includes more than just a preliminary or superficial level of learning. True spiritual education means deeper levels of learning, levels that include contributing to the knowledge. This is particularly true when delving in the Absolute Truth, which holds unlimited facets.

Considering, reflecting, analyzing with the mind and intelligence comprise a major part, the second level, of the process of education. The word “education” comes from the Latin verbal root “educare,” which means “to bring out of” or “to lead forth.” This indicates a positive empowering process that continues after the official lessons are finished; the student is not meant to crawl back into ignorance but to go forth on his own.

These levels or components of education are described in the *Bṛhad-āraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (2.4.5), Patañjali’s *Yoga-sūtras* (1.17) and a Sanskrit poem called the *Naiṣadha-caritam* (1.4). These three *śāstras* list the basic components of learning in slightly different ways, but we shall see that they all agree on the first three major levels.

The *Bṛhad-āraṇyaka Upaniṣad* offers three broad categories of learning: *śravaṇa*, *manana* and *nidhidhyasana*. *Śravaṇa* means hearing from a teacher. *Manana* means gaining intellectual insight or understanding by reflecting upon the subject. *Nidhidhyasana* means realization and application in life.

The *Yoga-sūtras* present four levels: *vitarka*, *vicāra*, *ānanda* and *asmitārūpa*. *Vitarka* consists of study, analysis, conjecture and argument. *Vicāra* includes reflection, meditation, insight and understanding. *Ānanda* contains assimilation and application. *Asmitārūpa* is equivalent to *svārūpa-siddhi*, the perfection of the *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* practice.

The *Naiṣadha-caritam* also mentions four levels: *adhiti*, *bodha*, *ācaraṇa* and *pracāraṇa*. *Adhiti* means to learn a subject thoroughly. *Bodha* entails gaining insight and proficiency in one’s learning. *Ācaraṇa* involves realizing the purpose of our learning and living according to it. *Pracāraṇa* comprises giving this knowledge to others.

Parallels may be gleaned by comparing these different presentations. The first level of each system describes the primary step of learning, wherein hearing, study and analysis prevail. The second level comprises gaining intellectual understanding and insight by reflection. The third level brings assimilation, wherein the student internalizes the subject, and his skills become second nature; he lives and breathes his subject effortlessly.

On the instructions of Srila Prabhupada, we have finally geared ISKCON for the first level. *Bhakti-śāstra* courses and examinations are available and have become popular. This has energized ISKCON with transcendental knowledge, and devotees feel a sense of accomplishment and enlightenment. But Prabhupada wanted his followers to develop the other levels. He often held mock debates with his disciples, forcing them to think deeply about the philosophy. The second level, that of insight and understanding, requires deeper thought, reflection and discussion and has not yet been developed in our Society. Insight and understanding mean we do not accept the philosophy blindly but question it and consider it from many angles of vision.

“And I am very much stressing nowadays that my students shall increase their reading of my books and try to understand them from different angles of vision. Each *śloka* can be seen from many, many angles of vision, so become practiced in seeing things like this.” (Letter to Tribhuvanatha 16 June 1972)

“Your first job should be to make sure that every one of the devotees in your zone of management is reading regularly our literatures and discussing the subject matter seriously from different angles of

seeing, and that they are somehow or other absorbing the knowledge of Krishna Consciousness philosophy. If they are fully educated in our philosophy and if they can get all of the knowledge and study it from every viewpoint, then very easily they will perform *tapasya* or renunciation and that will be their advancement in Krishna Consciousness.” (Letter to Satsvarūpa 16 June 1972)

Logically, if we do not develop the second level, the third will be beyond our reach. But again, even the second level requires a brahminical ethos, one of freedom and open inquiry without fear of reprisal, ridicule or alienation. In my opinion, this is, by and large, not available at present in many of our communities. This is one of many factors causing members to leave the Society.

Śrīla Prabhupāda states that the third level is essential for *brāhmaṇas* and for preaching: “This is a true description of a *brāhmaṇa*. A *brāhmaṇa* is one who has *assimilated* the Vedic conclusions by practicing mind and sense control... One who actually *assimilated* the essence of the *Vedas* can preach the truth [italics mine].” (Bhāg. 5.5.24 purport)

“One can assimilate the knowledge of the revealed scriptures only by hearing and explaining.” (Bhāg. 1.1.6 purport)

One cannot preach effectively without having assimilated the philosophy. Śrīla Prabhupāda also refers to these same four levels: “Kṛṣṇa consciousness is the great necessity of human society. Learn it and appreciate it, comprehend it and assimilate it—and teach it. It is very simple.” (Topmost Yoga System Ch.4)

The third level—assimilation—allows total absorption, which in turn creates “*ānanda*.” Assimilation stimulates creativity to flow. When we apply the philosophy with understanding, we are using all of the senses, including the mind and intelligence. It becomes a part of us. We internalize the practice and feel something profound. We feel linked to the Supreme. That is *yoga*.

*tad-buddhayas tad-ātmānas
tan-niṣṭhās tat-parāyaṇāḥ
gacchanty apunar-āvṛttim
jñāna-nirdhūta-kalmaṣāḥ*

“When one’s intelligence, mind, faith and refuge are all fixed in the Supreme, then one becomes fully cleansed of misgivings through complete knowledge and thus proceeds straight on the path of liberation.” (Bg. 5.17)

Progress on the path of liberation requires that we fix our mind and intelligence on the Supreme. We will not be able to fix our mind and intelligence if we do not understand how *guru*, *sādhū* and *śāstra* are correct. (See appendix on philosophical speculation.) We must fix our mind and intelligence to assimilate transcendental knowledge. Otherwise, we will become dependent on a dogmatic view of the philosophy. Our preaching may become irrelevant since we are unable to apply Kṛṣṇa consciousness to present day circumstances. We will therefore be forced to live in the past.

Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura wrote, “Forget the past that sleeps and ne’er the future dream at all. But act in times that are with thee and progress ye shall call.” The past has its place, but one should not reside there.

Echoing this point, Burke Rochford said, “In a curious way ISKCON’s leaders remain tied to ways of thinking that ultimately limit their ability to deal with present and future issues confronting the organization. Perhaps due to the weakened authority in the leadership, many of ISKCON’s leaders hold close to Prabhupāda’s words but not his wisdom. Failing to act on the basis of time, place and circumstance has meant that ISKCON has lost its dynamic quality. Leaders must be more than theologians attempting to hold close to the words of scripture.”

Let us not be disturbed by Mr. Rochford’s words but consider if there is some truth in them. There is an advantage in being criticized by someone. If it is a false accusation, there is nothing to worry about, and if there is some truth in it, let us try to adjust ourselves and delve deeper into our Kṛṣṇa consciousness to improve the situation.

Going back to the above *Bhagavad-gītā* verse, a result of using one’s intelligence in the present is that one develops *niṣṭhā* or steadiness and the ability to take *parāyaṇa* or shelter. *Niṣṭhā* and *parāyaṇa* add up to faith, and are included in the stage of assimilation.

Using his intelligence encourages a devotee to fly his own airplane, which he inevitably must do to succeed on the path of *bhakti*. The duty of a spiritual master is to usher his disciple to the stage of assimilation. There the disciple can discriminate on the basis of *guru*, *sādhu* and *śāstra*, and apply the philosophy in his daily life. This is far better than teaching him dogma just to ensure that he stays within the institution. In fact, the dogmatic approach will push an intelligent disciple to leave more than anything will. Conversely, if a *guru* gives him freedom and trains him to think, which is factually liberating, his disciple will feel so indebted that he will never leave his *guru’s* lotus feet.

1. One of Steven Covey’s top managers, after having read the *Śrīla Prabhupāda Lilāmṛta*, commented on Prabhupāda’s magnificent performance in accordance with their seven habits.

Questions and Answers

Q: It seems that non-intellectual devotees don’t like to analyze and discriminate, but they advance nicely anyway.

A: The majority of devotees don’t have to go as far as intellectual devotees do in discrimination. That is natural. But they too should reflect as deeply as possible on our basic theology. Their faith would be stronger if they would. The fact that they advance nicely, at least apparently, doesn’t negate the fact that they could do better if they would think and reflect more deeply. An example of a lack of discrimination is that some disciples of truly fallen *gurus* continue to accept instructions from them even though they are no longer connected to the *guru-paramparā*.

Q: Can assimilation take place through the grace of God because of the devotee's faith, love and service even if that devotee is not intellectually inclined?

A: Yes. This is mentioned by Srila Prabhupada in his purport to Bhagavad-gītā 10.10. Progress on the path requires that our mind and intelligence become fixed in the Supreme. This generally does not occur if one is not practiced in using his intelligence in understanding how *guru*, *sādhū* and *śāstra* are correct. Everyone reflects upon the philosophy as much as they can, trying to understand how and why it's true. If they try, but cannot do so for one reason or another, then Kṛṣṇa helps them from within. Kṛṣṇa reciprocates with His devotees' efforts to understand the philosophy, but it is another case if they never even try to understand it.

“Every part and parcel of the Complete Whole is endowed with some particular energy to act according to the Lord’s will.... Thus from the very beginning *Śrī Īsopaniṣad* warns us to be very careful to play the part designated for us by the Lord.”

Śrīla Prabhupāda,
Śrī Īsopaniṣad Mantra 4 purport

CHAPTER SIX – Creative Energy (Kriyā-śakti)

Let us continue our analysis from the point of assimilation mentioned in the last chapter. Assimilation is termed *ānanda* or pleasure by Patañjali in his *Yoga-sūtras* and *ācaraṇa* or behavior in the *Naiṣadha-caritam*.

When one assimilates something one lives or behaves according to it, and it becomes a source of pleasure. Similarly, one can assimilate the practice of devotion. A devotee assimilates *bhakti-sādhana* as a way of life; it is not just a weekend ritual. It becomes a genuine source of creative pleasure for him.

Creative energy is the very life of *bhakti*. It impels one to engage all the senses in a meaningful and dynamic way. Creative energy is dependent on freedom and is expressed through a person’s nature—starting from a material nature for a neophyte up to a spiritual nature for an advanced soul. Creative expression brings one beyond book knowledge and lays the way for spontaneity. Activities performed with devotion such as singing, dancing, praying, cooking, painting, writing, teaching, preaching or playing music are expressions of the soul's love for Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

"According to the regulative principles, there are nine departmental activities, and one should specifically engage himself in the type of devotional service for which he has a natural aptitude. For example, one person may have a particular interest in hearing, another may have a particular interest in chanting, and another may have a particular interest in serving in the temple. So these, or any of the other six different types of devotional service, should be executed in full earnestness. In this way, everyone should act according to his particular taste." (NOD Ch.16)

Philosophical Parallel

In Sanskrit, creative energy is called *kriyā-śakti*, and in light of this term, I use the word "creative" in this chapter.¹ *Kriyā-śakti* is mentioned in the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* (Madhya 20.252–255):

ananta-śakti-madhya kṛṣṇera tina śakti pradhāna
‘icchā-śakti’, ‘jñāna-śakti’, ‘kriyā-śakti’ nāma

“Kṛṣṇa has unlimited potencies, out of which three are chief—willpower, the power of knowledge and the creative energy.”

icchā-śakti-pradhāna kṛṣṇa—icchāya sarva-kartā
jñāna-śakti-pradhāna vāsudeva adhiṣṭhātā

“The predominator of the willing potency is Lord Kṛṣṇa, for by His supreme will everything comes into existence. In willing, there is a need for knowledge, and that knowledge is expressed through Vāsudeva.”

*icchā-jñāna-kriyā vinā nā haya sṛjana
tina tina-śakti meli' prapañca-racana*

“There is no possibility of creation without thinking, feeling, willing, knowledge and activity. The combination of the supreme will, knowledge and action brings about the cosmic manifestation.”

*kriyā-śakti-pradhāna saṅkarṣaṇa balarāma
prākṛtāprākṛta-sṛṣṭi karena nirmāṇa*

“Lord Saṅkarṣaṇa is Lord Balarāma. Being the predominator of the creative energy, He creates both the material and the spiritual world.”

Kriyā-śakti can act within this material world or in the spiritual world. Indeed, by *kriyā-śakti*, which is nondifferent from Lord Balarāma, the entirety of both the spiritual and material worlds is created. Creation is the culmination, or *prayojana*, of the Lord's thinking, feeling and willing. This sequence is similar to the process of learning. The third stage in the process of knowledge is assimilation, acting on what you have learned and understood.

- 1) *jñāna-śakti*----- knowledge ----- *vitarka* or *śravaṇa* ----- Vāsudeva
- 2) *icchā-śakti*----- (thinking, feeling) willing ----- *vicāra* or *manana* ----- Kṛṣṇa
- 3) *kriyā-śakti*----- activity ----- *ānanda* or *nidhidhyasana* ----- Balarāma

The third verse quoted above says that without all three energies there is no creation; all three are necessary. That includes thinking, feeling and willing, which is predominated by Kṛṣṇa. Similarly, without all three steps, spiritual life is difficult to achieve; one would find it difficult to attain *darśana* or meeting the Lord, and what to speak of liberation?

Then again, to meet the Lord one must go further than these three. One must pray and beg the Lord. Śrī Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa confirms this in his commentary to Verse Fifteen of *Śrī Īśopaniṣad*.

“But meeting the Lord directly is not possible just by *śravaṇa* (hearing), *manana* (insight and understanding) and *nidhidhyasana* (assimilation and realization). And by simply meeting the Lord one does not attain liberation. Only when one attains the mercy of the Lord can one attain the Lord. Though one performs *śravaṇa*, *manana* and *nidhidhyasana* for meeting the Lord one must also pray to Him. Though one may meet the Lord, to attain liberation one must also pray to Him.”

So first one takes the three steps of learning—*śravaṇa*, *manana* and *nidhidhyasana*—and then, from deep within the heart, one yearns and prays to come to the Lord. These heartfelt feelings are most important and cannot be learned in a classroom or from a book. Still, if there is going to be education or training, these preliminary three steps should be understood and applied.

Application

By encouraging a devotee in his or her own creative or productive abilities, we are simultaneously bringing out the best in the individual and assisting the mission. After all, what is ISKCON? It is not just buildings, bank accounts and a hierarchy. A society cannot be better than its members. Each individual devotee is ISKCON, a part of ISKCON, and the more the devotees are trained and engaged according to their propensity, the more ISKCON will be an attractive, blissful society.

“ISKCON leaders need to be more caring and people oriented, rather than institution oriented. Devotees should be independently thoughtful and creative in their service to Kṛṣṇa instead of leaders forcing devotees into molds only for the benefit of the institution. They can destroy one’s *bhakti*. Members need to be happy and satisfied. When the members are happy, all of ISKCON will be happy. The institution is made of the people within it, not the bricks that make the buildings.” (Pañca Tattva Dāsī, *Our Hare Kṛṣṇa Youth*)

“If a person can manage people, they can get anything done and done well. I feel it’s most important to keep everyone happy. Just by taking one basic management class I realized how important people are to a project. Without people there is no project.” (Śrī Gandhārī Dāsī, *Our Hare Kṛṣṇa Youth*)

It may sound odd, but there are devotees in our movement who firmly believe that one should do a service that one does not like—in this way, they say, one sacrifices one’s inclination on the Lord’s altar and becomes purified more quickly.²

This is an interesting theory, but it’s not our philosophy. Some even quote the *Bhagavad-gītā* to substantiate it. They say that Arjuna wanted to go to the forest, and Kṛṣṇa preached to him to give up this desire and surrender to fighting. Thus, Arjuna surrendered and did what he did not want to do. Therefore, they say, you should forfeit your inclination for a particular service and do something that you are not attracted to.

Actually, Arjuna circumstantially desired that which was not his nature; he desired to become a sage or renunciate, and Kṛṣṇa convinced him to give up this extraneous desire and simply perform his duty according to his nature, which was that of a warrior. Of course, if one is a liberated soul, one can transcend one’s material nature, but ordinary people cannot imitate this. Rather, they should try to determine their own nature and work according to it.

One may argue, “Śrīla Prabhupāda said that one should do the needful to help spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness.” That’s true, but the spreading of Kṛṣṇa consciousness is not a static, dry process. It is alive, changing, and vibrant. What was “doing the needful” thirty years ago could certainly be different now. With our mission so widely spread and with so many members and centers, we can and should encourage members to find their own niche according to their nature. Managing a group of people who are rightly situated in their own *varṇa* is much easier than pushing square pegs into round holes. Let people fill the places they naturally fit. Generally, all the services will be covered and the devotees will be peaceful.

Once, in London, after preaching and teaching *sāstras* for some years, I decided to do a service that would break my pride of working as a *brāhmaṇa*. I volunteered to manage the restaurant kitchen. Running up and down the stairs, hiring pot washers from the street, making schedules, setting wages, ordering produce and having meetings was very different from sitting peacefully and teaching. After a month or so I was finished and went back to my beloved teaching.

This kind of thing can be considered an experiment or an emergency service that one may do temporarily, but it should not be permanent. Moreover, if an emergency arises every week, then the overall plan needs adjusting.

Śrīla Prabhupāda writes about different forms of duties: “As far as prescribed duties are concerned, they can be fitted into three subdivisions: routine work, emergency work, and desired activities. Routine work in terms of the scriptural injunctions is done without desire for results. As one has to do it, obligatory work is action in the modes of goodness. Work with results becomes the cause of bondage, and so such work is not auspicious. Everyone has his proprietary right in regard to his duties, but should act without attachment to the result. Thus such disinterested obligatory duties help to lead one to the path of liberation. Arjuna was advised by the Lord to fight as a matter of duty without attachment to the result. His nonparticipation in the battle is another side of attachment. Such attachment never leads one to the path of salvation. Any attachment, positive or negative, is cause for bondage. Inaction is sinful. Therefore fighting as a matter of duty was the only auspicious path to salvation for Arjuna.” (Bg. 2.47 purport)

Renouncing attachment means renouncing the fruits of the work, not doing something far from one’s nature. To be engaged in an activity that is against one’s nature may happen, but such engagement is not generally desired, especially in the beginning. That engagement is emergency work.

“Disinterested obligatory duties” does not mean work that you detest. Rather, it means sacrificing the fruits of your own natural inclination or duty to the Supreme Lord. Therefore, our sacrifice lies not in performing work against our own nature, but in working according to our nature to please the Lord.

Of course, in the beginning, we may not know our own nature; it may take years to become clear, because in this age most of us were not conceived properly. We are also bereft of proper *saṁskāras* and training. Western society is a madhouse, complete with dysfunctional families, divorce, substance addiction, emotional problems, psychological scars, neurosis, abuse and other twisted, convoluted forms of insanity. It usually takes some years of a regulated devotional lifestyle to sort everything out and let our inner nature emerge from the wreckage. During this period, we may perform many varieties of devotional service, which will be all-good for us. There’s no rush. Gradually, our own nature will become clear, and we can gravitate toward a particular service suited for us.

Our creative energy is expressed in unlimited ways. We may build a temple, cook for the Deities, run a business, bring up a child or write a book. Lord Balarāma creates on a cosmic scale, and we create on a microcosmic scale. Since we are parts and parcels of the Lord, we also possess a minute degree of *kriyā-śakti*, and our using it is essential.

“Every part and parcel of the Complete Whole is endowed with some particular energy to act according to the Lord’s will. When the part-and-parcel living entity forgets his particular activities under the Lord’s will, he is considered to be in *māyā*, illusion. Thus from the very beginning *Śrī Īsopaniṣad* warns us to be very careful to play the part designated for us by the Lord. This does not mean that the individual soul has no initiative of his own. Because he is part and parcel of the Lord, he must partake of the initiative of the Lord as well. When a person properly utilizes his initiative, or active nature, with intelligence, understanding that everything is the Lord’s potency, he can revive his original

consciousness, which was lost due to association with *māyā*, the external energy.” (*Śrī Īsopaniṣad* Mantra 4 purport)

This idea is of utmost importance. To be successful on the path of *bhakti* we must use our creative initiative dovetailed in the Lord’s service. We all have our own part to play, which is given to us by Him. In our endeavors, we use our initiative with the goal of pleasing the Lord. To do so requires freedom, trust and intelligence.

Proper use of *kriyā-śakti* is also necessary to sublimate sexual energy. Naturally, anyone who is celibate possesses a powerful amount of *kriyā-śakti*. If one doesn’t use *kriyā-śakti* in a creative, devotional endeavor, it will be used sexually, sometimes emerging as perversion. Therefore, those who are celibate should be encouraged to express themselves devotionally.

“Desires are very difficult to fulfill; but if one desires something which is unreasonable and can never be fulfilled, the desire can be subdued and satisfied, and that is an art. By this art one can also subdue sex impulses when they are aroused, as they are even in *brahmacārī* life.” (*Kṛṣṇa Book* Ch.45)

In other words, there are methods by which desires can be sublimated. One method is creative devotional service. To be creative, we must perform a dynamic service that challenges and engages our abilities. By performing such a service, we’ll naturally feel enthusiasm and be appreciated by the community for it, thus feeling further satisfaction. This will help keep members of our spiritual communities free from lust and other material tendencies.

1. There are many different types of people. Some may not have much initiative or be particularly creative, meaning original, in their work. Still, everyone has some ability to be creative in the sense of engaging his natural work proclivities, and that should be encouraged.

2. Some have the same approach to marriage. The idea is that you should marry someone you are not in love with or attracted to so that attachment will not arise. Attraction and attachment, however, help to keep the marriage together, which in this age is a religious step forward for most people, especially Westerners.

“Be yourself—no one else will do it.”
Judaic Proverb

CHAPTER SEVEN - Varṇāśrama and Being Oneself

Being oneself is not as easy as it sounds, although it should be. In any society, many influences and social pressures induce one to act in a way that is often not true to the self. Society rewards behavior that it deems desirable whether that behavior is suitable to an individual or not. In childhood, our parents wanted us to be like them and work as they did. Our teachers wanted us to behave according to their standards, and our friends wanted us to join them in satisfying the senses. It seems that society pushes one to be anything but oneself.

Speaking about being oneself in spiritual circles is tricky, because the ultimate self is the *atma*, spirit soul, which has its own eternal form, nature and relationship with the Lord. There is also the material self, which, although not as important, has relevance to devotees who are not liberated. The material self is based on one’s *karma*, which manifests as one’s psychophysical nature. Our discussion here primarily focuses on the material self but simultaneously strives for the ultimate self.

In the modern material world, being sexy, flippant, arrogant and aggressive is generally, not only rewarded, but also deemed as star-status. Whereas being chaste, simple, austere, pure or surrendered just doesn’t fly. In ISKCON, we also have our behavioral preferences and expectations. The last qualities mentioned are what we are aiming for. We hope to seriously alter the horrendous Kali-yuga qualities developed during our sojourn in the material world, although the demonic qualities previously mentioned may rear their head from time to time while we’re trying to develop higher, spiritual qualities. Other qualities such as honesty, frankness, integrity, kindness, openness and warmth are also necessary to cultivate devotion. And they should manifest when devotion is present.

Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote about such qualities: “Anyone can become successful in devotional service provided he displays no duplicity. It is explained here that one must be very frank and open-minded (*amāyinaḥ*). To be situated in a lower status of life is not a disqualification for success in devotional service. The only qualification is that whether one is a *brāhmaṇa*, *kṣatriya*, *vaiśya* or *sūdra*, he must be open, frank and free from reservations. Then, by performing his particular occupational duty under the guidance of a proper spiritual master, he can achieve the highest success in life.” (Bhāg. 4.21.33 purport)

In the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (7.11.8–12), before discussing *varṇāśrama-dharma*, Nārada Ṛṣi lists thirty qualities that everyone should possess to be considered human. Our discussion here follows suit. These qualities are within us and are spiritual; they manifest through the practice of devotional service and are an important part of being oneself since they are qualities of a pure soul. We are all gradually becoming pure souls, and so we should know the behavior or qualities to aim for.

Prabhupāda also sometimes lectured about qualities such as honesty and kindness: “*Sato vṛtteḥ* means dealings must be very honest. No duplicity. Very frank, plain. *Sato vṛtteḥ*, *sādhu-saṅge*, and in association of devotees. *Ṣaḍbhir bhaktiḥ prasidhyati*. In this way, our propensity for, of love for Kṛṣṇa will increase.” (NOD October 1972 Vṛndāvana)

Someone might argue that *kṣatriyas* and *vaiśyas* have to be dishonest sometimes as part of their survival. But Vaiṣṇavas, even neophytes, play a *varṇāśrama* role and strive for devotional purity; they cultivate the highest qualities. They strive for brahminical qualities like Yudhiṣṭhira Maharaja. Vaiṣṇavas are even superior to *brāhmaṇas*, and therefore should endeavor for the highest standards.

Śrīla Prabhupāda also wrote letters to his disciples about developing these good qualities. Here is an example: "... they will see them come out as the topmost citizens with all good qualities such as honesty, cleanliness, truthfulness, loyalty, etc. So that is a very important work." (Letter to Satsvarūpa 1 July 1972)

Furthermore, Lord Kṛṣṇa declares that developing the quality of friendliness is important to Him: "One who is not envious but is a kind friend to all living entities—such a devotee of Mine is very dear to Me." (Bg. 12.13) "My dear Arjuna... he who is friendly to every living being—he certainly comes to Me." (Bg. 11.55)

The above qualities are natural devotional qualities, which emanate from the soul as one advances on the path of *bhakti*, and one should seek out saintly devotees who possess them. One should not assume that someone has saintly qualities only because others say so or because he occupies some official position. If these basic qualities are not present, how can there be any higher realizations? Additionally, if someone does not love other living entities, especially other Vaiṣṇavas, it can be concluded that true love of Kṛṣṇa is not present in that person's heart.

Focusing on good qualities is a part of being all that you can be. It brings attention to the self, not simply trying "to have" but "to be."

Work According to Varṇa

Let us now explore a few basic principles of working according to one's *varṇa*, and some points dealing with preaching and some with *śūdra-varṇa*.

Acknowledging one's *varṇa* is often an important step in spiritual life for *sādhakas* and particularly for *grhasthas*, since they must earn a livelihood. *Brahmacārīs*, however, although not so dependent on their *varṇa*, will recognize their service propensity in time as they develop devotional skills and focus on a particular service.

During the mid-eighties, ISKCON devotees in New Vṛndāvana attempted to install *varṇāśrama-dharma*. They posted a schematic diagram, which briefly described four *varṇas* and four levels within each *varṇa*. In other words, there were first-, second-, third- and fourth-class *brāhmaṇas*, and first-, second-, third- and fourth-class *kṣatriyas*. *Vaiśyas* and *śūdras* were also divided into four classes. The administration displayed this diagram in the *prasādam* hall for all community members to see. It was understood that one was supposed to slot oneself into one of the little boxes.

According to what I remember of this system, the first-class *brāhmaṇa* is intellectual, strictly attends all temple programs and follows the four regulative principles. A second-class *brāhmaṇa* is also intellectual, but his *sādhana* is not quite as good. He also attends most temple services and follows the four principles. The third-class *brāhmaṇa*, although intellectual, has poor temple attendance and

occasionally may have some trouble following the regulative principles. The fourth-class *brāhmaṇa* is intellectual but rarely comes to the temple services. He may follow only three of the regulative principles. The same approach was applied to the other *varṇas*.

Generously speaking, this system, although considered simplistic with today's hindsight, was a fair attempt considering the time and place. The application, however, was somewhat intimidating. Many may feel similarly threatened upon hearing something about implementing *varṇāśrama* in ISKCON and for good reason. Some feel that such implementation could create more facility for ill-motivated leaders of all kinds—including teachers, parents or managers—to abuse their underlings as it further emphasizes hierarchy.

This point was voiced by H.H. Bhakti Tīrtha Swami during his seminar in Māyāpura: “If the goal of what our society is supposed to be about is not clear, if the appreciation of quality *sādhu-saṅga* is not there, if the appreciation of the differences is not there in a synergistic sense, then I would strongly say that *varṇāśrama* would create casteism. It would create tyrants. It would create further fragmentation.”

This caution is wise if an institutional approach is attempted. Another approach is possible—an individual approach. Each person can benefit from awareness of his or her own *varṇa*, and it does not have to have anything to do with the institution.

Just as one benefits from knowing one's own shoe size, one benefits from knowing one's *varṇa*, whether or not the institution knows about it. If someone doesn't know his own shoe size, he may spend much time trying to find comfortable shoes. Moreover, a person will never greet you by saying, “Pleased to meet you. And by the way, what is your shoe size?” No one even thinks about it since it doesn't have any bearing on our relationships. Yet, it's useful information.

The same applies in knowing your *varṇa*. It's your own personal business for your own personal benefit—not for others. Your main identity is a Vaiṣṇava. Your *varṇa* is secondary or even tertiary. It's not anyone else's business. Nothing is posted, and no one is stamped.

Now, if you're more relaxed, you can try to determine your *varṇa*. This was traditionally done in India by one's parents, one's *guru*, the village elders, and available *brāhmaṇas*. In any society, the overwhelming majority is in the *śūdra* category. Therefore, before we begin, we should be prepared to accept the fact that we may be in the *śūdra* category.

I hope that this is not too shocking. Your ego may feel slightly pinched, but actually the *śūdra* category is not so bad. If that were your slot, you would be in excellent company. Many *mahā-bhāgavata* Vaiṣṇavas apparently accepted such a social position. Śrīla Rāmānanda Rāya appeared from the *śūdra* caste, as did Śrīla Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura and Śrīla Haridāsa Ṭhākura. Actually, Haridāsa Ṭhākura was from a Moslem background, which is considered even lower than a *śūdra*. From the Madhva line came the famous Śrī Kanaka, apparently from the *śūdra* class, who is honored even today by a memorial, which is found near the Kṛṣṇa temple in Udupi. The Rāmānuja-sampradāya boasts of Śrī Kāñcīpūrṇa, from the same class, from whom Śrī Rāmānujācārya desired to accept *dīkṣā-mantras*. The list is endless.

Although traditionally no one from the *śūdra-varṇa* studied under a *guru*, accepted *upanayana* (Gāyatrī *mantras*), studied Sanskrit or worshiped the Deity, Vaiṣṇavas may perform all of these

according to the Pañcarātric system, and their path to pure love of God, *śuddha-bhakti*, is not impaired in the least. All of the above *mahā-bhāgavata* Vaiṣṇavas played their roles within the *śūdra-varṇa*, at least partially, to prove this point.

Please also consider that those with *śūdra-varṇa* often humbly serve others by their craft. They don't have to deal with or pressure the public like *vaiśyas*. They don't have to employ political diplomacy or get involved in complicated civic dealings like *kṣatriyas*. And they don't have to strain their brain studying like *brāhmaṇas*. *Śūdra-varṇa* is actually nice for a peaceful devotional life.

Devotees with *śūdra-varṇa*¹ can just perform their own simple craft, relax, and hear and chant. Some may even become famous for their art like Michael Angelo. So let us not shoot ourselves in the foot by constantly denigrating *śūdras* to the point where no one will agree to accept that role.

I've observed this problem: Some devotees who possess *śūdra-varṇa*, are at least partially unwilling to accept this fact. This is similar to a *brahmacārī* who really needs to get married but is unwilling to do so. Either they are trying to be something they're not, or they're just confused and cannot determine which kind of training to focus on.

Of course, our Society is meant to train people to come to the brahminical platform, and all the temple activities are naturally geared toward that goal, but it doesn't mean that everyone will be transformed into *brāhmaṇas* overnight. Nor does it mean that one must continue performing the activities of a *brāhmaṇa* after one's initial training. Although one's *sādhana* will continue, one's work will take many forms according to one's nature.

Preaching for All Varṇas

As one's work can take many socially acceptable forms—so can one's preaching. Anyone can preach and help others to become Kṛṣṇa conscious. It's not just meant for the *brāhmaṇas*, *brahmacārīs* or *sannyāsīs*, although they're usually the ones who do it. Lord Caitanya and Śrīla Prabhupāda both stressed that all devotees can and should preach.

I once met a devotee named Mahāśṛṅga Prabhu from Poland who was managing a Food for Life program there. Later, he moved to Māyāpura with his family. He's a simple devotee, being neither a scholar, a powerful businessman nor a community leader. He started preaching to the local Bengalis in and around the Māyāpura Project. Late one night after cycling back from a Nāma Haṭṭa program in a village near the temple, he saw an old Bengali woman struggling to carry a large sack. She was almost falling over. He stopped his bicycle, looked at her and thought, "How can I allow this old woman to struggle like this? I must help her." Therefore, he offered to help and placed her sack on his bicycle. The woman was shocked and asked, "Why are you doing this?" He replied in Bengali, "You are like my mother. How can I let you carry such a heavy load?" She smiled with relief and they walked together toward her village. Arriving an hour later, he bid her farewell, jumped on his bike and pedaled home.

The result of this simple yet kind act was that the woman, who happened to be well respected in her village, told all her relatives and friends about the saintly foreigner who helped her. Thus, many local people now have a high opinion of ISKCON, and he has become a popular preacher in the villages.

The point is that we should never think that, “I cannot preach. I’m not a *brāhmaṇa* or a *sannyāsī*.” Regardless of our circumstance, education, location or *āśrama*, we can all make a significant difference and assist Śrīla Prabhupāda in bringing all kinds of people closer to Kṛṣṇa. That’s what preaching means.

Years ago in New York City, a saintly Vaiṣṇava named Jayānanda Prabhu felt the initial symptoms of a disease that would later take his life. Thus he entered a hospital, and a devotee began daily bringing him *prasādam* from the temple. Jayānanda Prabhu was hooked up to various intravenous contraptions as he laid in his hospital bed. Upon seeing that a devotee had brought *prasādam*, Jayānanda perked up and began to make a plan.

He asked, “Did you bring any *karatālas* with you?”

“Yes, I just happen to have a pair,” replied the devotee.

“Good,” said Jayānanda, “Now please cut up the *prasādam* into small pieces.” The devotee faithfully followed his request thinking that the small pieces would be convenient for Jayānanda to eat.

“Now please help me,” Jayānanda said.

“What are you going to do?” asked the devotee.

“We’re going to have a little festival,” said Jayānanda with a confident grin.

Jayānanda rolled himself, in his bed, into the hallway followed by his guest. They got into an elevator much to the chagrin of the nurses. Once in the lobby, Jayānanda instructed his curious friend to begin a *kīrtana* and give a lecture while he distributed the *prasādam* from his mobile bed. And there it was—the first Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava-mahotsava to take place in an East-Coast American medical unit.

People were stunned. Many of them had never seen Hare Kṛṣṇa devotees before. The *kīrtana* began while Jayānanda offered *prasādam* to patients, visitors, doctors and nurses. At first, they cautiously received some *halavā* and pieces of *purī*, but afterwards asked for more. Gradually, a crowd surrounded the two devotees as they animatedly explained the philosophy. Jayānanda felt right at home.

Actually, Jayānanda is a great example of being himself, not being swayed by social influences for status, and of preaching according to time, place and capacity. He acted as an *ācārya*, or one who teaches by example. We must also take courage to be ourselves and follow in such devotees’ footsteps. The result will be that we will feel blissfully connected to the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

1. It is considered offensive to use the term “śūdra-Vaiṣṇava.” Therefore I have used the term “Vaiṣṇava with *śūdra-varṇa*.” This indicates that the *varṇa* is separate from the Vaiṣṇava. Just as one might say “a Vaiṣṇava with size-ten shoes” and not “a size-ten Vaiṣṇava.”

“Dhruva Mahārāja’s becoming angry, overwhelmed with grief, and envious of the enemies was not incompatible with his position as a great devotee. It is a misunderstanding that a devotee should not be angry, envious or overwhelmed by lamentation.”

Śrīla Prabhupāda, Bhāg. 4.10.4 purport

CHAPTER EIGHT

Emotions and Impersonalism

“Religion from the neck up”—one of our congregational members in England coined this phrase. The meaning is that many devotees, although knowing philosophy and performing spiritual duties and rituals, rarely exhibited any feelings. This, of course, is a subjective statement, a sweeping generalization, and one can find numerous devotees with fine feelings—genuine integrity, humility and compassion. Still, this negative view has been leveled and should be reflected upon.

A Godbrother of mine, jetting to India, happened to sit next to a Christian pastor on the plane. In time, the pastor revealed that he had lived in one of our *āśramas* for a year or so. As the conversation developed, the devotee naturally became curious to know more about the pastor’s experiences, and in particular, why he had left the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement.

The pastor glorified the devotees, offering them heartfelt appreciation for practicing what they preached. He was reticent to say anything negative or give his reasons for leaving, and he said that he had great respect for devotees, seeing first-hand how they rose early, took cold showers, came together for prayer and song, and seriously practiced celibacy. My Godbrother became even more interested to know why the pastor had left and with more vigor asked him again. Relenting, the pastor said, “There wasn’t enough fellowship for me.”

Upon conducting many “Love and Trust” seminars, I found a similar phenomenon in our ISKCON communities. After exercises in open communication, devotees would often offer feedback such as, “I’m so glad that you’ve conducted this seminar. I was able to deeply talk with this other devotee whom I’d seen for years, but had never really spoken with before. I’m feeling so happy because I’ve found a new friend. Thank you.”

In my own meager way, I’ve attempted to assuage the onslaught of impersonalism and general lack of brotherhood found within our Society by conducting such seminars. A few persons benefited, but the problem remains.

I have had my own experiences as well, experiences that illustrate impersonalism in our communities. Once, early one morning, I was sitting and chanting my rounds with devotees. They were walking around in a circle, as they usually do, in the temple room. After a while, someone stopped in front of me, bent over, picked up my arm and looked at my watch. After viewing the time, he put my arm back and walked away. All of this was done without saying anything or even looking in my eyes.

This occurrence happened to me only once in twenty-six years, but it still has some significance. Socrates once said that a society can be judged by one member. In any event, I hope that Socrates doesn’t choose this person in judging our Society.

Having taught *Bhagavad-gītā* and other *bhakti-sāstras* at Bhaktivedanta Manor for seven years, I began to notice a peculiar behavioral pattern in many of the students. When teaching students who had been in the temple for less than a year, they responded appropriately to my mood. If I spoke strongly or angrily, they would brace themselves. If I joked, they would smile and laugh. If I spoke softly as if telling a secret, they would lean forward, eager to hear. They were fully with me.

But there were not the same reciprocal responses when teaching students that had been living in the *āśrama* for three years or more. They, in contrast, were dulled over, unresponsive, and poker-faced. I wondered, “Are we really helping these people in spiritual life?”

Of course, our movement introduces people to the basics of *bhakti-sādhana*—chanting *japa*, worshiping the Deity, hearing *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, performing *kīrtana* and so on. No one can deny the immense value in these. But why the dullness? Are we introducing something additional to the process? Or are we subtracting something from the process?

It would take many chapters to describe all of the multifaceted possibilities. Ultimately, I cannot say that I fully understand all of the causes behind this observation. There must be philosophical, sociological, cultural and even psychological factors involved. Add them all up and they spell—conditioning. As mentioned before, I am not a sociologist, but I will attempt to broach this subject. I request you to bear with me.

The first thing that comes to mind is the initial withdrawal symptoms experienced by a neophyte transcendentalist. In his struggle to control the senses, a neophyte often withdraws from contact with the sense objects. In the struggle for sense repression, one may also repress one’s feelings, not having sorted through or differentiated from sensual attractions and harmless or helpful human emotions. Śrīla Prabhupāda writes, “A neophyte spiritualist is generally advised to keep aloof from the objects of the senses.” (Bg. 3.42 purport)

Before continuing, I would like to differentiate between emotions and the urges of the mind and body. Emotions are one thing and these urges are another. Experiencing emotions does not necessarily mean that one is being attacked by physical or mental urges, albeit there is some overlapping. There seems to be a tendency to think that all emotions are obstacles. However, not all emotions are bad; some are good. Positive feelings of dedication, disgust for materialism, loyalty to one’s *guru*, remorse for sins, and love for God and His creatures are all a necessary part of devotional life.¹ Even negative emotions must be acknowledged and dealt with. That’s a part of maturing and becoming an adult. One cannot simply sweep them under the rug.

Let me digress a bit here and tell you something about myself. As a teenager of the sixties, I enthusiastically consumed many intoxicating substances, as did many young Americans. When I was sixteen, my mother passed away. I was shocked and felt deeply bereft. I realized that to mature emotionally I must fully experience her death with all of my faculties devoid of the dulling effects of intoxicants. Otherwise, I would face emotional difficulty later in life, perhaps even neurosis. Somehow, I sensed this. Therefore, I abstained from my usual habits and fully experienced the necessary bereavement. Thus, I can, on occasion, safely remember or discuss her death without negative emotions.

This is one example of dealing with intense, perhaps negative, emotions. Of course, I wasn't aware of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava philosophy, but I don't think that it would've made much difference at the time, considering my low level of consciousness.

A few years ago, my ex-wife's father passed away. I learned about this when I was sitting in the temple shop in London. Suddenly she came running into the shop, totally overwhelmed, heaving and sobbing. I didn't attempt to preach to her that her father's soul is eternal or any such thing. It wouldn't have helped her at the time. She needed a shoulder to cry on. Later, after letting everything out, she was able to cope with his death, and she naturally considered the philosophical points. Then the philosophy helped her.

Since persons have feelings, if one denies feelings, that would tend to make one impersonal, wouldn't it? That seems logical. Impersonalism arises when someone denies that God has senses. Therefore, if you deny that *you* have senses, which include feelings or emotions, then you court impersonalism.

I am not advocating, however, that you become an ocean of emotions, being swept away by each and every slight wave. Actually, emotions must be controlled since they are born from the modes of material nature. They are not absolute truths but only temporary, relative truths that can tell us something about our material nature. Depending on our level of spiritual advancement or consciousness, we can control emotions, but we should not deny them.

Our experiences cannot be denied, but they must be supported by and understood with philosophy. And, conversely, our philosophy should be supported by our experiences. Otherwise, our practice of Kṛṣṇa consciousness is not real or practical. For example, if chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa does not invoke joy and freedom from hankering and sin, then what is the use of it? The proof of the pudding is in the eating.

Now I will look toward *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* for direction. In the Third Canto, the four Kumāras came to the gates of Vaikuṅṭha but were stopped by Jaya and Vijaya. The Kumāras became angry and cursed the two gatekeepers. Śrīla Prabhupāda comments that anger will continue even in the liberated stage. "Here we can mark that even great saintly persons like the Kumāras were also angry, but they were not angry for their personal interests. They were angry because they were forbidden to enter the palace to see the Personality of Godhead. Therefore the theory that in the perfectional stage one should not have anger is not supported in this verse. Anger will continue even in the liberated stage." (Bhāg. 3.15.31 purport)

There is a difference between the anger of liberated souls and the anger of conditioned souls, but both are anger—an emotion. And the Kumāras' emotions, although connected with the Lord, were not *bhāva* or *prema-bhakti* since they were not devotees at that point.

Let us go further to the next Canto, which describes the history of Mahārāja Dhruva. Dhruva's feelings of insult and pain caused by the words of his stepmother impelled him to seek shelter of the Lord. Those feelings were negative and material, but they still somehow assisted him on his path to God. Even more relevant is what happened after Dhruva's liberation.

“When Dhruva Mahārāja heard of the killing of his brother Uttama by the Yakṣas in the Himalaya Mountains, being overwhelmed with lamentation and anger, he got on his chariot and went out for victory over the city of the Yakṣas, Alakāpuri.” (Bhāg. 4.10.4)

Śrīla Prabhupāda comments, “Dhruva Mahārāja’s becoming angry, overwhelmed with grief, and envious of the enemies was not incompatible with his position as a great devotee. It is a misunderstanding that a devotee should not be angry, envious or overwhelmed by lamentation.”

Dhruva’s feelings were not in connection with the Lord as were the Kumāras’. Dhruva’s feelings were negative and material even though he was a liberated soul,² yet Śrīla Prabhupāda says that this is not incompatible with his being a great devotee. Prabhupāda even goes so far as to say that it’s not incompatible for a great devotee to be overwhelmed by grief or lamentation.

In the next Canto, we find the account of Āgnīdhra, the son of Priyavrata Mahārāja. Āgnīdhra wanted a son to ensure his stay in Piṭṛloka. Prabhupāda comments: “Since Mahārāja Āgnīdhra was the son of a Vaiṣṇava, he should have desired to be transferred to the spiritual world, Vaikuṅṭhaloka. Why, then, did he desire to be transferred to Piṭṛloka? In answer to this, Gosvāmī Giridhara, one of the *Bhāgavatam* commentators, remarks that Āgnīdhra was born when Mahārāja Priyavrata was infatuated by lusty desires. This may be accepted as a fact because sons are begotten with different mentalities according to the time of their conception.” (Bhāg. 5.2.2 purport)

Śrīla Prabhupāda does not dismiss Giridhara Gosvāmī’s comment but accepts the statement that Priyavrata was infatuated by lusty desires. This is controversial. Priyavrata was a *mahā-bhāgavata*. How then was he influenced by lust?

One point is that when conceiving a child there must be some lust. Otherwise, there cannot be mortal conception. Another point is that although Āgnīdhra was not a pure devotee he was a highly elevated soul, a religious king. He was not evil. Therefore, Priyavrata’s mentality could not have been evil. It appears that he was just a little lusty at that moment.

Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote, "Our thoughts are always changing, that is the nature of the mind, so you cannot expect that even the great saintly persons are free from thoughts coming and going." (Letter to Satyabhāmā 28 February 1972)

Since it would be easy to misinterpret this point and use it to justify one’s own lust, I will explain it in more detail so that there’s no confusion. A moment of lust while conceiving a child with one’s wife is not such a serious felony. This incident should not be misused to justify gross sinful acts. *Mahā-bhāgavata* devotees are human and have feelings, and they may make slight or insignificant errors in rare circumstances if they are at a preliminary level.

According to the *Bhakti-sandarbhā* of Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī, there are three levels of *mahā-bhāgavatas*. At the highest level, the devotee is completely free from the modes of nature and has reawakened his relationship with the Lord. The example given is of Nārada Ṛṣi. At the second level, the devotee is also free from the modes but has not realized his *svarūpa*. The example given is of Śukadeva Gosvāmī. The third and lowest level of a *mahā-bhāgavata* is the devotee who is ever-so-slightly tinged by the material modes. The example given is again of Śrī Nārada but in his previous life.

In his previous life, after his mother died from a snakebite, Nārada wandered aimlessly throughout the countryside. He gradually sat in meditation, and the Lord appeared in his heart but then suddenly disappeared. Nārada then heard the Lord's voice: "O Nārada, I regret that during this lifetime you will not be able to see Me anymore. Those who are incomplete in service and who are not completely free from all material taints can hardly see Me." (Bhāg, 1.6.21)

Nārada's fault, referred to here by the Lord, is revealed by Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī. He says that Nārada was attracted to the peace and beauty of the forest due to his being ever-so-slightly tinged by *sattva-guṇa*, the mode of goodness. That prevented him from fully developing his relationship with the Lord in that lifetime. This is not much of a fault, but it's enough to invoke such words from the Lord. Thus, such ever-so-slight human faults may occasionally arise even in *mahā-bhāgavata* devotees, but the wise do not view them as such.

The next reference we will explore is that of Jaḍa Bharata, from the same Canto. Jaḍa Bharata felt insulted by King Rahūgaṇa, and there were waves of dissatisfaction in his mind. The king had spoken extremely harsh words to Jaḍa Bharata; any human being would have felt insulted. Jaḍa Bharata, however, is different from other humans. Later he neglected those feelings and again became calm. But he did experience those feelings; he did not deny them. He was not a dull stone, oblivious to what was happening.

"Śrīla Śukadeva Gosvāmī continued: My dear King, O son of mother Uttarā, there were some *waves of dissatisfaction in the mind of Jaḍa Bharata* due to his being insulted by King Rahūgaṇa, who made him carry his palanquin. But Jaḍa Bharata neglected this, and his heart again became calm and quiet like an ocean. Although King Rahūgaṇa had insulted him, he was a great *paramahansa*. Being a Vaiṣṇava, he was naturally very kindhearted, and he therefore told the King about the constitutional position of the soul. He then forgot the insult because King Rahūgaṇa pitifully begged pardon at his lotus feet [*italics mine*]." (Bhāg. 5.13.24)

Prabhupāda comments on this verse: "A pure devotee has all the qualities of a *sādhu*. Jaḍa Bharata is an example of this. Due to the material body, his senses were certainly agitated when he was insulted by King Rahūgaṇa, but later, due to the King's humble submission, Jaḍa Bharata excused him."

He is another example of a *mahā-bhāgavata* being agitated. Due to having a material body, Jaḍa Bharata's senses were agitated by the words of the king. This is significant. A common misunderstanding is that such a great devotee never experiences any material agitation, mental distress or dissatisfaction. The difference between a liberated soul and a conditioned soul is that although the liberated soul experiences the normal range of human feelings he never allows them to deviate him from life's ultimate goal. A liberated soul quickly and naturally subdues any negative emotions by the power of his devotion.

If a devotee imitates lofty stages of transcendence—that's hypocrisy. But the hypocrisy is convoluted if he imitates a *false conception of transcendence*. If a devotee strives for a false conception of transcendence, devoid of feelings, there can be nothing but havoc. In the past, a few of our Society's leaders have been thus bewildered, therefore we can assume that others have been influenced. The callous neglect of cows, women, children and *brāhmaṇas* are evidence of such a misconception.

This unique twist of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism was not created by one individual. In the late nineties, some well-known leaders in ISKCON suddenly faced severe levels of this and perhaps other problems. There have also been others. I know of one example. A respected American devotee, a *brahmacārī* for twenty years or so, was the pillar of a community and a successful preacher, but he had difficulty expressing emotions. He suddenly disappeared from the community with a young lady, although he could have simply married her in the conventional way and continued his service. This sudden burst of pent-up emotions overwhelmed him and made him act irrationally.

So far, I have analyzed two possible reasons for impersonalism: (1) the initial symptoms of the neophyte in his struggle for sense control, and (2) the apparent misconception in dealing with emotions in devotional life. The first seems natural and can be accommodated, at least within beginners. The second seems contrived or unnatural—a twisted approach indicating deeper spiritual or psychological problems. There are yet other possible reasons for impersonalism.

Upon joining ISKCON, we soon discovered that almost all of our Western “culture”—hot dogs, football and beer; discos, Rolling Stones and Rusty Nails; steak, sex and speed; bingo, Bloody-Mary’s and once-a-week baths; TV and pepperoni pizzas—was opposed to the path of *bhakti*. We quickly dumped our culture overboard to pursue our goal.

Sometimes I wonder if such an extreme sociological phenomenon had ever taken place before in the annals of history, a phenomenon whereby a group totally shunned its entire culture almost overnight. Shunning our own culture and not having fully developed another, we were more or less bereft of culture. Guess what that spells? Yes—impersonalism. Here we see another cause for the problem, a cultural cause. People cannot live without a culture, at least not for very long. A few rare souls have survived in India for twenty or thirty years, learned the language, and more or less adapted themselves to Vaiṣṇava culture in the *dhāmas*. But for most of us mortal beings, Kṛṣṇa consciousness means living in the West.

Fortunately, some aspects of Western culture can be incorporated into *kṛṣṇa-bhakti*, but one must know the *bhakti* science well. One must know what is favorable, what is unfavorable, and what is neutral. One must not be fanatically strict (*niyama-āgraha*) or whimsically loose (*niyama-agraha*). One must know what can be altered and what cannot be altered. It takes common sense and genuine realization. If one’s independent thought process has never been developed, then such common sense will not manifest and the struggle will continue.

Independently thoughtful *brāhmaṇas* are necessary for our Society to flourish. They must be consulted. Consulting *brāhmaṇas* is not just a cliché in our books; this system must be implemented practically. Such *brāhmaṇas* should be maintained with basic necessities³ and should not be striving for some position or be concerned with reputation and status. They must be willing to sacrifice for the truth.

One last cause for impersonalism is the gender problem. It has become clear over the years that the vast majority of devotees will marry sooner or later. Still, for some time in the beginning, they live a monastic lifestyle as monks or nuns. Generally, other than the traditional *brahmacārī* student, only people who have either already gone through family life or firmly decided to refrain from family life will live a monastic life. Usually people do not live as monks unless they *are* monks or are at least aspiring to become monks. In any case, they certainly do not live together with members of the opposite gender, which naturally makes it more difficult. In ISKCON we have a different situation, because we are

introducing not only a different religion but also an entirely different worldview and lifestyle—different from the host society. Therefore, many new adherents, who are predominantly Western unmarried young adults, live in the temple and begin to learn about our Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava practice. This was and still is necessary. After learning about our practice for a few years, they usually marry and live near the temple, becoming part of the temple's congregation.

Therefore, the major temples should be geared toward this scenario. They should be geared toward becoming the centre of a *gṛhastha* community, and usually become so anyway. All the benefits for the family are present in a large temple community—opulent Deity worship; opulent *mahā-prasādam*; opulent community festivals with music, bands and dancing; weddings; community meetings; and a wide variety of devotional engagements and devotional socializing.

Unfortunately, this kind of scene is not really suited to the humble monk—*brahmacārī*, *vānaprastha* or *sannyāsī*—who thrives on, or should thrive on, peace, solitude, austerity, simple food, scriptural study, early rising and a placid atmosphere. Our humble monk requires a setting like a monastery where he may perform his duties and worship without disturbance. Such a place should be very simple, without extravagance, so much so that no one would envy him for living there. He can also travel to preach or do some community service, but he should have the shelter of a peaceful *āśrama* and the fellowship of like-minded souls to return to at the end of the day.

Our ISKCON *āśramas* accommodate men and women. This is a first in the history of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, which came about because of Śrīla Prabhupāda's compassion and genius. Most Western ladies had to leave their homes to practice Kṛṣṇa consciousness, as did the men. Understanding this, Prabhupāda wisely accommodated them in the temples along with the men. This should continue. The mixed gender temple is favorable for those Westerners who are just becoming introduced to the practice, but there may be ramifications for those who wish to remain unmarried. We should be aware of the ramifications and make adjustments when necessary. One adjustment could be to have a few monasteries where our *brahmacārīs* or *vānaprasthas* can reside, perhaps one in each country.

Otherwise, there is a clash of interest, a clash of energies, a clash of ethos. The two different kinds of devotees—saffron clad and *gṛhasthas*—can create unnecessary discomfort for the other. The *brahmacārī* enters the community, which is half-filled with young ladies who often desire to marry. He refrains from glancing their way, restricting his vision in an attempt to control himself. To survive day after day, month after month, he gradually develops the habit of negating the ladies in the temple. He also begins to negate others. Negating others gradually develops into callousness and impersonalism. If a person, after staying in our *gṛhastha* community for a short period and learning the basics of our practice, really wants to live a monastic life, he should have the proper environment that facilitates his direction and prevents callousness arising.⁴

Our Western ladies have their own social needs that clash with those of celibate monks. When the monks live in monasteries, both parties will be more comfortable and able to relax among their peers, which they need for spiritual strength, and healthy psychological and emotional functioning.

In conclusion, I have attempted to understand an aspect of our Society that is vital for its future development and for our individual progress. Impersonalism must be recognized and dealt with for it is clearly our enemy.

1. Psychologists often differentiate between emotions that are raw like anger, love, hate, fear, and so on, and feelings that are mixed with considerations of the intellect, like “I feel a sense of accomplishment” or “I feel uncomfortable or out of place.” Be that as it may, I included in my discussion all types of feelings whether they are raw or processed. This difference is similar to the difference between *anubhāva* and *sāttvika-bhāva* found in the *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*.

2. “Dhruva Mahārāja was already a liberated person because at the age of five years he had seen the Supreme Personality of Godhead. But even though liberated, he was, for the time being, afflicted by the illusion of *māyā*, thinking himself the brother of Uttama in the bodily concept of life.” (Bhāg. 4.11.30 purport)

3. *Brāhmaṇas* should be maintained with food, shelter, clothing and other necessities like medicine.

4. I imagine that this scenario may be reversed and be developed for monastic ladies too.

“To cut off the tie of all other affections does not mean complete negation of the finer elements, like affection for someone else. This is not possible. A living being, whoever he may be, must have this feeling of affection for others because this is a symptom of life. The symptoms of life, such as desire, anger, hankerings, feelings of attraction, etc., cannot be annihilated. Only the objective has to be changed.”

Śrīla Prabhupāda,
Bhāg. 1.8.42 purport

CHAPTER NINE – Role of Emotions

After recognizing and accepting emotions in the overall picture of devotional development, many questions could be raised: (1) What is the difference, if any, between controlled emotions and repressed emotions? (2) How can we reconcile or balance emotions with reason for a functional life? (3) What should be our recourse when a gear slips and a negative emotion takes control? These three questions are discussed below.

First, I want to clarify, as I have already written, emotions are different from biological urges like those of the tongue, belly and genitals. Being hungry is certainly a feeling or an urge but not an emotion, at least not for most. Still, emotions can also be viewed as senses, subtle senses, and for this presentation, I will consider them as such since they are born of the mind, which is the king of the senses. And, similar to the sense urges, emotions seem to come and go as they please. They must therefore be controlled. Take anger for example; it surely must be controlled. The same applies to hatred, envy, pride and fear. Other emotions, however, like pity or love, may be expressed more readily within religious parameters, and they can be developed into exalted spiritual sentiments. Yet they can also be misapplied when expressed on the material platform.

Ultimately, the soul possesses spiritual senses and emotions that gradually appear as one advances in *bhakti-yoga*—that is another topic. Let us first establish the principles that are applicable to both emotions and senses.

Controlled or Repressed Emotions

In *Bhagavad-gītā* (3.33), Lord Kṛṣṇa advocates controlling but not repressing the senses or emotions: *prakṛtiṁ yānti bhūtāni nigrahaḥ kiṁ kariṣyati*. *Nigrahaḥ* means repression. Kṛṣṇa says that everyone follows his own nature and then He asks, “What can repression accomplish?” This is a rhetorical question meaning that repression cannot accomplish anything. Digging deeper, we also understand that the material modes of nature are so strong that controlling them is virtually impossible. One must strive for the mode of goodness by regulation, cleanliness, *sādhana* and so forth, and then strive further for pure goodness. Until then, the conditioned soul, being pushed by the modes, is forced to act helplessly at every moment:

*na hi kaścit kṣaṇam api
jātu tiṣṭhaty akarma-kṛt
kāryate hy avaśaḥ karma
sarvaḥ prakṛti-jair guṇaiḥ*

“Everyone is forced to act helplessly according to the qualities he has acquired from the modes of material nature; therefore no one can refrain from doing something, not even for a moment.” (Bg. 3.5)

This verse indirectly advises us to accept our own level of *dharma*, to act according to our conditioned nature, and not try to jump over our present situation prematurely. It can also be seen in the context of our discussion. Here Kṛṣṇa is not recommending we enjoy the senses without restriction. Sense control has already been recommended in the Second Chapter (Bg. 2.55–72), so how could He be contradicting Himself in the Third? No, it cannot be so. Kṛṣṇa warns that one should not become controlled by sensual attachments, because they are obstacles on the path.

*indriyasyendriyasyārthe
rāga-dveṣau vyavasthitau
tayo na vaśam āgacchet
tau hy asya paripanthinau*

“There are principles to regulate attachment and aversion pertaining to the senses and their objects. One should not come under the control of such attachment and aversion, because they are stumbling blocks on the path of self-realization.” (Bg. 3.34)

Clearly, sense control is insisted upon by the Supreme Lord. Still, He asks, *nigrahaḥ kiṁ kariṣyati*, “What can repression accomplish?” How can these two statements be reconciled? The answer is that one must control oneself according to one’s own individual capacity, and there are different standards of restraint for different individuals. This is the advantage of the *varṇāśrama* system—different strokes for different folks. Here “strokes” means regulations. In other words, one must regulate or control oneself as much as possible without excessive discomfort. This is a major principle in bona fide religious systems and is established to help conditioned souls control their senses by providing feasible guidelines of regulation.

This answers our first question. Controlled emotions as opposed to repressed emotions means controlled according to one’s individual capacity. Consider the following. Children can usually get away with crying, screaming and stomping on the floor whereas adults can’t. A new *bhakta* happily takes *prasāda* up to the neck, but a senior Vaiṣṇava is much more cautious. *Vaiśyas* can bend the truth, but *brāhmaṇas* can’t. To expect a *śūdra* or *vaiśya* to be as controlled as a *brāhmaṇa* would mean artificial repression. *Sannyāsīs* can’t run a business or embrace a woman, but a *grhastha* can.¹ In conclusion, repression can mean trying to control the senses far beyond one’s ability. The symptom of repression is that a person begins a severe struggle and cannot maintain that level.

Another difference between repression and control is that repression can be artificial and, in that case, there may be resentment or aversion. Whereas, when the senses are under control, one is detached and perceives them as different from the self.

There is also a difference, as discussed in psychological circles, between “suppression” and “repression.” Suppression can be defined as dismissing or pushing away an urge or feeling, knowing the negative results of that particular urge or feeling. It could be simple, like pushing oneself to stay awake during the *Bhāgavatam* class, or it could be more significant, like a *brahmacārī* suppressing the urge to talk with women. If he cannot control himself, he will need to change *āśrama*. He may then suppress the desire to enjoy others’ wives.

Repression, however, means an *unconscious* restraining of emotions or desires.² This is more tricky. Strong feelings are pushed down in the subconscious regions of the psyche without one knowing what is happening. As one would expect, tension gradually builds up until there is somewhat of an emotional explosion leading to uncontrolled anger, strange behavior or neurosis.

The dilemma is that neophyte transcendentalists experience so many material feelings, emotions and urges that they often categorically reject them all to get a footing in spiritual life. I mentioned this in the previous chapter. This method cannot last very long, and one must learn to purify, dovetail, suppress, sublimate or sort through material urges, emotions and feelings. These techniques can be known by experience and observation of the mind. Ultimately, they can be known when the Lord gives inner enlightenment as a reward for sincere surrender in the performance of devotional service.

Balancing Emotions with Reason

The following is a reference dealing with experience, observation and reason. Reason plays a part in balancing emotions, the topic of our second question. Surrender will be mentioned again later.

*ātmano gurur ātmaiva
puruṣasya viśeṣataḥ
yat pratyakṣānumānābhyām
śreyo 'sāv anuvindate*

“An intelligent person, expert in perceiving the world around him and in applying sound logic, can achieve real benefit through his own intelligence. Thus sometimes one acts as one’s own instructing spiritual master.” (Bhāg. 11.7.20)

Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī comments on this verse as follows: *gurv-anusaraṇe pravartaka ity arthaḥ*—knowledge acquired by one’s own observation and intelligence leads one to appreciate the value of the spiritual master.

This is an interesting comment. It indicates that the spiritual master must be very intelligent and preach practically with logic and reason. Otherwise, why would an intelligent disciple appreciate him by using his own intelligence? It also indicates that the spiritual master encourages his disciple to use his own observational skills. Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī also says that the word *śreyas* in this verse indicates that one can advance in life through one’s own intelligence.

A balanced, sensitive and reasonable person can attain joy and knowledge by carefully observing the world around him. This simple point is usually overlooked. By observing the happiness and distress of other living entities, one can understand what is desirable and what is undesirable.

Lord Kṛṣṇa advises us to use our direct experience and reasoning power when it comes to dealing with the material world:

*śrutih pratyakṣam aitihiyam
anumānaṁ catuṣṭayam
pramāṇeṣv anavasthānād*

vikalpāt sa virajyate

“From the four types of evidence—Vedic knowledge, direct experience, traditional wisdom and logical induction—one can understand the temporary situation of the material world, by which one becomes detached from duality.” (Bhāg. 11.19.17)

Reason must support emotions not suffocate them. Reason must give them direction and a goal. Otherwise, sentimentality or fanaticism will ensue. Śrīla Prabhupāda touches upon this topic in a lecture in Māyāpura (Bhāg. 1.8.47). He illustrated this with a story about how material affection or emotion can be misplaced—without reason or knowledge—and how there can be a negative result.

The story is summarized as follows: In front of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s residence there was a neighbor who was beating her child. Prabhupāda inquired from his servant, “Why is this woman beating her child?” The servant brought the news that the boy gave a *paraṭā* to his elder brother who was suffering from typhoid. During typhoid fever, solid food is strictly forbidden, but the boy did not know this. The elder boy felt hungry and thus asked his brother to steal a *paraṭā* for him. Thus, the younger boy became sympathetic to his elder brother and brought him a *paraṭā*, which aggravated the illness. As soon as their mother heard what had happened, she began to severely beat the younger boy, shouting, “Why did you give?” Although he gave in charity and although he acted with affection and sympathy, he received a beating.

Therefore, Prabhupāda concluded that if we do not know where or how our sentiments, even kindness or affection, are applicable, then we are under the laws of nature. We could be punished if we do not apply them properly. We need to exercise caution, knowledge and reason.

If we do not use our observational skills or reasoning power and remain in a kind of institutional bubble, the result can be impersonalism or at least “sheepism.” Commenting on the verse (Bg. 4.10) *vīta-rāga-bhaya-krodhā*, Śrīla Prabhupāda writes: “retaining the personality after liberation from matter frightens them. When they are informed that spiritual life is also individual and personal, they become afraid of becoming persons again, and so they naturally prefer a kind of merging into the impersonal void.” Some persons hide by merging into the void. Other persons hide by merging into an institution, becoming just another face in the crowd without expression, reasoning or desire to observe what’s going on around them; they consider this behavior to be spiritual life. Others are afraid to say what they think because of the possible social ramifications—perhaps they will be isolated, rejected or denied future perks or posts. Thus, both reason and emotions—head and heart—can become gradually atrophied. What, then, is left of a human being?

“Followers of *vaidhi-bhakti* should consider the cultivation of God as the principle work in their life. They should always be engaged in the cultivation of God in a favorable way. They should not cultivate, guided by fear or malice, but do so with love. This is called the favorable way.” (Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Thākura’s *Śrī Caitanya-śikṣāmṛta* 3.1)

Fear is the worst thing; in this context, nothing good can come from it. Better to be a whole person—be ourselves—for better or for worse. Let us maintain integrity. Why worry about what others think or whether we’ll acquire comforts or a good reputation? Yet we prefer to live in fear so that we may not lose a comfortable situation. What is the use of such a life? Vaiṣṇavas consider death preferable to such a life.

Ultimately, emotions need to be purified, uplifted to the point of *rasa*. That is our direction and prospect, not just balanced, mellow material emotions. Let our emotions burst and rage if the direction is toward loving the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Doing so crosses beyond reason, yet is full in *siddhānta*. Directing our love to God is really what is desired according to our philosophy. Thus, we will reasonably cross beyond reason. All feelings should be seen in this light: How to love the Lord and the Vaiṣṇavas? How to express that love? How to act upon that love through service? This is the true purpose of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava emotion. All feelings find their end in the Divine Couple, Rasarāja, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and Mahābhāvamāyī, Śrī Rādhikā.

Our Recourse in Controlling Emotions

To approach the third question, we will take note of Lord Kṛṣṇa's instructions in the *Uddhava-gītā* (Bhāg. 11.20.18–21). There the Lord recommends that whenever the mind deviates from its spiritual position one may bring it under control by allowing the senses limited satisfaction.

The disciples of Śrīla Prabhupāda comment as follows: “For example, although one may eat austerely, from time to time one may accept a reasonable amount of *mahā-prasādam*, so that the mind will not become disturbed. Similarly, one may occasionally relax with other transcendentalists through joking, swimming and so forth. But if such activities are performed excessively, they will lead to a setback in spiritual life.” (Bhāg. 11.20.19 purport)

This is one technique for sense control. The same technique may be applied to the balancing of emotions. One may relax, joke or go swimming with devotees and thus feel emotionally satisfied. Others may satisfy their emotional side by writing, dancing, chanting, cleaning, singing, walking or playing music. Actually, much of what we do is recreation, and there is full scope for satisfied emotions and happiness in the process of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Śrī Kṛṣṇa says, *su-sukham kartum avyayam*—“this path is joyfully performed.”

When, however, one hankers for *sinful* gratification such as illicit sex or intoxication, one must tolerate the mind's insanity and strongly push the mind toward Kṛṣṇa consciousness. In this endeavor, one should never lose sight of the goal, and using intelligence strengthened by the mode of goodness, one should bring the mind under the control of the self. Often this is quite a struggle, and one may become overwhelmed by our old fiend, Mr. Lust. At such times one can realize one's helplessness and pray, begging *Hṛṣīkeśa*, the controller of the senses, to control the senses, especially the mind. Then, the illusion will soon subside, and the gate to sanity will again open wide.

The best technique is to keep the mind always busy in devotional service so that it cannot wander onto the dangerous path of sense gratification: the main attraction being sex desire. The material mind is naturally inclined to accept material sense objects at every moment. Unless the mind is brought under control, there is no possibility of steadiness on the path of spiritual advancement.

These various techniques for sense control can also be used for balancing emotions. Balance is the correct term since both the senses and emotions are alive and active, and they both demand satisfaction, but this satisfaction must be controlled. Although they are presently contaminated, they both must also be used in the process of devotional service. In this way they become purified.

Lord Kṛṣṇa ends this theme by providing the excellent analogy of a horseman: “An expert horseman, desiring to tame a headstrong horse, first lets the horse have his way for a moment and then, pulling the reins, gradually places the horse on the desired path. Similarly, the supreme *yoga* process is that by which one carefully observes the movements and desires of the mind and gradually brings them under full control.” (Bhāg. 11.20.21)

This is the basic answer in our discussion of sense control and emotional balancing. We can compare both the senses and the emotions to wild horses. We must tame them, but we should do so artfully and gradually.

The commentators elaborate, “Just as an expert rider intimately knows the propensities of an untamed horse and gradually brings the horse under control, an expert *yogī* allows the mind to reveal its materialistic propensities and then controls them through superior intelligence. A learned transcendentalist withholds and supplies sense objects so that the mind and senses remain fully controlled, just as the horseman sometimes pulls sharply on the reins and sometimes allows the horse to run freely. The rider never forgets his actual goal or destination, and eventually places the horse on the right path. Similarly, a learned transcendentalist, even though sometimes allowing the senses to act, never forgets the goal of self-realization, nor does he allow the senses to engage in sinful activity. Excessive austerity or restriction may result in great mental disturbance, just as pulling excessively on the reins of a horse may cause the horse to rear up against the rider. The path of self-realization depends upon clear intelligence, and the easiest way to acquire such expertise is surrender to Lord Kṛṣṇa. The Lord says in *Bhagavad-gītā* (10.10),

*teṣāṁ satata-yuktānāṁ
bhajatāṁ prīti-pūrvakam
dadāmi buddhi-yogaṁ taṁ
yena mām upayānti te*

One may not be a great scholar or spiritual intellect, but if one is sincerely engaged in loving service to the Lord without personal envy or personal motivation the Lord will reveal from within the heart the methodology required to control the mind.”

Nothing can replace sincerity, surrender and devotional service. Sincerity and surrender include genuine humility, deep prayer, and dependence on the Lord. Humility, prayer and dependence on the Lord are a part of what “taking shelter” means. Śrī Kṛṣṇa can control, balance and satisfy everyone who takes shelter of Him. He’s waiting to do so.

Along with surrender and taking shelter of the Lord, we must become artful horsemen and learn by experience how to sometimes give in to the senses and emotions, and sometimes restrict them. For example, a *grhastha* couple who are unable to beget children may satisfy their emotional needs by looking after or teaching the children of other devotees. This could be compared to giving the horse his way. They would also be aware of the limitations and expectations in doing so. This could be seen as a restrictive action—the horseman pulling on the reins.

Another example might be parents who lost their child in an accident. I received a moving letter from a Vaiṣṇavī after we discussed this topic, and I include part of it as follows:

“When I lost my son, I came to an understanding that as utterly painful as the situation was, I had a choice, and it was very conscious: I could choose to live or to die. This may sound somewhat dramatic, but I have spoken to other mothers who have lost children, and this is their understanding as well. We’re not supposed to live beyond our children, and to do so one has to choose to do so. I’ve gone through so many ceremonies for my son: his funeral, his fire sacrifices, his *śrāddha* ceremonies, scattering his ashes in the Gaṅgā and the Yamunā, and a ceremony in which we burned all of his broken and bloody things from the accident site. Each time I performed a ceremony it was terrifyingly difficult. I could feel the pain I would have to go through, and I would simply have to face it and go through it, and in going through it, come out to a more healed place on the other side. But in being able to face my pain, going through it and heal, I have also felt so much joy in my life and so much appreciation of people and things.”

This is similar, in principle, to my realization in facing my mother’s death. To be fully alive one must experience the emotional side of life—even the painful side. One can avoid pain or other feelings by denying or pushing down the emotions, but that leaves one bereft of the ability to fully experience life and its attendant maturity, which brings wholeness of being. Better to face life and live.

Of course, if one is not an emotional person, one may not have much to face. There are different kinds of people with different kinds of hearts, and those without a rich emotional life may find this topic somewhat irrelevant.

Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī discusses different types of hard hearts in his *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* as follows: “A hard heart is compared to a lightning bolt, to gold and to shellac. The lightning bolt is very strong and never becomes soft. Similarly, the hearts of those who are engaged in severe austerities and penances do not become very easily softened. The golden heart becomes melted at high temperature, as in ecstatic love. And the shellac heart is very easily melted in slight temperature.” (NOD Ch. 31)

One must transform material emotions into spiritual emotions by the standard purificatory process of *bhakti-yoga*. Should we wait until purity arrives, perhaps *bhāva-bhakti*, before we engage our present feelings in the Lord’s service? No. Feelings are important in the very process of purification that we are practicing. An excellent example of this is Śrīla Prabhupāda advising his disciple to preach, taking the courage of an Englishman and the heart of a Bengali mother. Another example is Śrīla Prabhupāda advising us to chant the holy name like a child calling out for his mother. A child has strong feelings of dependence on his mother. That means using our present feelings in *sādhana-bhakti*.

“Actually the Lord’s holy name has such powerful potency. But there is a quality to such utterances also. It depends on the quality of feeling.” (Bhāg. 1.8.26 purport)

Our feelings are necessary for practicing *bhakti-yoga* right from the beginning. How could we think otherwise? The goal is to love Kṛṣṇa and to feel His presence. If we do not use our feelings now, how and when will we begin to use them?

“A living being cannot be vacant of desires. He is not a dead stone. He must be working, thinking, feeling and willing. But when he thinks, feels and wills materially, he becomes entangled, and conversely when he thinks, feels and wills for the service of the Lord, he becomes gradually freed from all entanglement.” (Bhāg. 1.6.22 purport)

“Unless one’s mind is filled with thoughts of Kṛṣṇa, feelings for Kṛṣṇa and a desire to serve Kṛṣṇa, the mind will be filled with material activities.” (*Caitanya-caritāmṛta* Madhya 13.138 purport)

Of course, spiritual love is more than just feelings, but it also includes feelings. If we avoid feelings and emotions out of fear or simply to escape material entanglement, that avoidance may take us to first base, but we will never make it all the way home without devotional feelings. At some point, we will have to deal with them.

“To cut off the tie of all other affections does not mean complete negation of the finer elements, like affection for someone else. This is not possible. A living being, whoever he may be, must have this feeling of affection for others because this is a symptom of life. The symptoms of life, such as desire, anger, hankerings, feelings of attraction, etc., cannot be annihilated. Only the objective has to be changed.” (Bhāg. 1.8.42 purport)

Śrīla Prabhupāda has explained this point more than once. Hearing and understanding transcendental philosophy is for our own benefit so that we may practice devotional service properly. Otherwise, the tendency to look outside of orthodox Sārasvata Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism will increase more and more.

Here is an excerpt from an article by Klaus Klostermaier, who is Chairman and Professor in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Manitoba, Canada. While living in Vṛndāvana, he met and frequently associated with Śrīla Prabhupāda. He writes, “Western mainstream religions throughout the past few centuries had tried to rationalize their traditions, to repress emotions and to conduct services like business meetings.” In contrast, he refers to Śrīla Prabhupāda, “He preached a religion that was not afraid of emotions.”

Having felt the atrophy of emotions in modern Western civilization, I, like many others, had deteriorated to animal instincts until arriving at the shores of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, where I felt shelter and grew spiritually, culturally and emotionally. Strangely enough though, I gradually perceived a similar atrophy within the Society that had saved me. This atrophy, I feel, is due to fear, impersonalism, authoritarianism and other factors mentioned earlier in this work. I would like to see our Society rise above these so that it may better help people come to Kṛṣṇa.

Thrown from the Horse

Have you ever experienced an emotion rearing its head and throwing you? I was thrown off a horse at the age of twelve. I was winded and desperately gasped for air.

My riding teacher told me, “Get back on and try again.”

I could hardly breathe and thought, “No way!”

He continued with firm conviction, “If you don’t get back on now, you’ll never ride a horse again.”

Sensing the wisdom of his statement, I gathered courage, climbed back up and rode the horse without a problem.

The same principle applies to dealing with emotions—guilt, anger, envy, lamentation, fear or depression. If we are thrown for a loop, we must get up and try again. It may be difficult at the time, but it gets easier as you do it—and almost impossible if you don't.

Let's consider what happens when devotees sometimes fall from grace and become guilt ridden. They may self-flagellate, thinking this a necessary ritual to get back in good graces with the Lord. They may wallow in lamentation, taking shelter of *tamo-guṇa*. Or they may become defensive and try to passionately bolster their self-worth with a brazen front, which leads to self-deception.

I have been with devotees in such states, and often their problem is insecurity. Strengthening a devotee's feeling of self-worth is important in bringing him back to a position where he can try again. Acceptance plays a major role in this endeavor although it is the subtlest element involved. The devotee must feel accepted and not in a condescending way. Since the material energy is so strong, many *sādhakas* will slip on the path and need friendship, understanding and encouragement to continue.

There are additional points about falling from grace and a devotee's response to it.

*yadī kuryāt pramādena
yogī karma vigarhitam
yogenaiva dahed aṁho
nānyat tatra kadācana*

"If, because of momentary inattention, a *yogī* accidentally commits an abominable activity, then by the very practice of *yoga* he should burn to ashes the sinful reaction, without at any time employing any other procedure." (Bhāg. 11.20.25)

The word *yogena* here refers to *jñāna-yoga* and *bhakti-yoga*, since they both have the power to burn *karma* to ashes. The word *aṁhas* or "sin" refers to an accidental falldown against one's desire. Premeditated misuse of the Lord's mercy is much more serious. The Lord prohibits any extraneous purificatory rituals, since the *yoga* systems are themselves the most purifying processes, especially *bhakti-yoga*. If one gives up one's regular devotional practices to perform a special ritual or penance, trying to purify a sinful reaction, one may become guilty of the additional fault of considering *karma* superior to *bhakti*. One should pick oneself up from an accidental falldown and go on enthusiastically with one's devotional duties without being discouraged. Still, one should regret; otherwise, there will be no purification. If, however, one becomes overly depressed about an accidental falldown, one will not have the enthusiasm to continue on the devotional path.

Healing

We have explored some forms of misguided ethos or dysfunctional dynamics in our Society. Over many years, these dynamics have been ushered in by past leaders, although the leaders were well-intentioned and faithful to Śrīla Prabhupāda. An ethos that hampers the free flow of devotion has crept in. We cannot blame one person nor can we consider such leaders condemned by the Lord since He accepts only a devotee's sincerity and positive contributions.

Still, the mistaken moods, ideas and dealings must be clearly understood and rooted out, at least within oneself. One could also avoid persons who espouse or exhibit such unhealthy, obstructive ideas. There is no need to go on a witch-hunt or become angry or bitter. Such strong negative emotions would needlessly damage one. What's done is done. If we consider deeply, it is quite possible that you or I could have done the same or worse.

Here is an interesting statement by Śrīla Prabhupāda's Godbrother, Śrīpāda B.R. Śrīdhara Mahārāja on this theme; it is philosophically deep and also healing for those who have been jostled and bruised while trying to surrender to Mahāprabhu's mission within any organization. "On the whole, we must think that no blame is to be put on others, and it is actually true. We are responsible for our disgrace, our fallen condition. And the path to self-improvement is also similar: we must learn to critique ourselves and appreciate the environment. Our appreciation should especially be for Kṛṣṇa and His devotees, and then gradually everyone else. He has not given anyone the authority to harm us. If it appears that way, it is only superficial and misleading. That anyone can do harm to anyone else is misleading. It is only true on the superficial plane. Of course, this does not condone harming others or ignoring oppression, but from the absolute standpoint there is no harm. When we reach the highest stage of devotion, we shall see that everything is friendly and that our apprehension was wrong. It was a misconception." (*Loving Search for the Lost Servant* pp. 21–22)

Śrīla Prabhupāda had to face many problems in the beginning while establishing ISKCON. He began with nothing and had to deal with all the immaturity, madness and fighting of thousands of neophyte devotees. His tolerance was incredible. Here is an important explanation, taken from a letter he wrote to Ātreya Ṛṣi Dāsa back in February 1972:

"It is not so much that because there may be some faults in our godbrothers and godsisters, or because there may be some mismanagement or lack of cooperation, that this is due to being impersonalists, no. It is the nature of the living condition to always have some fault. Even in the Spiritual World there is some fault and envy—sometimes the Gopis will quarrel over Krishna's favor, and once Krishna was so much attracted to Radharani that by mistake he tried to milk the bull instead of the cow. And sometimes when the Gopis used to put on their dress and make-up for seeing Krishna, they would be too much hasty and smear kumkum and mascara in the wrong places and their ornaments and dresses would appear as if small children had been trying to dress themselves.

"There are so many examples. But it is not the same as material fault or material envy, it is transcendental because it is all based on Krishna. Sometimes when one Gopi would serve Krishna very nicely, the others would say, 'Oh, she has done so nicely, now let me do better for pleasing Krishna.' That is envy, but it is transcendental, without malice. So we shall not expect that anywhere there is any Utopia. Rather, that is impersonalism. People should not expect that even in the Krishna Consciousness Society there will be Utopia. Because devotees are persons, therefore there will always be some lacking. But the difference is that their lacking, because they have given up everything to serve Krishna—money, jobs, reputation, wealth, big educations, everything—their lackings have become transcendental because, despite everything they may do, their topmost intention is to serve Krishna. 'One who is engaged in devotional service, despite the most abominable action, is to be considered saintly because he is rightly situated.'

"The devotees of Krishna are the most exalted persons on this planet, better than kings, all of them, so we should always remember that and, like the bumblebee, always look for the nectar or the best

qualities of a person. Not like the utopians, who are like the flies who always go to the open sores or find the faults in a person, and because they cannot find any utopia, or because they cannot find anyone without faults, they want to become void, merge, nothing—they think that is utopia, to become void of personality. So if there is sometimes slight disagreements between devotees, it is not due to impersonalism, but it is because they are persons, and such disagreements should not be taken very seriously. The devotee is always pessimistic about the material world, but he is very optimistic about spiritual life; so in this way, you should consider that anyone engaged in Krishna's service is always the best person.”

Śrīla Prabhupāda once said that spiritual life is difficult, but material life is impossible. Therefore, a devotee must always be tolerant and look on the bright side. If one expects too much from any spiritual organization, seeking perfection in all dealings, one will be disappointed. If one then wants to become void, or lose oneself, that is impersonalism, the other side of what we discussed earlier in this chapter. In other words, impersonalism lurks in all corners—either blindly covering oneself over, avoiding the variety of personal dealings, including faults, or always seeing faults and focusing on them excessively—both indicate and spawn impersonalism. Healing comes, however, by practicing being personal, and that practice naturally brings one to the point of being personal. Thus, being personal is both the means and the end.

1. A *grhastha* may embrace his wife, daughter, mother or other close relative, but he should be mindful of the warnings in the scriptures about being alone with a member of the opposite sex.

2. David L. Rosehan, Martin P. Seligman, *Abnormal Psychology*, Second Edition, 1989, W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. The description, complete with examples, is clear and explicit. What begins as conscious suppression can, in time, become automatic repression.

"It is the tragedy of all great religions that they violate and pervert the very principles of freedom as soon as they become mass organizations governed by a religious bureaucracy.... This has happened in all religions."

Erich Fromm

CHAPTER TEN – Liquid Refuse

Institutionalism

Authoritarianism and impersonalism have already been discussed in previous chapters. We should somehow rid ourselves of these subtle forms of refuse, liquid refuse. I refer to them as "liquid" because they're subtle; they're difficult to spot and even more difficult to grasp. They're within ISKCON's holy waters and create an unsavory odor, unsavory enough to move many members to the Society's last row, or worse, to drive them away.

Subtle refuse troubles most organizations—religious, governmental and commercial. Reform efforts are warranted in ISKCON, because it is a spiritual organization, and it was founded by a pure devotee of the Lord, Śrīla Prabhupāda, who is our life and soul.

Institutionalism is another form of liquid refuse that repels people away from spiritual shelter. According to Webster's dictionary, institutionalism means "the characteristic rigidity apt to pervade a public or private institution or to affect the outlook of its officials." Rigidity is the key point and it is likely to appear in any organization in time. How do you know that an organization has become rigid or institutionalized? That's a good question with many answers. Let's approach one answer by drawing parallels with business and organizational development, which is said to have four stages. These stages of development are broad and can be applied to other entities such as religious institutions.

(1) A business starts in its entrepreneurial stage. It caters to a small number of customers, takes a low share of the market and is creative and aggressive. Its strength is in quality goods and services, which attract customers. (2) Change, adaptability and innovation characterize the second or growing stage. The business becomes team-based with an expanding market. (3) The third or formal stage is characterized by a leadership, which has formed within an established culture. Other symptoms are formal structures with a fixed, inert and often complacent and bureaucratic mood that is resistant to change and innovation. (4) Crisis and expediency dominate the fourth stage or dying stage wherein mediocrity is firmly established, and sacred cows abound.

A deeper study of the above analysis could be written in the context of religious history, but that is not within the scope of this book. We can, however, briefly view ISKCON's history in this light. We can easily imagine the first stage being set at 26 Second Avenue, with its small but creative beginning and continuing until a few years later, say 1970. The second stage could be seen in the seventies when most of the temples were founded, and Śrīla Prabhupāda traveled extensively and established the GBC. The third stage, with its well-determined zones, management meetings and infrastructure arrived in the eighties.

To see an example of the difference between the first and third stage, just glance at some Back to Godhead magazines or Vyāsa-pūjā books from the sixties or early seventies when the offerings were

written well before clichés and platitudes cemented themselves within the Society. You'll find a certain flair and freedom of expression, which was sometimes couched in Judeo-Christian jargon, the voice of our Western members' cultural milieu. Some of those offerings may be seen as idealistic. Nevertheless, they had a certain heartfelt realness, which is also available today, but dare I say, much less. It seems that a kind of stiffness has settled within our midst.

You may consider the fourth stage. Of course, Lord Caitanya's movement will not die, and we would like to think the same about our organization, but ISKCON may have to go through some serious changes to survive. Such changes will be decided and engineered by the Lord.

Prabhupāda: "Yes. That is preaching. Therefore, we are writing so many books. Unless we take care of the books and preach and read ourselves, understand the philosophy, this Hare Kṛṣṇa will be finished within a few years. Because there will be no life." (Morning Walk 12 Dec. '73 LA)

"Therefore it is failing. Now churches are being closed. Similarly, if you do not keep yourself fit to preach, then your temples will be all closed in due course of time." (Morning Walk 12 Dec. '73 LA)

Once, while riding down the motorway in a van with devotees, I was thinking about the problems within our Society and was feeling somewhat discouraged. I glanced out the window and saw of an old, rotten tree stump on the side of the motorway. It was big and must have supported a huge tree in its day. Inside it was a fresh, budding green sprout, surely its offspring.

Suddenly, I understood the tree's significance. Sensing a response to my despair, hope came: "Our movement will survive in any event, no matter how difficult things may get. There's nothing to worry about. But the external form of ISKCON may somehow be altered, the old falling away to make room for the new."

Confirming this point, Drutakarma Prabhu recently wrote, "A new ISKCON will be built on the foundation of authentic personal relationships in devotional service, and not on legislated bureaucratic control systems."

My purpose is not to over dramatize nor give credence to deviant sects. In other words, the idea of new "sprouts" may give credence to schisms like *ṛtviks*, *sahajiyās*, pseudo *bābājīs*, new-age mystics and so on. My desire is to see an authentic, orthodox form of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, the kind that Śrīla Prabhupāda envisioned—one full of love, trust, integrity and freedom. Unfortunately, now many devotees and neutral observers often see signs of something else. Yet little is being done to address these issues.

According to Burke Rochford's 1996 survey,¹ ISKCON has exhibited symptoms of authoritarianism: "Many devotee respondents expressed the view that ISKCON suffers from poor management and that leaders are not always responsive to those they serve. There is reason to suspect that this only breeds mistrust and a sense that local as well as regional leaders are out of touch with the needs and lives of the average member." The terms "not always responsive" and "out of touch" indicate an authoritarian ethos.

According to former gurukula students in their presentation made to the GBC in 1999, ISKCON has exhibited symptoms of authoritarianism and institutionalization. Two young ladies, Kṛṣṇa Devatā dāsī

and Śakuntalā dāsī, brazenly declared, “I see before me a group of people who have simply sold out. It’s not about Absolute Truth anymore. Most of you are out of touch with yourselves, and out of touch with everyone else. How many resolutions must we write before we realize that this is not a structural problem. We are facing alienation and isolation. We don’t know each other. As a movement, we no longer have Śrīla Prabhupāda’s living force, his vision. We are fragmented, disenfranchised, disillusioned and uninspired. As a movement, we do not have trust in our leaders, nor do we have trust in ourselves.”

Ironically, most of ISKCON’s early members joined its ranks because of its revolutionary spirit and penetrating, bold statements of Absolute Truth thrown in the face of stultified, materialistic conformity. ISKCON’s youth have expressed their own truths, yet it seems that too few have seriously listened to their words.

GBC member, H.H. Bhakti Tīrtha Swami, also commented on this trend: “The body is signaling that there’s something wrong, vomiting or diarrhea. It’s better to know about the bacteria that are intruding into the system. When we find ourselves lacking enthusiasm—that’s a signal that something is wrong. And when we find the entire community like that, there’s serious issues at hand.”

I agree with the Swami. If we know about a problem, we can solve it. Pretending that it doesn’t exist will not help it go away. The symptoms are signals that we must act positively for rectification. If not, the only alternative is further suffering. Knowing that some leaders are aware of the problems gives us hope.

Bhakti Tīrtha Swami later added, “It is often difficult for leaders to change the way they think. Many years ago, I used to go to Switzerland to work with the United Nations. I was preaching to some diplomats there, and soon I began to notice that they’re in their own world. I worked mostly with leaders from third world countries, and I began to notice that they own a Limousine or Mercedes, and they collect pounds, marks or dollars. When they go back to their own country, they act as big people, visiting some of their friends, showing off. They don’t really have to be so much a part of the environment that they’re representing. And so consciously or unconsciously they begin to lose touch with some of the real needs and concerns of the people because often whatever happens doesn’t really affect them.”

Leaders losing touch with other’s needs has been seen many times. For example, leaders who gets separate meals may be unaware that the devotees’ *prasādam* is inadequate. Another example may be that wherever a leader goes, he is treated with respect and given facility so he has no idea that devotees in general are not given even a slight welcome.

Here is a specific example offered by a respected senior devotee: “In one temple, the local GBC and temple president have a ‘no guest’ policy, because once some guests overstayed their welcome, were bothersome, and couldn’t be easily removed. Although this is the temple’s official policy, they do allow guests if the guests are disciples of the local guru, or are coming to benefit the temple. Devotees who want to move to the community but not work full time for the temple cannot stay for even a few days while they look for a place to live. The local leaders appear to lack sympathy for the inconvenience caused to well-behaved ISKCON members. When the local GBC man travels, he gets a reception and accommodation. He is out of touch with the difficulties encountered when someone travels to his zone and has to stay in an expensive hotel.”

If many persons from different quarters are expressing the same view, even using the same terminology (“out of touch”), that view is likely to be true. One way to know if you or your organization has become institutionalized is that people tell you.

There have been indications that men at the top are aware of the problems. In the ISKCON Communications Journal 1999, Professor Larry D. Shinn wrote an article entitled, “Reflections on Spiritual Leadership: The Legacy of Śrīla Prabhupāda.” He stated, “The good news is that there are many signs in America, Europe and elsewhere in the world that gurus and other leaders in ISKCON recognize that they must live and act in ways that are more consistent with their teachings. Conferences held in Europe during the past half dozen years reveal a more contrite and apologetic tone in public self-presentations by devotees. However, Prabhupāda's legacy is richer still in the lesson it would teach to contemporary devotees: that the quality of one's spiritual practice and growth must undergrid one's theological and scriptural erudition and public and private actions. *His lesson is for the developing spiritual seeker—not for one seeking a religious role in ISKCON as an institution* [italics mine].”

As long as we are only seeking a religious role in the institution, there is no urgent need to concern ourselves with deeper, subtler problems: elitism, authoritarianism, the lack of love and trust, the lack of a brahminical ethos, the lack of unity and integrity. We only have to exhibit remorse and an apologetic tone when things go wrong. Then we can safely continue in our comfortable, religious roles. But if we truly desire to develop love of God and widely spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness, we must be willing to sacrifice everything and anything, and address these problems at the deepest levels, beginning with ourselves. Introspection and self-reform are the hardest work. They separate saints from official religious statesmen.

We must be willing to sacrifice in the same manner as we did in the beginning, upon joining the movement—sacrificing our career, our family inheritance, our “friends” and other social benefits. That same mood must be enacted again from within our religious role in the institution. We must reject all extraneous considerations or selfish motives, and act earnestly by identifying and adjusting motives, attachments and ill behavior, gladly watching them fall away. The same results will occur as they did in the beginning—Kṛṣṇa will deeply reciprocate with us.

If a devotee is not introspective, *anarthas* will grow in his heart. Like weeds, they will choke the devotional creeper. He will tend to become absorbed in externals, which are none other than the material energy. A subtle form of *karma-mīśra* contamination will fester, which creates a superficial atmosphere devoid of spiritual love. Instead of basing relationships upon what we *are*, the relationships will tend to be based on what we *have*.

Śrīla Prabhupāda's sannyāsa guru, Śrīpāda Bhakti Prajñāna Keśava Gosvāmī wrote, “Due to the influence of Kali, eating, leisure and material security unfortunately tend to become the primary interest of any religious sect.”

Therefore, devotees naturally want to increase their social value and be appreciated by increasing their status of externals instead of increasing their inner qualities such as humility, integrity, kindness, simplicity, generosity, honesty or sensitivity. Because of this trend, these qualities may have little value in a community. They may not be rewarded but may be seen as unimportant or even as weaknesses.

A similar opinion was voiced by Bhakti Tīrtha Swami in his Gaura-pūrṇimā 2000 Festival Seminar: “Often our Society breeds people who take to leadership or a certain status, and sometimes we have glorified advancement based on those positions. And so it begins to engender a culture where people are constantly trying to be in charge of others to control more assets and facilities as if that constitutes developing the *bhakti-latā-bija*.”

In this regard, David Frawley writes, “...in life the outer goals commonly mask themselves as the inner. This is the great tragedy of society from which the greatest confusion and illusion arises. We veil our seeking of wealth and power as a pursuit of truth or as serving our religion. We use religion as a mask for promoting commercial and political goals. This is not something we necessarily do consciously. Most of the time we are victims of our own desires, which we blindly transfer into the religious realm where they have no place.”

“We like to feel that what we are doing has some greater value, that it is for some higher good, even if it is not. This has been the cause of the violence done in the name of religion. It is not the religions themselves in their true spirit that promote conflict but those of non-religious values who mask their greed in religious terms, not only deceiving others but deceiving themselves. Hence the modern mind has revolted against religion as a form of corruption and domination, as a perverted form of materialism, which it has often been.” (*God, Sages and Kings / Vedic Secrets of Ancient Civilization* pp.241)

We should be careful, therefore, with whom we associate or approach for shelter. We must use discrimination. We must walk down the path of *bhakti* with attention, keeping our eyes wide open, looking for signs of incorrect dealings, which may indicate deviation both within others and within ourselves. Neophyte devotees may believe that anyone with a title has a halo, but they should realize that simply by having a position does not necessarily mean that one is free from lust, greed or desires, which plague neophyte devotees.

Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote, “There are many jealous people in the dress of Vaiṣṇavas in this Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement, and they should be completely neglected. There is no need to serve a jealous person who is in the dress of a Vaiṣṇava. When Narottama dasa Ṭhākura says *chāḍiyā vaiṣṇava sevā nistāra peyeche kebā*, he is indicating an actual Vaiṣṇava, not an envious or jealous person in the dress of a Vaiṣṇava.” (Cc. Madhya 1.218 purport)

“Unfortunately, in this Age of Kali there are many mundane persons in the dress of Vaiṣṇavas, and Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura has described them as disciples of Kali.” (Cc. Madhya 1.220 purport) These statements may also be applied to persons in other Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava institutions.

My purpose in quoting these excerpts here is not to lash out at all ISKCON leaders, because many of them are selflessly serving the Vaiṣṇavas. Furthermore, there has been enough leader-bashing in recent years, making life difficult for leaders with integrity and sincerity. In these quotes, however, Śrīla Prabhupāda and Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura are cutting through illusion with the searing eye of discrimination, and we must do the same. A mature view based upon discrimination and knowledge is necessary to bring about a balance. Without such vision, one could be misled by a pseudo Vaiṣṇava posing as a spiritual authority. This point may surprise some and may seem juvenile to others, but one should not be naive. Otherwise, the surprise may appear on our own doorstep.

While living in England years ago, I was once invited to speak at a Nāma- Haṭṭa group, and I called the Vaiṣṇava hosts on the telephone to confirm the meeting. The wife was home, and she suggested I call later to speak with her husband. She then requested to speak to me about something that was bothering her, and I naturally agreed. With a choked voice, she began describing that she and her husband had recently had a baby and that their finances were meager. Her voice strained until she sobbed, “But our Guru Mahārāja has demanded that we give him thousands of pounds for his project.” Trying to pacify her, I assured her that I would speak with others about this and somehow solve the problem. Preceptors, of course, should not behave in this way. We should therefore begin discriminating based on individual qualities. Neither blind acceptance nor blind rejection will lead us to the desired goal.

One may rightly question, “How can I discriminate without becoming a chronic fault-finder and offender?” The answer is simple, but the application may take practice. A Vaiṣṇava always tries to see the good in others, overlooking their faults. This allows a Vaiṣṇava to be kind, simple and pure-hearted. This vision should always be encouraged. “Overlooking” means that one sees other’s faults but does not emphasize or dwell on them—not that one is oblivious to faults—being naive or foolish. Yet one should not focus on others’ faults, knowing well that everyone has faults, especially oneself.

If, however, one cannot help but notice serious, negative behavior in a devotee, deviant behavior that may even hinder others’ progress, one should act accordingly. What does it mean to act accordingly? That depends on the circumstances, and it would be tedious to describe many cases. In some cases, one can speak to the person directly, which would require humility and tact. Correcting others is an art in itself, and for further understanding, one may refer to a more detailed account of Vaiṣṇava etiquette. In other cases, one may approach his peers or superiors in the hope that they will correct him. If these methods bear no fruit, one may simply tolerate and avoid contact with the person, or go further and search out another spiritual leader. Finally, in severe cases such as abuse, one may seek justice in a court of law.

The classic example of Bali Mahārāja is helpful. His mentor, Śukrācārya, was guilty of transgressing the proper behavior of a spiritual master by advising Bali to refrain from surrendering to Lord Viṣṇu in the form of Vāmana Deva, who he knew was the Supreme Lord. According to the *Mahābhārata, Udyoga* 179.25, which is quoted by Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī, one should reject such a spiritual master who does not know the proper path. Bali Mahārāja directly dealt with Śukrācārya and is eternally glorified in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* for using his discrimination. This is an extreme example, but it sets a precedent.

There is also the opposite fault of rejecting a *guru*, who is actually a true Vaiṣṇava, to approach a more learned or charismatic one. It may happen that a *guru* is wrongly rejected, because he does not fit into a superficial, stereotypical mold or because a disciple attributes the faults of the organization to him.

Narahari Sarkāra Ṭhākura states (*Śrī Kṛṣṇa-bhajanāmṛta* verse 54): “If a father or spiritual master or husband is not possessed of outstanding qualities, even then they are always worshipable.”

One should be balanced in the approach to discrimination and not allow oneself to enter into a witch-hunt mentality, viewing oneself as superior to all or as the romantic revolutionary who will expose the evil ones. This type of extremist mood is easy to fall into.

During the early eighties, I visited America and was subjected to an irate devotee, who had imbibed a fanatic mood of reform. Unexpectedly, he angrily insisted that he loved Prabhupāda more than I did. He ranted at me without apparent reason, and I felt the biting result of misapplied, unbalanced behavior.

Reform and discrimination should continue, but they must be done with a cool head. A devotee with a cool head keeps in mind that deviation could appear in his own heart. Therefore, he does not passionately blame others. Experienced, intelligent and detached members should lead the way. Otherwise, liquid refuse will remain.

How to Rid Ourselves of Institutionalization?

Again, this is a good question with many answers. Here are a few simple suggestions. My observations tell me that one way to avoid the common rigidity that sets in after years of working within an institution is to do something outside of the institution. This work does not necessarily include one's role as a holy man or spiritual leader. This helps one surpass the social or psychological barriers that create rigidity. Of course, this would have to be done carefully without risking one's spiritual principles.

The example of Bhakti Tirtha Swami is applicable here. He worked with the UN, and now conducts seminars on management and self-development in secular circles. Also, H.H. Smita Kṛṣṇa Swami accompanied one of his disciples through Twelve-step therapy to morally support him and to see how the group interacted. He developed working relationships with people who did not know anything about spiritual life or his respected position as a *svāmī*. Another senior preacher in Europe attended some courses on public speaking, which complimented his personality as well as his lectures.

A more conventional way to avoid institutionalization is to do front-line preaching. While preaching, one's respected position in the institution is unacknowledged by the new comers, who are unaware of the institution's hierarchy or celebrities. This is one reason why the initial stage of any religious movement is devoid of rigidity—everyone is immersed in dynamic pioneer preaching, strongly convincing and converting others to their beloved path, without considerations of prestige or position.

According to the previous comparison of organizational development, rigidity does not appear until the third or formal stage. In fact, institutionalization cannot arise in the first two stages simply because there is no "institution" as such. Are all organizations destined to arrive at rigidity sooner or later? Many do, but the trick is to minimize or avoid it by the following:

1) Clearly know the goals and essential principles of the organization. Always clarify the vision and goals.

2) Be open to ideas, suggestions and feedback (even diverse or challenging feedback) from all members of the organization, including less significant members, or even from non-members. Cāṅkya Paṇḍita wrote, "No one should be disrespected. Everyone's opinion should be heard. The wise should heed even a child's sensible words."

- 3) Have a clear conception between the essential substance and the accompanying form.
- 4) Carefully adjust details, not principles, according to time, place and circumstance to achieve the goal.
- 5) Care about individuals, especially the ones that cannot benefit you in some way.
- 6) Encourage others' creativity and individual achievements.
- 7) Do something devotionally outrageous! Knock on someone's door and beg him to chant the Holy Name. Embrace a drunkard and declare that God loves him. In Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, Lord Kṛṣṇa tells Uddhava to offer obeisances to a dog, cow or ass.
- 8) Increase both the quality and quantity of your *sādhana*.
- 9) Become spiritually advanced. This is most important yet most difficult.

Śrīla Prabhupāda

We can see from his behavior that Śrīla Prabhupāda was not institutionalized. He related to people as people, or should we say, as spirit souls. In ordinary instances, he was not absorbed in or obsessed with his institutional role as the founder-*ācārya*. That is to say, sometimes he had to consider his institutional role: he insisted that we place his title as founder-*ācārya* before his name on official printed matter and on institutional buildings. In ordinary instances, however, he exhibited aloofness to that role. The following stories illustrate this point.

Once, Śrīla Prabhupāda visited Amsterdam to install the Deities of Lord Jagannātha in the temple. He noticed many discrepancies. The local devotees had not prepared the altar properly, and there were no grains, fruits or flowers for the fire sacrifice. Newspaper reporters had arrived along with TV cameramen, and the temple was crowded with guests.

When he came to perform the sacrifice, Śrīla Prabhupāda angrily asked, "Why are there no flowers? Where are the fruit and grains? You didn't bring Lord Jagannātha fruit? Who is responsible for this?"

A devotee ran off and later came back with a large bowl of fruit salad.

Prabhupāda got even angrier, "You are bringing fruit salad for the fire sacrifice?" In front of the TV cameras, Prabhupāda shouted at the local manager, "You are not fit to be temple president. Lord Jagannātha is neglected! You are calling Him to come, and now you are neglecting Him!"

Nearby was a regular guest, a hippie to whom the devotees had sometimes instructed, "Just chant Hare Kṛṣṇa." Therefore, when he saw Śrīla Prabhupāda getting angry, he innocently said, "Don't get angry, just chant Hare Kṛṣṇa."

Prabhupāda looked at him with wide eyes and said, “Oh, you have given me very good advice. You have done the best thing today.” Prabhupāda immediately got his bead bag and started chanting *japa*. He was wise and so humble that he took advice even from a hippie.

A well-known story about Śrīla Prabhupāda at the New York City airport also demonstrates his aloofness from his hierarchical position. Many devotees surrounded him in the departure lounge, while he was waiting to board. There were hundreds of devotees from various temples eager for the opportunity of intimate exchanges with His Divine Grace. A frantic airline official requested the devotees to vacate the area since they were preventing passengers entering the departure lounge.

Rūpānuga Dāsa jumped upon a chair and loudly announced, “Hare Kṛṣṇa! All devotees must leave this lounge immediately. All devotees leave right now.”

Everyone was stunned, not knowing what to do, but Śrīla Prabhupāda quickly rose and began walking to the exit until Rūpānuga said, “Oh, not *you* Śrīla Prabhupāda.” Much was revealed within that reflex action. Śrīla Prabhupāda demonstrated his deep humility and pridelessness.

In Hyderabad, the devotees hired a cook. When Prabhupāda found out, he became angry. He said that they had hired a common sweeper, who had disguised himself as a *brāhmaṇa* so that he could make some money. Prabhupāda also said that the food had been cooked in such bad consciousness that it had contaminated the innocent farmers who had eaten it. Then he looked at his disciples and said, “Why didn’t you ask me to cook?” He said that he would have cooked for them, and all the devotees felt ashamed. Śrīla Prabhupāda expected his disciples to ask him to cook if there was no one else qualified to do so, because he wanted to serve in any capacity. He didn’t feel himself above serving the devotees.

“Prabhupāda acted like one member of the discussion. He was not wearing his big founder-*ācārya* hat and dictating all the rules. He was encouraging us, letting us voice our frank opinions without inhibitions, and training us to become his independently thoughtful men.” (H.H. Lokanātha Svāmī in his book *Festivals* p. 219)

These stories illustrate the fact that Śrīla Prabhupāda wasn’t focused on his institutional position as the founder-*ācārya* of ISKCON but rather as a humble servant of the Lord. He did not expect anyone to respect him simply because he was the founder of the movement. Furthermore, he was willing to learn, under most circumstances, from his own disciples or from people who were not even devotees.

This behavior seems simple, but it is not so easy to follow, because the tendency to identify with, depend upon, covet, misuse and over emphasize one’s position is extremely strong, so strong that very few can completely free themselves from it. This holds true even for honest, humble devotees, who have the best intentions.

In the West, ISKCON was previously the only Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava organization and is still by far the most prominent one. This, however, engendered a sense of monopoly, at least in the West, because the only way to Śrī Kṛṣṇa was through ISKCON. This is, in one sense, natural, or at least logical. This sense of monopoly has been an accomplice to ushering in elitism and authoritarianism.

Whilst residing in the UK, I experienced monopolization in trying to get a telephone installed in my flat. At that time, British Telecom was the only telephone company in the country. The installation fee was approximately two hundred dollars, and there were no fringe benefits or services offered. But as soon as the cable companies started springing up, offering free installation along with many extras like free local weekend calls, British Telecom suddenly dropped their prices and began offering many wonderful extra services, like free call-back, answering service and dirt-cheap long distance calls. They lost a few million customers but managed to stay in business.

Similarly, we have also neglected our devotee customers in many ways. One area of neglect has been the lack of training and education. Until recently, devotees had little assistance in developing their personal skills, both devotional and vocational, and in receiving counseling or simply getting friendly, encouraging association. Now, in some places, we are offering these services for our members, and we have become a bit friendlier. In one sense, having competitors is healthy, but the point is that we let our success and position go to our head.

Personally, I have always tried to shun any position or title to avoid the above tendencies, but even being a senior preacher is a type of designation. Being known as a “Prabhupāda disciple” is also often viewed as such. This can be understood by the way devotees ask, “Are you a Prabhupāda disciple?” as if it were a designation. I have found myself guilty as well, expecting others to respect and provide for me. It is not just “those big leaders”—it’s also me.

We must reject not only all designations, but also all expectations of how others respond to us. Expecting or insisting on service from subordinates emerges from the innate conditional tendency to enjoy and lord it over others. This tendency is all-pervading among conditioned souls, so we should not be so surprised to find it within ourselves. In fact, if we’re going to expect anything, we should expect this tendency to emerge from within us at some point.

The further we advance, however, the closer we come to total abnegation of the false self along with the entire gamut of concomitant tendencies. This is one side of self-realization: *muktir hitvā anyathā rūpaṁ* (Liberation means rejecting misconceptions of the self) and *sarvopādhi-vinirmuktam* (Bhakti frees one from all false designations). Thus, ultimately these are obstacles in spiritual life.

During a festival, a Godbrother whom I had not seen for a few years came walking by. As we crossed paths he asked, “Have you seen my disciple?” Surprised that he didn’t greet me, I wondered why he assumed that I knew his disciple; I had never heard of him. He walked away unaware of my disappointment. Although qualified in many ways, this Vaiṣṇava seemed to be focused on his position. Moreover, using the term, “my disciple” is a kind of misnomer, which probably should be minimized if only to curb the possibility of such a mentality. In other words, we would do good not to assume that we have achieved such infallible spiritual positions simply due to our official, institutional one.

Each leader must remind himself of the proper focus. Hearing the pastimes of pure devotees such as Śrīla Prabhupāda is helpful medicine for getting a grip on spiritual reality and breaking the hold of institutionalization.

1. Burke Rochford once lived in our Los Angeles community. He is a sociologist, and was commissioned by the GBC to conduct a survey for the 1996 Centennial.

“All glories to the steady course of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s pastimes in this world! All glories to his fixed position, more dependable than the steady orbit of the sun in the sky! And all glories to his transcendental intelligence in preaching by which he changed his ways according to the indications of Kṛṣṇa for the best results in presenting Kṛṣṇa consciousness to the unwilling conditioned souls. May his Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement continue to reflect these two strengths of change and endurance.”

Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswāmī,
Prabhupāda Nectar Vol. 4 pp. 260

CHAPTER ELEVEN – Substance and Form

Substance and form can be illustrated with the example of a cup of milk. In this analogy, the cup is the form and the milk is the substance. The substance milk is very tasty and healthy. It can be drunk directly from a cow, so it is not dependent on the cup for its existence or for its consumption.

Substance is independent of form, but the converse cannot be said. Rather, form is dependent on substance. In fact, form has no meaning or function without substance. Without substance, form withers and dies just as rice husks wither after the rice is extracted. Yet form is useful in conjunction with substance and usually supports its storage, transport and distribution. Not everyone drinks milk directly from a cow, so containers are handy.

One can observe substance and form in almost every aspect of human life. For example, when a man and woman marry, they dress beautifully, invite friends and relatives, and have a ceremony. The substance of the ceremony is their loving relationship. The ceremony is meant only to enhance the relationship.

The same could be said of the initiation ceremony between *guru* and disciple. The benefit from such a transcendental ceremony can be minimized if the externals become the disciple’s focus, and he thinks that with his new Sanskrit name, he is socially acceptable or even superior to others. And if the *guru* feels accomplishment in giving beads and a name to the disciple, without training in *siddhānta* and coaching in *sādhana*, he reduces substance and cheapens a sacred rite.

*upanīya tu yaḥ śiṣyaṁ veda-madhyāpayed dvijaḥ
sankalpaṁ sa-rahasyaṁ ca tam ācāryaṁ pracakṣate*

“An ācārya is not one who only confers the sacred thread. He trains his disciples in sacrifice and teaches them the confidential meaning of the Vedas. Such a spiritual master is an ācārya, according to saintly authorities.” (Manu-saṁhitā 2.140)

Distinguishing between minor components and essentials requires intelligence. A lack of intelligence is illustrated in the following story. Once upon a time, a woman made fine arrangements for her daughter’s wedding. However, during the wedding a cat ran into the middle of the assembly. "Oh no!" thought the mother. "What to do?" She spotted a basket, promptly grabbed it, trapped the cat underneath it, and carried on with the ceremony undisturbed. Years later, the daughter had her own family, and the time arrived for the granddaughter's marriage. Rich arrangements were again made, but the daughter felt something amiss. Then she thought, "Ah, I remember at my wedding, mother placed a cat in a basket." She then found a cat, put a basket on it and carried on with the proceedings. From that time, her family followed this tradition.

The tendency to carry form without substance always exists, because using a template from the past is easier than working with one's intelligence and applying principles to the present.

Many of us are understandably cautious of making adjustments, because Śrīla Prabhupāda, noticing our speculative, inventive nature, told us not to change anything. What Śrīla Prabhupāda established does not need to be changed—it needs to be followed. Yet there's a need to apply his teachings, by using our intelligence to fill in details based upon the core values and general approach that he gave us. Pensive, senior members of our Society can lead the way. Room for adjustment is especially relevant when there is strife, disunity and alienation. We must look at our organization and ourselves, and reasonably adjust whatever is blocking the way forward.

ISKCON – Body and Soul

Śrīla Prabhupāda once said, "ISKCON is my body." On the spiritual platform, there is no difference between the body and the soul. Therefore, ISKCON members consider that ISKCON is not different from Śrīla Prabhupāda. This is true as long as the members are on the spiritual platform, which is maintained by following Prabhupāda's instructions. As long as we fulfill Prabhupāda's desires and represent his will, then ISKCON *is* Prabhupāda's body. But if the members of ISKCON are not following his instructions and thus are not on the spiritual platform, there can be a difference between the present-day ISKCON and Śrīla Prabhupāda. In other words, there can come a point where ISKCON ceases being ISKCON.

The following quotation provides background for this understanding: "The present Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement is nondifferent from the pastimes performed by Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu when He was personally present, for the same principles are being followed and the same actions performed without fail." (Cc. Antya 5.88 purport)

The nondifference between the pastimes of Caitanya Mahāprabhu and the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement is not whimsically or unconditionally declared. Rather, the oneness is based on the same principles being followed and the same actions being performed. Prabhupāda did not write that whatever the situation, regardless of whether we follow or not, the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement is the same as Mahāprabhu's pastimes. There is a gulf of difference between these two situations.

Understanding this point is important. Otherwise, strange ideas can arise. For example, if one thinks, "ISKCON is Prabhupāda and Prabhupāda is perfect, so ISKCON is also perfect. I'm in ISKCON and therefore I'm also perfect." From this assumption, varieties of unscrupulous behavior could arise in the name of Prabhupāda or ISKCON. Hopefully, no one thinks in this way, but the point is that we must keep the focus on the substance, not the form. Then everything will come to the right position.

Śrīla Prabhupāda also once said that Lord Jagannātha could, in the future, leave the Purī temple and come to the ISKCON Purī temple. Lord Jagannātha is not bound to stay in that ancient and beautiful *mandira* if the devotees are not serving Him with love and acting properly. The Lord will only stay where there is purity and devotion. Similarly, *guru* and Kṛṣṇa are not bound to stay in an institution just because it has their names on it. The Jagannātha Purī temple also has Lord Jagannātha's name on it.

This notion may worry some readers, and indeed, it should. It may also prod devotees to follow Śrīla Prabhupāda's mood and instructions. Such following will ensure that we maintain what Śrīla Prabhupāda gave us and not be complacent, thinking that because we possess ISKCON letterhead all is guaranteed and nothing can go wrong. Such thinking is dull and sectarian.

The next question naturally arises, "What is the substance of ISKCON?" Another book would be needed to fully answer this question, because the substance of ISKCON is pure devotional service to the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and Śrīla Prabhupāda's instructions point to that substance. Thus far, I have mentioned a few principles of *bhakti* in this work. The science of *bhakti* is the subtlest science for it deals with the soul, spiritual freedom and spiritual love. Unlimited books are required to explain this subject.

In the Introduction, I compared ISKCON to the Yamunā river, because they both offer the Lord's mercy to many people. Nowadays, refuse is expected in most rivers and is found in most organizations. Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura also experienced his fair share of institutional contamination. Such contamination is external and introduced, often unknowingly, by an organization's own members. I feel that most devotees want to improve the present situation in ISKCON and are prepared to adjust details to go forward. Improvement calls for intelligence and realization coupled with honesty and integrity.

If we have the same purpose—to please *guru* and Gaurāṅga—then going forward, although slow will be sure. I am hopeful; otherwise writing a book on this topic has no meaning. How to go forward? That is not so clear. Perhaps these points will cause others to further consider our needs.

The ISKCON river has a subtle, internal system of cleansing itself. Although there is no palpable infrastructure for internal cleansing, somehow or other, cleansing does happen. Presently there seems to be pressure bubbling up deep within the entire river—a move to cleanse itself. If we possess a clear vision between substance and form, sorting through whatever emerges from the river will be much easier.

Again, form is not bad. It's a great help if it carries the substance. That is the purpose of the Governing Body Commission. This GBC concept was given by the topmost *paramahansa*, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura because he wanted substance to be carried into the future. He, however, also recognized that established churches or organizations spoil substance.

"The idea of an organized church in an intelligible form, indeed, marks the close of the living movement. The great ecclesiastical establishments are the dykes and the dams to retain the current that cannot be held by any such contrivances... Neither can there be any earthly contrivance for the permanent preservation of the life eternal on this mundane plane on the popular scale.

"The original purpose of the established churches of the world may not be always objectionable. But no stable religious arrangement for instructing the masses has yet been successful. The supreme Lord Shree Krishna Chaitanya in pursuance of the teaching of the scriptures enjoins all absence of conventionalism for the teachers of the eternal religion. It does not follow that the mechanical adoption of the unconventional life by any person will make him a fit teacher of religion. Regulation is necessary for controlling the inherent worldliness of conditioned souls. But no mechanical regulation has any value even for such a purpose. The bonafide teacher of religion is neither any product nor the favorer of any

mechanical system. In his hands no system has likewise the chance of degenerating into a lifeless arrangement. The mere pursuit of fixed doctrines and fixed liturgies cannot hold a person to the true spirit of doctrine or liturgy.” (Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura’s essay in *The Harmonist*, January 1932)

Śrīpāda B.R. Śrīdhara Dev Gosvāmī says in *Follow the Angels*, “Organization is only necessary to spread truth to the people for their benefit. Mere organization has no value in and of itself. When the organization is distributing something healthy to the atmosphere, that organization is welcome. Otherwise, if any organization fails to distribute truth, it goes amiss, it commits suicide, and it fails to do its proper duty.”

The ISKCON organization can provide many advantages. The foremost advantage is that it facilitates powerful, strategic preaching: attracting new members at all levels and from all walks of life. ISKCON is a medium for offering Kṛṣṇa consciousness to people all over the world. It also provides devotees with variegated devotional association and devotional engagements including farms, schools, restaurants, Deity worship, extensive literature, large-scale festivals, devotee business opportunities, and international and local congregations. Even devotees who have joined other Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava organizations appreciate ISKCON’s large-scale preaching.

Most of us desire to see Kṛṣṇa consciousness spread to every town and village because that is the desire of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu. In the history of Vaiṣṇavism, however, we are the first generation of Vaiṣṇavas to preach globally, and the task is not easy. Preaching in the West, in any form, is a battle. And faced with the added problem of having to use an international organizational infrastructure to carry traditional Vaiṣṇavism—we’re walking on thin ice.

Therefore, we can expect trouble. On top of these difficulties, our beloved Śrīla Prabhupāda left us quite early. Almost all the senior leaders in ISKCON were in their mid-twenties when he left and they took the heavy responsibility on their shoulders. Some accepted disciples after only seven years of *bhakti-sādhana*. Accordingly, while discriminating and not being naive about our leadership, one must also be broad-minded and mature, which is the nature of a Vaiṣṇava.

Narahari Sarakāra Ṭhākura advises us as follows: “No one should find fault with a Vaiṣṇava for his activities or behavior. What person is free from the influence of Kali-yuga or has perfect, pure behavior and action?” (*Śrī Kṛṣṇa-bhajanāmṛta* Verse 39)

One may still question that if the institution no longer carries the original ideals of the founder, is it the same institution or just a reflected form? In other words, if the Yamunā becomes so contaminated that the pollution becomes overwhelmingly prominent—is it still the Yamunā? Or is it pollution with some Yamunā water sprinkled on it? Should a faithful follower of the original concept continue to support an institution that has become overly contaminated? It’s a question of degree and of subjective opinion. The more critical among us have given up hope, remaining nominally connected to ISKCON or not connected at all. Others feel that we are just going through growing pains, that existing faults are slowly being rectified, and the situation is gradually improving. And still others may feel that there are no serious problems.

If I had to slot myself into one of these three categories, I would choose the second since I still feel hopeful. Yet I would say that, although moving in the right direction, we are proceeding painfully slow

and are causing many devotees, including our founder-*ācārya*, unnecessary distress. This distress is due to many factors, but one important factor is sectarian institutional pride, which is closely linked with authoritarianism and focusing on form.

Sectarian institutional pride is just another brand of pride, and is founded on the premise that we like to present ourselves as indestructibly absolute. “I’m the center. Therefore, serve me. I carry the Lord’s authority. Come through me. You cannot attain Him otherwise.” But even Śrīla Prabhupāda didn’t think or present himself as such. He truly felt, “I am not so expert. I have no good qualities. If I have any credit, it is simply that I’ve followed the instructions of my Guru Mahārāja.” Factually, Prabhupāda was and is absolute, but he did not think of himself as absolute. He commonly asked for opinions and advice before proceeding in many situations, and after weighing everything carefully, he made decisions.

When Śrīla Prabhupāda visited Stockholm, he lectured on the four classes of men: *brāhmaṇas* (first class men), *kṣatriyas* (second class men), *vaiśyas* (third class men), and *sūdras* (fourth class men). A student in the audience stood up and challenged, “You’re sitting on a very high seat and are decorated very beautifully with flowers. You think that you’re a first-class man, don’t you?”

Śrīla Prabhupāda was silent. For a moment, nothing happened. Devotees became concerned. Prabhupāda softly spoke under his breath, “Actually, I am not a first-class man. I am a fifth-class man, because I am the servant of everyone.” A tear rolled down his cheek behind his spectacles. He deeply meant what he said; he was a servant of everyone. He never considered himself qualified. He then addressed the student, “If I have any qualification that is that I only repeat the message of my spiritual master. If there is any success in this mission, then it is all the mercy of my spiritual master. If there is any success in the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement in this world, then it is simply because we have stuck to the principle of *guru* and Gaurāṅga.”

Śrīla Narahari Sarakāra Ṭhākura makes a related point: “During this Kali-yuga, when the time of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu and Śrī Nityānanda Prabhu’s transcendental pastimes become unmanifest, Their Lordships become the object of transcendental research and discussion. At that time, all level of devotees including *uttama-adhikārī*, *madhyama-adhikārī* and *kaniṣṭha-adhikārī* shall always be in anxiety, and it will be at all times. They shall almost feel uncertainty in their hearts regarding the correct understanding of the eternal truths of devotional service.” (*Śrī Kṛṣṇa-bhajanāmṛta* Verses 3, 4)

For a humble Vaiṣṇava to feel almost uncertain in the modern application of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism is natural. Individuals will have different opinions, so one should be broad-minded when forming opinions about preaching strategies or about other Vaiṣṇavas. We needn’t be too confident and condemn others, because of their opposing opinions or because they belong to another organization.

For those whose substance is lacking, dependence on form is proportionately necessary. This concept is also true of our relationship with Śrīla Prabhupāda; if we are firmly connected and secure in our relationship with him, we can accommodate or at least hear different ideas from many different people, even when the ideas are unconventional. We will not condemn Vaiṣṇavas, because they have different ideas or because they left our organization. Their personal reasons may be valid for them. Yet there may be other reasons to shun them. Ultimately, all decisions and opinions should be based on *guru*, *sādhū*, *śāstra* and common sense. Everyone and everything must be brought before these beacons of truth. If they fair well before them, then credit is due them.

Focus on Substance

All true Vaiṣṇavas have realizations and possess the potential to offer good advice. Substance is to be found everywhere regardless of form. You can search out substance in the most unlikely places, which will keep you sharp and attentive to the will and message of the Lord.

If we do not search everywhere for substance,¹ rigidity will ensue. We will think that we have got everything sewn up. As soon as that mentality arrives, the Lord disappears. The Gosvāmīs never thought they had captured the Lord. They were always searching, *he rādhe vraja-devīke ca lalite he nanda-sūno kutaḥ śrī govardhana-kalpa-pādapa-tale kālindī-vane kutaḥ* “O Rādhārāṇī! O Lalitā! O son of Nanda Mahārāja! Where are you all now? Are you just on the hill of Govardhana, or are you under the trees on the bank of the Yamunā? Where are you?” We must imbibe this mood in our day-to-day life and in our leadership, never allowing complacency to set in. Seeing ourselves as the Lord’s servants, always searching for His direction in our preaching and in our own devotional life, we will proceed to our dearest goal and come closer to loving the Lord.

Loving the Lord is the substance, and ISKCON is but a form, a grand form. If ISKCON members focus on substance, automatically the form of ISKCON will flourish. Focusing on substance takes firm faith, above the *kaniṣṭha* level. Therefore, we should preach and practice Kṛṣṇa consciousness, not organization consciousness. A masseur concentrates on massaging the muscles and thus automatically massages the skin. If he focuses only on massaging the skin, his work is incomplete since the purpose of a massage is to relax the muscles.

All religions struggle with the problem that their members gradually focus on form. Many Christians accept the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden as a historical fact. Moreover, they often miss the point of the story, resulting in their trying to enjoy this temporary world. The Lord offered Adam and Eve the entire garden to enjoy—all but the forbidden fruit—which is traditionally presented as an apple. Eve was influenced by the devil in the form of a snake and in turn tempted Adam. The story contains undeniable truths, but one must see beyond the story to the message contained within.

Opening the *Bhagavad-gītā*, we will see the same truth. “In the beginning of creation, the Lord of all creatures sent forth generations of men and demigods, along with sacrifices for Viṣṇu, and blessed them by saying, ‘Be thou happy by this sacrifice because its performance will bestow upon you everything desirable for living happily and achieving liberation.’” (Bg. 3.10)

The Lord has offered us this material world to live in, and we may enjoy it, but only by accepting our quota in accordance with His regulations. If we take more than we need, we are taking the forbidden fruit. This is the *īśāvāsya* principle— everything belongs to Kṛṣṇa. The devilish snake is our own lust, which whispers to us in the form of our mind, “Come on. Take more. You are the enjoyer. Why limit your sense pleasure?”

Essence and truth are found in the Bible, but they can be overlooked or misunderstood. Similarly, we have many truths, extremely valuable truths, and they too can be misunderstood. Prabhupāda called this “churchianity.”

Prabhupāda: “He doesn’t want any improvement. He wants to keep it as a... Just like professional church, temple.”

Devotee (1): “They’re more attached to the external form that they already have.”

Prabhupāda: “No, no, that is which we call churchianity. Christianity, churchianity.”

Devotee (1): “Churchianity.” (laughs)

Devotee (2): “Also he may lose his position because he has no knowledge.”

Prabhupāda: “That is going on everywhere. These, our Indian people, they’re not interested in God. They’re interested in some blessing because they can make improvement in their material position.” (Morning Walk 28 February 1973 Jakarta)

“Then you become *madhyama-adhikārī*, advanced devotee. Just like these people, either in India or here, they remain simply churchianity, going to the church without any understanding. Therefore it is failing. Now churches are being closed. Similarly, if you do not keep yourself fit to preach, then your temples will be all closed in due course of time.” (Morning Walk 12 December 1973 LA)

We must keep ourselves fit by focusing on the substance of Kṛṣṇa consciousness, which is to always remember Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and therefore see Śrī Kṛṣṇa in everything. Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Absolute Truth. He embodies supreme absolute love, supreme absolute beauty and supreme absolute knowledge. Hence, an organization using His name, must represent these features of His.

If we focus on the substance, the Absolute Truth, then ISKCON will be full of truth. If we focus on the form, then ISKCON may not be so. In other words, we should not accept hypocrisy in any form, even if it’s presented on ISKCON letterhead or wrapped in saffron. This adjustment—focusing on substance—will keep our Society pure. Prabhupāda came to give Absolute Truth, beauty, love and freedom, and we should continue to give them to others. We cannot use Kṛṣṇa’s name without them, because His name and form contain them. One who sincerely chants His name and serves Him with devotion will develop absolute truthfulness, beauty, love and freedom.

1. Searching everywhere also has its limits. One must strictly follow one’s *guru-paramparā*, and one’s *ādi-guru* or founder-*ācārya*. In Vṛndāvana, the *sādhus* follow an unspoken etiquette: they may occasionally hear from different sources and they offer respect to all, but they never give up their *guru* or *paramparā*.

“Everything should be offered to the spiritual master as a matter of duty, but the offering should be made to the spiritual master with heart and soul, not artificially to gain material prestige.”

Śrīla Prabhupāda, Bhāg. 7.7.30–31

CHAPTER TWELVE - Calculated or Spontaneous Devotion

Our Kṛṣṇa religion demands a certain mood, which is spontaneous, without calculation. As one studies or practices Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, one begins to understand that this approach to God is different from any other. One could say that Kṛṣṇa is more than God in the sense that God, Lord Viṣṇu, must create and maintain the cosmos, keep tabs on everyone’s sins and pious acts, and appease the demigods whenever there is trouble in the universe, usually by killing some demon. But Śrī Kṛṣṇa, Śyāmasundara, doesn’t bother with these duties. He simply plays with His friends, tends the cows, plays His flute and dances with the *gopīs*.

In His abode, Goloka Vṛndāvana, consciousness of Kṛṣṇa’s divinity as the Supreme Lord, the topmost position of universal hierarchy, does not exist. Kṛṣṇa, Vraja-kumāra, is seen as just a neighborhood kid, Nanda Bābā’s boy, who is so sweet, loveable, cute and clever that no one can stop thinking about him.

*dustyajaś cānurāgo ’smin
sarveṣām no vrajaukasām
nanda te tanaye ’smāsu
tasyāpy autpattikaḥ katham*

“Dear Nanda, how is it that we and all the other residents of Vraja cannot give up our constant affection for your son? And how is it that He is so spontaneously attracted to us?” (Bhāg. 10.26.13)

They naturally love Him without any calculation of what He can do for them, without considering the benefits of performing pious acts, and without considering being purified from sins. They have no consideration other than pure attraction and affectionate love. To enter into that special inner group—one of the village folk that rub shoulders with Gopāla daily—requires a special mood of pure love, a mood without any calculation, enhanced by strong, spontaneous loving feelings.

That sweet boy, Śyāmasundara, performed divine pastimes to illustrate the necessary mood to enter His enticing entourage. A classic pastime is *govardhana-līlā*. The Vrajavāsīs were planning to worship Indradeva as they did every year, but Nanda’s son approached His father, questioned the whole affair, and declared that it was unnecessary. Gopāla redirected the Vrajavāsīs’ worship toward the *brāhmaṇas*, the cows and the hill they grazed on. “The cows are our wealth,” He explained, “and the cowherds’ residence is in the forest and on the hills. Therefore you should offer worship to the cows, the *brāhmaṇas* and Govardhana Hill.”

Such an explanation surpasses both form and calculation and goes directly to substance, pure substance. Kṛṣṇa had just performed His pastime with the *yajñic brāhmaṇas*. While making official, sacrificial offerings in the holy fire, they rejected the humble request of Kṛṣṇa’s cowherd friends. What hypocrisy! Gopāla thought, “I don’t want my close friends, the Vrajavāsīs, to act like that.”

Of religious acts, to find one more external and official than worshipping the elite demigods for personal gain, comforts or status would be difficult. Demigod worship does not bring about the consciousness that attracts Kṛṣṇa. He will not allow such persons into His personal abode. Only persons who are pure, soft hearted, loving, compassionate and selfless will go to Him in Vraja-dhāma—not others.

To develop this kind of loving devotional mood, one must begin here and now. Elitism or calculation in any form will hamper this development, since they indicate that one is not dealing from the heart. Our ethos, mood and mentality indicate our direction. One can see that there's a tendency to go in the wrong direction. We must search for the symptoms of real devotion, devoid of calculation and show, and head straight for the pure devotional mood exhibited by Śrīla Prabhupāda and all on that path, and avoid anyone who is simply playing a role. But we should not make sweeping generalizations about a certain group. Look at individuals not at groups. Vaiṣṇavas can be judged according to individual merit based on *guru, sādhu, śāstra* and your own experience and reasoning. That is the way to test everything. In this way, you'll safely proceed forward.

*śrutiḥ pratyakṣam aitihyam
anumānaṁ catuṣṭayam
pramāṇeṣv anavasthānād
vikalpāt sa virajyate*

“From the four types of evidence—Vedic knowledge, direct experience, traditional wisdom and reasoning—one can understand the temporary situation of the material world, by which one becomes detached from the duality of this world.” (Bhāg. 11.19.17)

To develop the right internal mood, the atmosphere must be one of freedom, devoid of fear and excessive emphasis on hierarchy, elitism or other externals. Otherwise, one will be hampered in expressing devotion. *Sādhana-bhakti* cannot fully develop without use or expression of the senses. Even in regulative devotional service, one must express oneself, and what to speak of spontaneous devotional service?

Our Vaiṣṇava rules and regulations are not external, but they can become so for one in *niyamāgraha* mentality. The rules and regulations help one to enter into pure *bhakti*, but one can abuse them by having a goal other than *prema-bhakti*, and thus transform them into obstacles. A mature devotee incorporates all the rules and regulations into his practice since he has assimilated them. He naturally avoids sinful acts and intensely preaches and performs *bhajana*, because he is strongly attracted to devotional activities. The rules and regulations are not external, since they comprise *bhakti-āṅgas* given by Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī, but beginners often mechanically follow them.

According to the official cosmic hierarchy, Indra was superior to Gopāla, who was just a cowherd boy. Gopālaḥ doesn't really like these types of calculations; He just wants to reciprocate and play with His loving friends. Indra soon learned that Gopāla was no ordinary boy, and in Vṛndāvana, the measurement of status is based on love. Unfortunately, poor Indra had very little love, and thus, when he entered the arena of love, Vraja-dhāma, his status took a serious drop—from top to bottom.

Indra, although a cosmic celebrity, was not successful in Vraja due to a lack of substance. He could not recognize Kṛṣṇa as the supreme worshipable recipient, but only saw Him externally as a village

boy. Therefore, he neglected the Lord and tried to obstruct others, who loved the Lord, by sending torrents of rain.

Celebrity Consciousness

Celebrity consciousness develops when followers focus more on the external features of a spiritual leader rather than on his spirituality. These external features may include *āśrama*, reputation, charisma, nationality, opulence, material talents, a large following, material education or institutional position. Focusing on externals tends to breed neglect and disregard of other devotees or noncelebrities, which is just one of its harmful aspects. Such spiritual leaders become more like pop stars than *sādhus* to their followers, who are usually starry-eyed neophytes. One characteristic of this phenomenon is that a celebrity leader cares little for anyone other than his followers or potential followers, and the followers care little for anyone other than their celebrity leader.

Somehow, accepting followers has a sweet taste, but so does white sugar, and enough of it in time can cause hypoglycemia or diabetes. Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu includes “followers” to His list of items that He rejects, *na dhanam na janam na sundarim kavitam va*, knowing the possible ill effects. But some leaders accept followers regardless of the superficiality of the relationships, sometimes even advertising to solicit them. In severe cases, a celebrity leader becomes emotionally addicted to such relationships and cannot sit still to hear and chant; he must continue enrolling fresh recruits. In such a scenario, form is prominent, whereas substance is dispensable.

The multiple ramifications of this scenario are stifling to spiritual life, and we should take care not to fall into this trap. One drawback is that a spiritual leader can become addicted to the adoration of his followers and see that adoration as a sign of his own spiritual advancement. Therefore, he sees no reason to strive and dive deeper in spiritual life, and he becomes proud and complacent. One should be careful, however, that one does not imagine this fault in others, and thus make offenses. Another drawback is the behavior of the neophyte followers, who are elated by their celebrity leader. They see him as their all-in-all and, in their attempts to serve him, often step on the toes of others. I have had many personal experiences of such dealings as have many others.

Sometimes, in an unhealthy way, the followers hand over the responsibility of their lives, so that they must ask permission for everything they do. This binds and blinds the followers since they are not using their intelligence. Consequently, celebrity consciousness is related to authoritarianism. Such a blind, authoritarian mood filters down to local leaders, who then expect the same behavior from their subordinates. Here is one example of this trend.

Many years ago a *brahmacārī*, who was having difficulty, was advised by his temple leader to get married. The *brahmacārī* agreed and mentioned a young lady in the congregation whom he fancied. Upon hearing her name, his leader winced, “Oh no! She’s hardly a devotee. She’s not the right one. There’s a girl in the temple who’d be much better for you.”

The devotee asked, “What about my attachment for the other lady?”

“Don’t worry,” replied his confident leader, “you’ll forget all about her.”

The *brahmacārī* accepted this idea and agreed to meet the girl in the temple. She, on the other hand, was not prepared to marry anyone. But the temple leader convinced her to get married and arranged for the couple to begin meeting. They married a few months later.

The man was eager for romance, but the girl was still accustomed to a celibate lifestyle. The man's ego was crushed after his romantic attempts were rejected. Discouraged, he withdrew from the marriage and began to meet the young lady from the congregation. His newly-wedded wife naturally became disturbed and left for another community for her own peace of mind. Such is life for people who allow others to think for them. The man's initial intuition was correct; he and his wife from the congregation are still together today.

Spiritual authority is valuable only if used properly. One can get good advice from detached persons who possess wisdom, and then one must make one's own personal decisions in life. Unfortunately, an authoritarian system does not encourage people to make their own decisions.

Returning to the celebrity problem, those who are *not* deemed as celebrities find the opposite dynamic. They may spend time counseling and training others, but they are rarely seen as significant or connected to the Lord. They're often taken for granted. Sooner or later, feeling the weight of their second-class status, they may either begin hankering for celebrity status too or become discouraged in their attempts to preach and guide others. They can survive, however, by visiting or residing at places where their efforts are appreciated. Yet such survival requires humility and determination. Persons who appreciate them are usually mature, having learned to see through the spotlights on the neophyte social stage.

The upshot is that the noncelebrity preachers who push on year after year may develop saintly qualities by focusing beyond the superficialities. To do this they must see the Lord's hand in their situation. Eventually they may also develop a following. Since they've been living without fanfare for many years, they're not dependent on it and are less likely to be affected by it.

What about spiritual leaders with natural charisma and who have become a celebrity but not due to any material desire of their own? What about them? Are they not *sādhus*? Yes, they are *sādhus*. They are neither attracted nor affected by the fanfare. Rather they try to avoid it whenever possible by sidestepping the spotlight, pushing others forward, and encouraging their followers to respect and take guidance from other qualified Vaiṣṇavas. They tolerate the fanfare and try to fan the spark of maturity, sobriety and balanced regard for all. They are appreciated by their Godbrothers and are often seen with them in friendly circumstances.

It may be true that starry-eyed followers will always be present, since everyone begins from the neophyte stage. The duty of spiritual leaders, however, is to minimize their followers' misconceptions and misbehavior as much as possible by clear instructions, so that spiritual life can be ignited in the hearts of the followers.

Subject Consciousness

Although a devotee may be going through the motions of *sādhana*, preaching or serving in various ways, unless he gives up subject consciousness, he will not progress well on the path of *bhakti*. Subject consciousness means, "I am in the center—not Kṛṣṇa." Since Kṛṣṇa is the super-subject and all others

are objects for His enjoyment, He is the only one who deserves to be in the center. The rest of us are on the sides as objects, cooperating to please Him. Someone who is Kṛṣṇa conscious likes this arrangement and feels uncomfortable otherwise. He doesn't take himself too seriously or feel proud, but rather feels helpless, always depending on the Lord and waiting to see what is His plan.

I once read that the most prominent motivating factor for a person is his desire to be a hero. Reading that struck me. Whether it is true or not, I cannot say. It must surely be a major motivating factor for people to act. For someone to want to be in the right and be appreciated for helping others is somewhat natural. But this desire can also become excessive to the point where one misjudges situations, causes distress to others or even cheats to be seen as the hero. In that case, one would be placing oneself in the center—not Kṛṣṇa.

Everyone has standards of dealing with others, sometimes being liberal and at other times being strict. A devotee bases these decisions on what will be the most pleasing to *guru* and Kṛṣṇa, always trying to influence others to become Kṛṣṇa conscious. That is Kṛṣṇa-centered. One can observe someone's motivation by associating with the person for some time. After observing, one might find that there are other criteria for the person's decisions; they may be whatever makes him look good in others' eyes, which is a subtle but ugly *anartha*. Over concern for one's own reputation can blemish and distract one's devotion. Having others think poorly of you and having love for God is better than having a spotless reputation without love for God. Yet a good reputation and love for God are not necessarily opposed to each other.

Again, we must turn our sights inward and observe our own *anathas*, not being too much concerned about others' *anarthas*. I have seen reformers in the past, who wielded strong criticism toward others but had not pointed their critical faculties toward their own hearts. Reformers should reform themselves at least as much as they try to reform others.

Keeping Kṛṣṇa in the center is only possible if we are fully engaged in devotional service, which includes loving thoughts and feelings about Him. In this regard, one can never go too far.

“Unless one's mind is filled with thoughts of Kṛṣṇa, feelings for Kṛṣṇa and a desire to serve Kṛṣṇa, the mind will be filled with material activities. (Cc. Madhya 13.138 purport)

Drilling deeper into the heart by hearing and chanting about the Lord is the sublime method for ridding ourselves of all misgivings and developing a higher taste for reawakening our dormant relationship with the Lord. To the degree we are endeavoring for selfless surrender, making ourselves hollow flutes to be played in the Lords' hands, to that degree our hearts will fill with divine love and we'll be fixed in our real positions as objects to be enjoyed by the super-subject, Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

Questions and Answers

Q: What about the fact that we cannot imitate *rāganuga-sādhana* but must first perform *vaidhi-sādhana*, in which our actions are calculated?

A: I am not advocating false imitation of lofty stages of *bhakti*. That should never be done. But spontaneous devotion is our highest goal and should always be kept in the forefront, ahead of us. Furthermore, the atmosphere or ethos of our Society should accommodate spontaneous devotion as far as possible without deviating from our *ācāryas'* cautious and respectful approach.

Additionally, I think you'll find that even *vaidhi-bhakti* flourishes far better with freedom, friendship and love. Whereas elitism, excessive emphasis on hierarchy, personal agendas and comfort-seeking or status-seeking does not bring about the kind of atmosphere that attracts Kṛṣṇa or any kind of devotion for Kṛṣṇa.

The term "calculated" can be seen in different ways. I am not referring to simple, honest devotees who are beginning the practice and are therefore endeavoring somewhat mechanically. That is unavoidable because when beginning anything there is always the need for practice, which calls for some degree of mechanical repetition just as when one begins playing the guitar. One must practice the scales and chord positions and so develops calluses on the hand. But it's not necessary that one must begin performing *bhakti* with calculation, at least with the kind of calculation which I am describing (as in the previous paragraph).

Q: What about someone who's not yet spontaneous but follows the rules with faith?

A: That's fine. That can also be done with love for the spiritual master with the ultimate aim of loving the Lord. Such a faithful devotee avoids personal motives and attachments to externals. The question is not whether or not the devotee is *rāsika* or not, but rather whether or not he is open, honest and unmotivated. Śrīvāsa Ṭhākura, Murāri Gupta, Anupama, Vanamālī Ṭhākura, Garuḍa Paṇḍit, Paramānanda Purī and countless others, although exalted personal associates of Śrīman Mahāprabhu, are devotees in an *aiśvarya* mood. Of course, if we could meet anyone of them and get their mercy and instructions, we'd be doing quite well. We should never minimize or frown upon those in *aiśvarya-bhakti*. We are not so exalted. And those who are truly *rāsika-bhaktas* never do so due to their deep humility.

In conclusion, let us say that those who are faithfully following the principles of *bhakti* without calculated external motives or focus on position are worthy of praise, and we should eagerly take their association.

Q: Are our rules and regulations external or not?

A: No, but they can become so for one in *niyamāgraha* mentality. The rules and regulations help one enter into pure *bhakti*, but one can abuse them and transform them into obstacles. Later, when more advanced, a devotee incorporates all of the rules and regulations into his practice since he has assimilated them. He naturally avoids sinful acts and intensely performs *bhajan* and preaching because he is strongly attracted to devotional activities. In conclusion, the rules and regulations are not external since they comprise *aṅgas* of *bhakti* given by Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī, but they are often mechanically followed by beginners. That is expected.

“Try not to become more of a success, but rather try to become a man of value.”

Albert Einstein

CHAPTER THIRTEEN - Culture and Character

Culture influences our psyche, our values, our ethos, our mental attitudes and our work ethic, in short, our entire being. Culture is so fundamental to our conditioned nature that we don't even notice our own cultural conditioning until we associate with people from other cultures or begin living outside our own country.

Being aware of one's cultural conditioning is helpful to begin the process of internal change. This awareness is part of the cleansing process called *anartha-nivṛtti*, wherein one re-adjusts aspects of oneself to create a favorable situation for *bhakti*. I remember when I had moved to the Philippines in 1984. My Americanisms were noticeable to others, and I also became aware of them, which was healthy for my spiritual advancement; I learned that I was loud, impatient, somewhat pushy and proud.

Having resided in many countries, I noticed the qualities of many cultures. In the Philippines, people are not as “mental” as Westerners but rather fun loving and simple. In Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Thailand, sarcasm is conspicuous by its absence, and dutiful work is common. In Russia, people are extremely generous and accommodating, although often sentimental. They find it difficult to refuse someone upon being asked for something, whereas Americans can easily say “No!” without feeling guilty. In England, people are polite and helpful but often distant.

Generalizations and stereotypes grow from national traits; they are not baseless. Yet one cannot apply them absolutely to all individuals in a given nation. That is called bigotry or racism. Nevertheless, a devotee will always find some cultural residue dwelling within himself, and must deal with it. Therefore, for devotees to live in a foreign country for a few years can be beneficial. This is not to say that our own culture has nothing valuable to offer, but one may remain unaware of one's negative traits and not gain positive traits from other cultures if one does not experience alternative cultures.

One can adopt desirable traits by close observation and association. This adopting of good qualities should always be done anyway, regardless of the circumstances or culture. In other words, we should always be searching for good qualities to imbibe from those we meet whether from other countries or our own. The Lord often arranges for His devotees to meet others who have qualities that are beneficial for one to advance on the path of *bhakti*. Such qualities are generally of the mode of goodness, but they could also be transcendental.

Ain't Got No Culture

In the material world, there is always the tendency for superficiality, taking everything externally or cheaply. Few persons are willing to concentrate and work hard to achieve something substantial. We are the push-button generation, and we want quick results without effort. This is the influence of this age—*mandāḥ sumanda-matayo manda-bhāgyā hy upadrutāḥ*—people are slow, foolish, lazy, unlucky and always disturbed. Few are willing to undergo the rigors of true spiritual life, which bring one

devotional depth. The influence of the age can be seen by the lack of *sāttvika* culture in modern man and by the way we deal with each other.

One popular Western trait is that people are accustomed to engaging many senses at the same time. Due to the usual prominence of the mode of passion, Westerners often feel the need to overwhelm their senses. Once I witnessed a person watching television while munching on a sandwich, guzzling a drink, chatting on the phone and puffing on a cigarette.

Devotees sometimes act similarly due to their Western conditioning: gazing at a video while tasting *prasādam*, or flipping through a magazine while chanting *japa*. We know that chanting *japa* while driving a car is not quite the same as when one is sitting peacefully at home or in a temple. When one, however, learns to concentrate on one activity, the mind becomes peaceful and one's ability to chant *japa* is improved. Concentration on one activity helps to bring one to the mode of goodness, which is necessary for spiritual life.

Our social dealings also often reflect a lack of finesse. For example, when devotees first meet one another, they often ask, "Who's your *guru*?" as an initial greeting similar to inquiring about someone's name or country. Although in Vedic times this information had been sometimes offered upon meeting someone, it was meant to enhance and deepen the relationship. It was done respectfully, not as if asking about one's washing powder, or to categorize one in an impersonal way. Imagine if someone, upon just meeting you, were to ask, "What are the names and nationalities of your parents? How did they meet and conceive you?" You might reply, "That's none of your business. Is nothing sacred?"

Many devotees feel that knowing another's *guru* is essential and that this information alone sizes up an individual—whether he has integrity, character or intelligence. No doubt it does have *some* bearing, but there's no reason to place so much emphasis on it. Isn't it wiser to get to know a person first? Can't we be more personal and judge an individual on his or her own merit? The person's life will naturally unfold as our relationship deepens. To know the person who's standing before us is better than immediately judging someone on one piece of information. We can deal with him, learn about him, and give him space to keep something he treasures.

Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī quotes from the *Sammohana-tantra* to establish this point.

*gopayed devatām iṣṭām gopayed guru ātmanah
gopayec ca nijam mantraṁ gopayen nija-mālikām*

"One should hide one's *iṣṭa-deva*, one should hide one's *guru*, one should hide one's *mantra*, and one should hide one's *japa-mālā*." (*Hari-bhakti-vilāsa* 2.147)

The Supreme Lord confirms this truth in His words to Aditi.

*naitat parasmā ākhyeyam
pṛṣṭayāpi kathañcana
sarvaṁ sampadyate devi
deva-guhyam susamvṛtam*

"O lady, even if someone inquires, you should not disclose this fact to anyone. That which is very confidential is successful if kept secret." (Bhāg. 8.17.20)

Treasures are naturally kept in a concealed place. Similarly, a devotee wisely keeps his relationship with his *guru* and his *iṣṭa-deva* deep in his heart; they are not for everyone's view and comment. The secrecy protects the value of the relationship just as keeping spices in a container maintains the flavor of the spice. If the lid of the container is not shut tight, the value of the spice is quickly lost. Of course, one should not hide one's *guru* due to shame. Rather, one should feel fortunate to have a caring and enlightened preceptor. And one should feel oneself fallen and unqualified to be his disciple and represent him. One should not proudly advertise oneself as the disciple of someone, feeling one's increased status due to the relationship; that is like using the *guru* as a social springboard for one's false prestige. Nor should one cheaply brag about his *guru*. Rather, let our *guru* be truly glorified by our exhibiting exemplary behavior and Vaiṣṇava qualities, especially humility.

Years ago, two Godbrothers of mine went to Māyāpura to visit an elderly and respected *sannyāsī* to hear his opinion about a certain philosophical controversy. They offered him respect and began discussing philosophy. At one point one of them asked him, "Who is your *guru*?" The *sannyāsī* hesitated and slowly uttered, "Why are you asking? My spiritual master ..." He could not speak further. His voice choked and tears filled his eyes. The devotees realized that they had somehow offended him by being too forward, having just met him.

Westerners, in general, take too much for granted and are not careful enough in social dealings. Modern Western society conditions one to artificially come too close, too soon without respect for one another. Modern Western society respects nothing beyond fame, money and sexual prowess; it is the antithesis of Vaiṣṇava culture.

Prematurely judging others and jumping to conclusions are other negative traits found almost everywhere, which most of us must admit. These traits, born of the mode of passion, create dissension. We should seek to understand our fellow devotees and try to accommodate them. This principle is basic to all religious people and holds true even in mundane dealings.

Here is a story that illustrates the point of prematurely judging others and jumping to conclusions. Once, a man was sitting on a park bench, quietly reading a newspaper. A moment later, another man with three children came along and also sat down on the bench. The man with the children looked morose and stared at the ground, but his children began to clamor for attention. The man ignored them and the children began to fight among themselves. The first man was trying to concentrate on his newspaper, but the children were making quite a disturbance. He thought, "Why doesn't this man control his children?"

Ten minutes passed. Finally the first man suddenly put down his newspaper and turned to the second man and said, "Why the hell don't you control your children? Can't you understand that they're creating a nuisance? It's so disturbing!"

The second man slowly turned to the first, and with tears in his eyes, replied, "My wife has just died of cancer. I've come from the hospital. My children think that she's gone to sleep. They don't know that she's dead, but they sense that something's wrong. I don't know how to explain it to them." On hearing this, the first man realized that he had made a mistake. He acted too soon without properly understanding the situation.

Nowadays, if a devotee is accused of something, many jump to a conclusion and consider him guilty without knowing the details. And if a devotee is factually guilty of a crime or misbehavior, many hold it against him even twenty years later, never considering the possibility that he could have repented and become purified through devotional service. This closed-mindedness indicates a lack of faith in the process of *bhakti* and a lack of proper culture.

Hollywood Culture verses Eastern Culture

Since I have lived in seven foreign countries, six being Eastern, over the last twenty-six years, I speak with some experience. The Eastern or Oriental culture stems from India according to our Vaiṣṇava understanding. By witnessing Eastern or Oriental culture, I have seen that it is akin to Vaiṣṇava culture. Eastern or Oriental people, in general, are respectful, gentle, humble, tolerant, generous and accommodating.¹ These qualities are conducive for spiritual life in any tradition and should be acknowledged, but Western culture or Hollywood culture is the opposite of spiritual culture. I roughly define Eastern or Oriental culture as the culture of those who have a spiritual goal and do not aspire to follow Hollywood culture, no matter the geographic location.

Modern Western culture influences one to become arrogant or at least over-confident, which is enough to cause problems. If you then add other contemporary Western tendencies like being callous, ungrateful and disrespectful, the result can be quite a mess. Western devotees especially have to be wary of their cultural influence to move quickly beyond *anartha-nivṛtti*.

Unfortunately, Hollywood culture is spreading faster than spiritual culture, mainly through the cinema industry. This becomes obvious if you visit any third-world country. When I lived in Hong Kong in 1981, it was considered risqué if a young couple held hands while strolling down the street. Now couples can be seen embracing in public; prostitutes, drug dealers and other such characters also rove about, largely due to unholy Hollywood cinemas.

Even in the villages of India, people have a satellite dish and now view the slickest flicks from the States. Thus, many ancient and noble cultures are gradually degrading and becoming grossly materialistic.

On the train to Māyāpura, a young Indian lady wearing jeans came to ask assistance from another Indian lady. She didn't know how to put on a sari and was asking the other lady to help her. The second lady agreed and they left the compartment. I said to her husband, "I thought that all Indian ladies knew how to put on a sari." He replied, "Not now. Our culture is changing."

Western devotees who have never lived outside of their Western homeland would do well with an injection of culture. Śrīla Prabhupāda desired that our Society's members regularly visit the *dhāma* in India and absorb the culture and pure spiritual atmosphere. In fact, Srila Prabhupada said that unless they did so they were less likely to go back to Godhead.

After experiencing the Western culture and social dynamics within ISKCON, devotees sometimes leave the Society to seek a more open, warm and accommodating atmosphere. Vaiṣṇava atmosphere is of a *sāttvika* nature and often more akin to Eastern or Oriental culture. We need to develop a genuine Vaiṣṇava atmosphere if we are going to be successful in our attempt to spread Kṛṣṇa consciousness and improve the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement.

Character

In Russian folklore, there is a tale about a man who exhibited great character by upholding his word. One morning he heard a knock at his door and, upon opening it, found a desperate youth.

“Please help me,” the boy pleaded, “they’re coming after me. They’re going to kill me!”

The man of the house tried to calm the youth and asked, “How can I help?”

“Please hide me,” begged the young man.

Promising to protect him, the man led him to the attic. Later, a swarm of townsfolk came upon the house.

“Have you seen the young scoundrel?” they inquired.

“Why?” asked the man of the house, “What has he done?”

“He killed someone in a fight.”

“Who did he kill?”

The villagers hesitated but finally replied, “Your son.”

The man was shocked and answered, “No, I’ve not seen him.”

The days that followed were filled with weeping relatives and funeral rites. The man brought fine food for his relatives and for his hidden guest in the attic. After the bereavement, the relatives left, and the man climbed the stairs to the attic.

“You’re free to go now,” he told the youth.

Since the man had promised to give the youth shelter, even though his son was killed in the brawl, he set the youth free. This shows how much he was a man of his word.

Others might have chosen to break their promise in such a case. The man in this story chose to follow his word and release the youth; perhaps he knew the relationship between the youth and his son, or other details.

One could spend much energy considering whether the man’s protecting his son’s killer was ethical,² and thus miss the point. The point is that he sacrificed his attachment for revenging his son’s death in order to uphold his word, which he held sacred. The man’s sacrifice to uphold his word is considered a great deed and is therefore glorified in the Aphasie region of Southern Russia, where family attachment is extremely strong.

Upholding one's word, or more significant, upholding one's *dharmic* vow is an important element of religion and enables one to advance to higher levels. Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura discusses the principle of upholding one's *dharma* in his analysis of the term *niyamāgraha* found in *Śrī Bhaktyāloka*: "Conditioned souls are eligible to attain a very exalted position from a very low position. Between these two positions are many other positions. Each position is a gradual step. Each gradual step is a distinct level of advancement. Each and every gradual step has different prescriptions and prohibitions. Whenever a living entity steps to one level and stays there, he is obliged to follow the prescriptions and prohibitions of that step. By following those enjoined prescriptions and prohibitions, one becomes eligible to attain the next step. If one is unable to attain the next step, he falls down to a lower step. This is called degradation. Attaining a higher step is called advancement.

"To properly follow the precepts of one's own level is called 'one's prescribed duties' or steadiness in one's own position. Steadiness in one's own position is piety, and deviation from one's position is called impiety. There is no other piety and impiety than this. Therefore in *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (11.21.2) Lord Kṛṣṇa spoke this instruction to Uddhava:

*sve sve 'dhikāre yā niṣṭhā
sa guṇaḥ parikīrtitaḥ
viparyayas tu doṣaḥ syād
ubhayor eṣa nīscayaḥ*

'Steadiness in one's own position is declared to be actual piety, whereas deviation from one's position is considered impiety. In this way the two are definitely ascertained.'

Therefore we should proceed cautiously in spiritual life and strictly follow our vows. This ensures that we're able to rise up to the next level, which we should be eager for but not too eager. In other words, we should not abruptly jump ahead simply to impress others or for other material motives. Slow and steady wins the race.

Following one's word, following *varnāśrama* duties, or following other *dharmas* can be compared to a plate, and *bhakti* can be compared to food. The plate acts as an assistant principle to allow one to take one's meal peacefully. One may gradually relinquish emphasis on lower principles as purity and attraction to Śrī Kṛṣṇa are attained. But if character and virtues are absent, they should be held high until they are firmly planted in the hearts of aspirants of devotion.

Śrīla Prabhupāda once told a story illustrating loyalty, which is quickly becoming a rare quality. Nevertheless, it is a necessary element in devotional service. There was a man who had a baby and a dog. He once had to leave his home for a short time, and so he put the baby on the bed and left his dog in the room to guard it. Upon returning later, the room was empty. The baby was no longer on the bed. He was horrified to find a trail of blood leading out the back door into the yard, and from there into the garden. The dog came out from the bushes, its mouth covered in blood. The man was shocked and thought, "The dog attacked the baby, dragged it, and killed it." He angrily raced inside, grabbed his gun and pointed it straight at the dog. The animal sat obediently before his master. Boom! He shot and the dog fell over dead.

Suddenly he heard a child crying. The shot had startled the baby, who was sleeping inside the house. The man reeled in confusion. He had thought his baby dead. Running inside, he traced the

crying to underneath the bed, and there lay his child, unharmed. His mind raced, “If the dog hadn’t killed the baby, then where is the blood from?”

Returning to the garden, he searched further and found a dead fox covered in blood. Everything became clear: the fox had threatened the baby, so the dog had put the baby under the bed to protect it. The dog then fought and killed the fox and dragged it into the garden. The man deeply regretted his hasty action. His dog had valiantly performed its duty and, although misunderstood by the master, it remained faithfully by his side. Śrīla Prabhupāda concluded that although dogs are lowly creatures, they have one good quality—loyalty to their master. Prabhupāda added that the disciple should also be very loyal and faithfully serve his spiritual master.³

Obviously, character traits such as honesty, loyalty and keeping one’s word have value on the path to *bhakti*. If someone doesn’t keep his word, how can he accept initiation vows? If someone is not honest, how will he weed out his *anarthas*? How could the dishonest benefit from associating with a spiritual master? And, if someone is not loyal, how can he remain fixed in his master’s service? Good character is fundamental on this path and should not be minimized.

“Truthfulness is the basic principle for all religions. The four leaders of human society, namely the *sannyāsīs*, the *brāhmaṇas*, the king and the public leader, must be tested crucially by their character and qualification. Before one can be accepted as a spiritual or material master of society, he must be tested by the above-mentioned criteria of character.” (Bhag. 1.17.41 purport)

“One must therefore promote himself to the stage of goodness through his character and behavior and then gradually come to the transcendental platform, or *adhokṣaja* platform, in which he realizes both his position and the position of others.” (Bhag. 6.17.19 purport)

“In *Bhagavad-gītā* it is stated by the Lord Himself that the acts and character of great authorities are followed by people in general. Leaders of ideal character are therefore needed in society.” (Bhag. 3.16.23 purport)

“Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura advises that a Vaiṣṇava who is not of good character should be avoided. A Vaiṣṇava is one who has taken the Supreme Personality of Godhead as the ultimate goal of life, but if one is not pure and still has motives, then he is not a Vaiṣṇava of the first order of good character. One may offer his respects to such a Vaiṣṇava because he has accepted the Supreme Lord as the ultimate goal of life, but one should not keep company with a Vaiṣṇava who is in the mode of ignorance.” (Bhag. 3.29.8 purport)

“The devotee should avoid a person whose character is not yet fixed in the standard understanding; even though he may be a Vaiṣṇava, or a devotee of Kṛṣṇa, if his character is not correctly representative, then he should be avoided.” (Bhag. 3.29.18 purport)

The *Mahābhārata* emphasizes duties, vows and *dharma*. By reading it, one perceives the noble character exhibited by such exalted souls as Bhīṣma, Vidura, Gāndhārī, Kuntī, Arjuna and so on. The *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* also offers sterling examples of devotees of great character such as Mahārāja Parīkṣit, Dhruva, Prahlāda and others. The quality of human life then was much higher than it is now. Someone with virtuous and noble qualities could derive great benefit from the path of *bhakti*. Of course, they would have to receive the seed of *bhakti* from a pure Vaiṣṇava. Presently, most people are bereft

of such character traits; the modern human being has become lazy, selfish and shameless. He will lie for convenience, annually switch spouses or preceptors and vegetate on government funds. The human backbone has degenerated. The man of principle is becoming an extinct species.

What is the use of such a person becoming a disciple of a Vaiṣṇava *guru*? One might argue that by practicing *bhakti-yoga* one develops all the fine qualities of the demigods, *yasyāsti bhaktir bhagavaty akiñcanā sarvair guṇais tatra samāsate surāḥ*. *Bhakti-yoga* includes all religious principles and offers much more, but if one is not practicing *bhakti-yoga* properly, due to a lack of character, especially possessing a cheating mentality, then divine qualities will not manifest unless a miracle occurs.

We may have many bad qualities, but if we're at least honest and a little humble, we can go forward. Occasionally, *bhakti* may descend upon us fallen wretches by the mercy of the Lord or a Vaiṣṇava, but generally there should be an evolution starting with virtue as a clear ground for *bhakti* to grow.

Bhakti could appear anywhere—in a child, in an animal, or in a drunkard. But Kṛṣṇa also says, *yeṣāṁ tv anta-gataṁ pāpaṁ janānāṁ puṇya-karmaṇām*, “Those who come to the end of all sins and act piously develop firm determination to worship Me.” Miracles may take place, especially if a person fully surrenders to the Lord or His representative, and such miracles establish the independent nature of *bhakti*, but generally, pious persons with character have a better chance.

For a person who has already taken to the path of *bhakti*, he benefits by living a clean and pious life, which includes honesty, truthfulness, integrity, and so on. Such devotees usually do well and have a better chance of coming to the goal than those who do not have such qualities. Without *bhakti*, however, these qualities may indeed dwindle, and *bhakti* is not dependent on them to manifest, but they certainly make a fertile soil for *bhakti* to grow.

In his *Śrī Caitanya-śikṣāmṛta* (2.5), Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura writes, “When the accidental process works, such as by the mercy of Kṛṣṇa or saints, or the removal of all obstacles due to past *sādhana*, then the process of evolution (of virtues, etc.) is not needed. The independent will of Śrī Kṛṣṇa is its motivating power. This cannot be reconciled by reasoning. Even the dispute between law and favor, which cannot be solved by human intellect, finds its reconciliation in the Absolute Truth, where opposite virtues are nicely reconciled.

“By the mercy of Nārada an immoral Fowler became a devotee without accepting morality. By the mercy of Śrī Rāmacandra, Sabari, a wild forest dweller, received a life of divine feelings. They did not practice relevant virtues between their wild life and their devotional life. From this it is to be understood that as soon as they got *bhakti*, all beauty arising from a civilized, moral life became an ornament in their lives.

“The accidental process is rare and inconceivable, so without depending upon it, the evolutionary process should be adhered to. Of course, it would be best if, at any time, the accidental process works of itself.” (italics mine)

By hearing constantly about the powerful mercy of the Lord and the Vaiṣṇavas, which is referred to above as the accidental process, the tendency to disregard the usual path of *dharma* may arise. We should not imagine ourselves, however, becoming transcendental so quickly. Often, one thinks oneself

situated higher than one is actually situated. One is usually better off if one places oneself in a low position and rises slowly to the higher path.

Although the higher path of *bhakti* is far above morality, it is beneficial while walking on that lofty path to develop moral character. This can be done by hearing about and emulating the exalted character of great devotees. In this way, we'll have some ideal to aim for while we're still floundering, without having imbibed noble character or *sāttvika* cultural habits.

Strengthening One's Character

Hearing about the lives of great devotees who embodied great character will inspire and strengthen anyone. In the interim, we may practice applying those exalted qualities in small ways in our every day lives, gradually building ourselves up to men or women of character. We should also associate with those rare souls that possess ideal character. Additionally, we can pray to the Lord to develop a particular trait, focusing on the one most needed.

Devotees with official positions sometimes find it beneficial to offer to resign from their post to strengthen their character. This can be used as a technique for checking undue attachment or self-deception. Of course, one should not whimsically renounce one's duties, but this method can offer a win-win result because either way one gains the Lord's grace and the appreciation of one's peers. If you offer to resign from an official position, you will get a true picture of what the Lord and the Vaiṣṇavas desire. The worst scenario would be that your resignation is accepted, but that might be best for you and for the higher cause, and others would deeply respect your integrity. If, on the other hand, the Lord arranges that you maintain your position, then you're sure that it's the desire of the Lord and a fitting service for you. Thus, you could continue with confidence and peace of mind.

I recently attended the annual GBC meeting in Māyāpura and saw three of my Godbrothers offer their resignations. One resignation was accepted; the other two were not. My faith in the integrity of those leaders was reinforced. I also witnessed many leaders sincerely trying to ascertain the best way to forward Mahāprabhu's mission. I have more hope than before, but it's my opinion that our movement has to rectify itself, and that many leaders are unaware of the depth or causes of the movement's problems. Yet we are somehow or other moving in the right direction, albeit too slow. Many devotees are waiting for ISKCON to rise up and become the movement that it is meant to be. A renaissance is required, a renaissance of trust and empowerment. Thoughtful spiritual leaders must embrace the spirit and character of Śrīla Prabhupāda.

1. Modern Oriental people, like all people in Kali-yuga, may also exhibit unsavory qualities such as being duplicitous; they sometimes prefer to tell a small lie rather than offend others. They consider this cultured behavior, whereas Westerners find it quite annoying.

2. Other ethical considerations would appear had the youth killed another's son. Still, we take the story as it stands and extract value from it. It should not, however, be misconstrued as support for aiding and abetting a killer.

3. This does not mean that one should continue to follow a fallen *guru*, but loyalty should exist if he is not fallen. Blind acceptance and blind rejection are both faults and will not bring the desired results.

“Failure is only the opportunity to begin again more intelligently.”

Henry Ford

CHAPTER FOURTEEN – Concluding Words

The First Chapter discussed the foundation—freedom. Freedom allows for reflection, and reflection leads to assimilation. Attaining assimilation, a devotee can express himself or herself more easily, which naturally encourages creativity. Creativity, in turn, assists individuality, being oneself. When a person can be himself and work creatively, he is using all of his being, all of his energies. This full engagement leads to emotional involvement, otherwise known as inspiration, wherein absorption, excitement and encouragement arise. These assist self-realization and the process of Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Absorption in devotional service and spiritual sense objects invokes the divine descent of spiritual pleasure.

Emotional involvement does not mean that one becomes sentimental, but emotions are part of the self, the material self if one is on the material platform and the spiritual self if one is on the spiritual platform. There is a gradual meeting of these two platforms. A *sādhaka* does not suddenly wake up one morning on the spiritual platform with spiritual senses and emotions. Rather, a gradual and proportionate purification takes place, wherein the material senses, mind and emotions are replaced with spiritual senses, mind and emotions. As the material senses, mind and emotions are purified due to chanting the holy name and other devotional practices, their spiritual counterparts proportionately manifest. Thus, a divine transformation takes place. [See appendices]

There are two incorrect approaches. One approach is to allow the senses and mind free reign, which is the *karma* approach for the material enjoyer. The second approach, from the other side of the spectrum, comes from those who negate or deny any sense urges along with all feelings and intuition, which is the *jñāna* approach. The synthesis is *bhakti*, wherein we must sort through and discriminate between favorable and unfavorable, and between sensual, material prodding and spiritual prodding. In the beginning, we experience mostly material prodding. But even then, how did we come to the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement? The Supersoul prodded us from within the heart, “Find that book you put on the shelf so long ago. Now visit the temple.” Therefore, we should accept the possibility that we may be prompted by the Lord in the form of devotional feeling or intuition. Simultaneously, we must be wary of dreamy projections of illusion.

Spiritual treasures—realizations, sensitivity and devotional feelings—naturally develop after long years of practicing Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Any devotional community should be glad to accommodate and encourage such development. By creating an atmosphere of mistrust, fear and self-interest, organizational deformity such as institutionalism, authoritarianism and elitism can temporarily obstruct the natural development of spiritual treasures in the individual.

The first nine chapters describe the dynamics of devotion, focusing on the individual practitioner. Chapters Ten to Thirteen describe organizational dross and other items that hamper devotional development. A society that trusts and develops its individuals gains the strengths of those individuals. Otherwise, the opposite effect is found. Today our Society is contending with unsatisfied members, who

might have otherwise been contributing positively. A similar type of scenario was seen in the Soviet state of yesteryear.

The Soviet government neglected its own communist doctrine by neglecting its own people. And in time, those people rejected it. Until that time, the state, under the flag of communism, exploited its people. It geared everything toward war and the military machine. They had no idea of individual development and creativity; the goal was to be a good part of the state, which is a worthy element of Communist doctrine. That doctrine also asserts that individual needs are met, but they neglected the individual. The Soviets gladly accepted the tail end of the chicken but not the head. In other words, when it came to promoting faith and surrender to the state, there were no limitations, but when it came to government provisions—proper housing, decent roads, medical care, transportation, and so forth—they were lacking. Nowadays, remnants of that mentality remain: the Russian government has produced the best fighter jet the world has ever seen, but they don't bother to produce even one decent car.

Although a God-centered institution with stunning Deities, potent *kīrtanas* and loving devotees, ISKCON has its faults as does every organization. Yet it still offers a powerful society with a firm infrastructure that will last into the future, well after the present faults are mitigated. One might see this period as a time of internal transformation wherein caring for devotees becomes the main emphasis, with less stress on quantity and more on quality. The prosperity of the Society is not dependent on one person's success, but on a group effort. Therefore, cooperation and unity are necessary and they require maturity, humility and Kṛṣṇa consciousness.

True Kṛṣṇa consciousness insists on establishing Śrī Kṛṣṇa as the super-subject and as ourselves as His objects, which are meant to be enjoyed by Him. If we view ourselves as the subject, then others must become objects for our enjoyment. This understanding is fundamental and very subtle. Cooperation demands viewing ourselves as objects of the super-subject Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

Although we should not be naive or dull in our perceptions, we should also not be overly negative. We must have faith and be deeply grounded in our higher prospect. Our vision of Lord Kṛṣṇa must not be covered by temporary social or political situations. We must forge ahead in our personal relationship of loving service to the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Knowing and living the highest virtues of divine love that bring one closer to the Lord, we will enact those virtues among our own circles of influence.

Much time was spent diagnosing various maladies in this book, but the medicine is simple and sublime. Ultimately, everything is dependent upon Kṛṣṇa consciousness. All faults, problems and misgivings can only be solved with the purity of Kṛṣṇa thought, which can bring about the necessary love, trust, integrity, wisdom, humility, and open-heartedness. These internal qualities cannot be legislated. To develop such qualities one must improve and increase one's *japa*, *bhajana*, *kīrtana*, *kṛṣṇa-kathā* and *sādhū-saṅga*. Who will not take this medicine?

Taking Stock

The valuable treasures we possess are immense. One of these treasures is our *gurudeva*. Members from other Gauḍīya lines, and even other *sampradāyas*, are beginning to realize the awesome stature of His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedānta Swāmī Prabhupāda. During a visit to

Vṛndāvana, I met a devotee from the Nityānanda-parivāra, the lineage of Lord Nityānanda, who told me that years ago he had been requested by his guru to meet and take shelter of Bhaktivedānta Swāmī.

He replied, “Why should I go to him? You are my only shelter. I don’t need to go to anyone else.”

His guru, Rādhā Govinda dāsa Bābājī, explained to him the all-expansive nature of *guru-tattva*, and also told him that Bhaktivedānta Swāmī was an *āveśa* manifestation of Śrī Nityānanda Prabhu.

Later the same day, he went to see Śrīla Prabhupāda at the Kṛṣṇa-Balarāma Mandira. Prabhupāda was speaking with a group of disciples in his *darśana* room at the time, so the receptionist requested the devotee to return later. Prabhupāda heard the exchange, however, and insisted that he be brought in. The devotee introduced himself, and Śrīla Prabhupāda realized that he knew the devotee’s grandfather and had visited their temple many times. Śrīla Prabhupāda requested his disciples to leave the room, and he warmly embraced the devotee and blessed him by insisting that he travel worldwide and preach the message of Mahāprabhu. That devotee, having accepted Prabhupāda’s order, now wears saffron cloth, carries a *daṇḍa* and preaches in the West. This is unprecedented in their line.

A similar account has been given by Śrīnivāsa Kṛṣṇadāsa, a devotee in the Śrī-sampradāya, who is presently an Associate Professor in the University of Madras. He said that his *śikṣā-guru*, the renowned centenarian in Madras, Śrī Kṛṣṇadāsa Mahārāja ordered him years ago to dedicate the rest of his life to studying the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* commentary written by His Divine Grace Śrī Śrīmad A. C. Bhaktivedānta Swāmī Prabhupāda.

Śrīnivāsa was surprised and asked, “But Mahārāja, why are you asking me to read his books? He is not from our *sampradāya*.”

The Mahārāja replied, “He may not be from our *sampradāya*, but he is an eternal associate of Lord Kṛṣṇa, so it does not matter which *sampradāya* he has taken his birth in. It is my personal realization that he did not write those books alone, but Lord Kṛṣṇa stood beside him and dictated the knowledge to him. He simply wrote down everything that the Lord spoke.”

Another astounding story was related by H.H. Rādhānātha Swāmī. Many thousands of Madhvaite Vaiṣṇavas recently met at Paṅkajakṣetra near Uḍupī to celebrate the 700th anniversary of Śrī Madhvācārya. Prominent *ācāryas* gathered for the occasion. The most influential *ācārya*, Śrī Viśveṣa Tirtha (Pejāvara Swāmī of the Pejāvara Maṭha of Uḍupī), spoke first about Madhvācārya and then glorified Śrīla Prabhupāda. He said that Madhva’s teaching had never left the shores of India until Śrī Bhaktivedānta Swāmī Prabhupāda took them to the West. He has taken the pure teachings of the Bhāgavata and Bhagavad-gītā to every continent on earth and had not in any way compromised the teachings of sanātana-dharma. Motioning to all of the *ācāryas*, he concluded by saying that all of us put together do not equal even one grain of dust at the feet of any of his disciples who are spreading this message all around the world.

Śrīla Prabhupāda was no ordinary *sannyāsī* or *guru*. This will become clearer to all as time passes. His mood, emphasis, standards and direction on devotional activities are not lacking in any way. Rather, they were directly directed by the Lord.

Pure devotion and spiritual love answer all problems such as lust, fear, disunity, rigidity, self-interest, authoritarianism and so on. Pure spiritual love will cause a renaissance of empowerment. Many difficulties can be resolved by embracing the same spirit as Śrīla Prabhupāda.

Many devotees, however, are not accustomed to even utter the word “love,” what to speak of live and breathe by it. This love is not the romantic love found in novels. Rather, it takes the form of factual assistance, encouragement, and care on the path of *bhakti*. Our renaissance will be realized proportionate to the degree of care, understanding and empowerment offered to individual members, beyond the accepted and unquestioned collective acts of distributing books, opening temples and attracting new members. I’m not weighing or judging one set of actions against the others as I have performed front-line preaching for many years and am grateful for having had the opportunity to do so. Nevertheless, if we take a more human or individual approach to *bhakti* and its form, the organization, we will have more satisfied, balanced and mature members, who can do more in all fields of carrying Mahāprabhu’s message to those in need of it.

In a recent address to the North American GBC, Burke Rochford made a similar request, “Authority and trust in today’s ISKCON must be earned. I urge the GBC to move forward on a limited number of specific projects that will benefit devotees and thereby begin the process of restoring trust in the leadership.”

By benefiting or serving devotees, one benefits oneself, because the Lord becomes pleased to see the loving cooperation between His devotees, and He showers His blessings. Benefiting and facilitating devotees also supports and strengthens the preaching effort, because feeling loving support, the devotees get a boost in morale and enthusiasm. Benefiting or serving individual devotees sends a message to everyone, “You are valued. We care about you,” even if some individuals are not reaping the benefit themselves. Thus, faith increases all around.

In the modern world, faith is a rare and fragile commodity. It must be valued and nurtured. We must create an atmosphere where it can grow. Our relationships with other Vaiṣṇavas are most important. If leading Vaiṣṇavas understand and act upon this single point, soon the page could turn into a promising chapter.

In regard to relationships, a young devotee put it well when he said, “No society can survive without love as the defining characteristic. We will never treat God right until we treat each other with care and respect.” (Bhakta Rūpa Dās, *Our Hare Kṛṣṇa Youth*)

One could flip this statement around and say that unless one truly loves God, one will not care about others because all living beings are parts and parcels of God. The divine goal of loving the Lord should never be eclipsed by other desires. Otherwise, maintaining one’s spiritual authority gradually slips and causes the kind of problems that we’re encountering today. As I pointed out before, love and authority are closely linked. Śrīla Prabhupāda was truly successful because he loved Lord Kṛṣṇa without other interests. Let us also love the Lord and become truly successful.

Once on the roof of the Bombay temple when Nitai Dās was massaging Śrīla Prabhupāda, one of two GBC men who often argued with each other came to inform Prabhupāda about the mistake of his rival. Prabhupāda became upset and said, “I give them a little power and they immediately start

ordering everyone around, 'Do this, do this, do this.' No. First you get them to love you, and then they'll do whatever you want." (Told by Bhārgava Dās)

APPENDIX 1 – Philosophical Speculation

Letter to: Chaturbhus
Bombay
21 January, 1972
72-01-21

My Dear Chaturbhus,

Please accept my blessings. I am happy to receive your nice letter of January 10, 1972, and I am pleased to note that you are asking very intelligent questions. That is natural position for the neophyte devotee who is sincerely seeking to understand what is the Absolute Truth. So I am very much englanded to hear that you are very intelligent boy, like your father, and that your whole family is advancing in Krishna Consciousness. May Krishna give you all blessings.

As for the difference between mental speculation and philosophical speculation, we take it that everything is known by the psychological action of the mind, so that philosophical speculation is the same as mental speculation if it is merely the random or haphazard activity of the brain to understand everything and making theories, "if's" and "maybe's." But if philosophical speculation is directed by Sastra and Guru, and if the goal of such philosophical attempts is to achieve Visnu, then that philosophical speculation is not mental speculation. It is just like this: Krishna says in Bhagavad-gita that "I am the taste of water." Philosophical speculation in the accepted sense then means to try to understand, under the direction of Sastra and Guru, just how Krishna is the taste of water. The points of Bhagavad-gita, though they are simple and complete, can be understood from unlimited angles of vision. So our philosophy is not dry, like mental speculation. The proper function of the brain or psychological activity is to understand everything through Krishna's perspective or point-of-view, and so there is no limit to that understanding because Krishna is unlimited, and even though it can be said that the devotee who knows Krishna, he knows everything (15th Chapter), still, the philosophical process never stops and the devotee continues to increase his knowledge even though he knows everything. Try to understand this point; it is a very good question.

Your ever well-wisher,
A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami

APPENDIX 2 – Being Yourself

Here Satsvarūpa Mahārāja honestly writes about his personal struggle to find himself amidst the social and mental pressures to be a big, important leader:

"I would have liked to have been inside the room to hear Prabhupada's valuable instructions, but I had not been invited. And why should I be invited? I was the secretary-servant. My duty was to get Srila Prabhupada a fresh *neem* twig for brushing his teeth, to prepare his clothes, get his medicine, clean his room—and go get important devotees like Tamal Krsna for him to speak with. Feeling somewhat sorry

for myself, I tried chanting my silent *japa*, but it was now more difficult than ever, as I was trying to listen at the door and as my mind was beating me with foolish thoughts.

“It further occurred to me that if I wanted to take on more important managerial duties, there was nothing preventing me from doing so. It would not be unfitting if as we traveled I assumed the position of Srila Prabhupada’s representative, looking into the management, finances, and direction of preaching in each place. But that was not my inclination—to assert myself everywhere. Nor was I qualified. I should type the letters, do the menial duties and simply travel everywhere with Srila Prabhupada, I told myself. That satisfied Srila Prabhupada so why shouldn’t it satisfy me? Just the fact that Prabhupada wasn’t kicking me out should have been enough to satisfy me. How could I be so ungrateful? Even the big leaders, although called in by Srila Prabhupada, would be left behind in their zones while I went on accompanying Srila Prabhupada *everywhere*. What did it matter if I was a menial servant? Wasn’t that my constitutional position?

(Life with the perfect Master by Satsvarūpa Dās Goswāmī — pg 61-62)

APPENDIX 3 – Senses Become Spiritualized

“When devotees begin prosecuting devotional service in accordance with the instructions of a bona fide spiritual master, they engage their ears and other senses in pure devotion by hearing of the Lord, chanting His glories, remembering Him, offering obeisances to Him, giving Him personal attendance, and so forth. Thus the devotees make the Lord’s transcendental qualities the objects of their senses, as stated by the Lord Himself: *nirguṇo mad-apāśrayaḥ*. (Bhāg. 11.25.26) In this way the devotees’ bodies transcend the material modes. Yet sometimes the devotees may take as their sense objects mundane sounds and so on, and that is material. Thus a devotee’s body can have two aspects, transcendental and material.

“According to one’s level of devotional service, to that degree the transcendental aspects of one’s body become prominent and the material aspects diminish. This transformation is described in the following verse from the *Bhāgavatam* (11.2.42):

*bhaktiḥ pareśānubhavo viraktir
anyatra caiṣa trika eka-kālaḥ
prapadyamānasya yathāśnataḥ syus
tuṣṭiḥ puṣṭiḥ kṣud-apāyo ’nu-ghāsam*

‘Devotion, direct experience of the Supreme Lord, and detachment from other things—these three occur simultaneously for one who has taken shelter of the Supreme Personality of Godhead. Thus, in the same way pleasure, nourishment and relief from hunger come simultaneously and increasingly, with each bite, for a person engaged in eating.’

“When one achieves totally pure love of God, the material portions of the body disappear and the body becomes completely spiritual.” (Bhāg. 10.29.10-11, Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura’s commentary)

“Bhakti purifies the mind so that it gradually becomes spiritual...” *Jaiva Dharma* Ch4

APPENDIX 4 – Points on Leadership from Devotee
Audiences

We'd like to see leaders who:

regularly serve prasadam

are genuinely concerned about other's welfare

invite others without being asked

instruct their disciples to honor their Godbrothers

push others forward

are inclusive instead of exclusive

are generous

live very simply

sometimes joke and laugh with us—not at us

apologize after making a mistake

ask others what *they* would like to do for Kṛṣṇa

do not insist on being served

Reviews on
“Unspoken Obstacles On the Path to Bhakti”
by Purnacandra Das

Mukunda Goswami: "Essential reading for 'thinking' devotees. A must."

Satsvarupa Das Goswami: "I think this book is substantial and dynamic. It is full of sastric foundation but also personal, well aware of ISKCON history and not afraid to speak honestly."

Devamrta Swami: "It gave me a lot to think about. I especially liked the way you wove in sastra, even Vraj-katha, along with your observations and reflections on ISKCON life. If each senior devotee in ISKCON would write a book like this, we would have a valuable heritage of experience and applied wisdom to pass down to future ISKCON-ites, whether leader or not. You have captured well a certain mindset and ethos that is undoubtedly a major prevailing wind from the past that must die out in the present and future."

Bhakti Tirtha Swami: "On the plane ride from Mexico I got the chance to read your wonderful book. I just wanted to thank you for writing such a nice book."

Bhakti Vikas Swami: "Purnacandra Prabhu's new book which pointedly yet without blaming analyzes many problems in our movement."

Bhaktimarga Swami: "I read your book 'Unspoken Obstacles' while in the air. It certainly had a grounding effect. It was reassuring to hear about things that aren't often 'spoken'. I guess honesty and integrity are strong brahminical traits that we must all try to apply in our dealings with one another as well as to consciously check impersonalism. 'To be human' is something that we must practice while we are walking the road of transcendence. We need to remind ourselves of how important it is to put kindness and sensitivity ahead of everything. Thanks for the great read. Is there a sequel?"

Krsna Ksetra Prabhu: "Who says it's not possible to be reflective, thoughtful, honest, articulate, challenging, respectful of tradition while open to change, and be a member of ISKCON at the same time? Read "Unspoken Obstacles..." to be assured that this is not the case. And if you still think it's not possible, this book is a good start to find out how to make it possible."

Urmila Devi: "Purnacandra Prabhu's 'Unspoken Obstacles' reveals ways in which our organization can better fulfill its mission of 'bringing the members of the society together with each other and nearer to Krishna.' It is full of thoughtful and candid insight regarding problems and solutions on both a personal and collective level. Therefore, it offers practical guidance for leaders as well as every member of ISKCON. Even deep concepts have been made accessible through everyday examples and plain language, and altogether the book is a refreshing pleasure."