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THE JOURNEY TO PREMA

~ A Course in the Science of Bhakti-Yoga ~

Lesson 2

Please Chant:

Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa - Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare
Hare Rāma Hare Rāma - Rāma Rāma Hare Hare

+ Huh-ray (Huh like hut); Krish-nuh (nuh like nut); Rā-muh (like drama)

IN THIS LESSON:

- Sanskrit Pronunciation
 Increasing Your Faith – Sādhus – Service
 Serving God's Servants – The Guru
 Śrīla Gurudeva – Serving the Guru
 The Boat of Knowledge – A Light in the Darkness
 Sanskrit Pronunciation Guide
- Correspondence Course
 - Pocket Aide: Glossary – Pronunciation Guide

By the way

Do you have more questions?

Would you like to receive free books on bhakti-yoga?

Would you like a bhakti-yoga pen pal?

We're here to help!

Contact us at the above address



His Divine Grace

Śrīla Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja
 (Affectionately called Śrīla Gurudeva)



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THE JOURNEY TO PREMA – LESSON 2

Dear servant of God,

Please allow us to humbly offer our respects to you.

WELCOME BACK!! We are very happy and excited that you chose to continue studying this course. By asking us to send you lessons you have shown that you are developing faith in the **Vedas + Vay-duhs**. We are sure you recall the discussion on faith in Lesson 1 where we explained that faith was the first step on your journey to prema. We are happy to see that your faith is growing.

We are excited for you because all of us here at the IPBYS Prison Outreach Program have gained peace of mind and feelings of satisfaction for our souls by practicing bhakti-yoga + **b-huk-tee**. We know these benefits and more await you if you faithfully and sincerely study these lessons and practice the recommended processes. We also wish to once again thank you for allowing us to serve you.

Rule #1

In Lesson 1 we told you about the most important rule in all of the Vedas. We must control the mind and live our lives in ways that allow us to follow this rule. The rule is so simple, and yet, it can be difficult to follow. We are instructed to always remember God. We hope that you did your best to put that rule into practice and we ask you to continue to make it the guiding rule in your life.

As this course progresses we will tell you many, many things about God. We will also tell you about the various techniques that the Vedas have given us to help us remember Him. Until you learn all of the things, you can remember Him in whatever way works best for you.

You may want to try seeing Him in everything, seeing the sun as His energy, or flowers and rainbows as His beauty. Perhaps you would like to remember Him with prayers. We ask that you try remembering and repeating His names. Of course you can also try all of these techniques, separately, or in combination.

For now the way you choose to remember God is not that important. What is important, both now and throughout the remainder of your life, is that you make a sincere effort to follow this rule.

Sanskrit Pronunciation

Last month we told you that we would cover Sanskrit pronunciation in this lesson, and although we have done so, you will find that it is located on the last page. We did this so that you can easily access it as you read and study this lesson and so that you will be able to easily find it should you wish to refer back to it when studying later lessons.

We have also included this same pronunciation guide on the pocket aide that we will discuss below. This way you can use it both as a travelling study tool and still be able to have a copy in your property as well.

Although this guide should be of assistance to you in learning how to pronounce Sanskrit words, we must admit that you will find only the most basic instructions in it. This is because Sanskrit can be a difficult language to pronounce. Also, because it is not a commonly spoken, native language that is in use today, many people, including those who have studied it, will suggest different pronunciations for the exact same words or letters.

Another difficulty may arise from the fact that most of you will not be able to hear it spoken (unless you have internet access – see guide). On this point however we will suggest that you do your best to say these words out loud as you study them, for hearing is a valuable tool when it comes to adding information to our storehouse of knowledge. Also, by hearing these words, you will find that you read them more easily, for your mind will recognize the word as a sound memory rather than as letters that must be sounded out. We can understand this by the fact that we learn to recognize words and to speak them long before we can read, and then when we do learn the word we, in a sense, “hear” it as we read it.

By including this guide we are at least providing you with a resource to use as you do your best to read, study, and learn these Sanskrit terms. Also, since some of the books that we send out do not contain pronunciation guides, you may use this to assist you in reading them as well.

Each time you come to a new term, especially those that are:

1. **In bold**; or
2. **Include a pronunciation aide, indicated by a “+” sign**; or
3. **Found in the glossary**:

You should put extra effort into learning both the pronunciation and the meanings of these words, for they are important terms in the science of bhakti-yoga and they are likely to appear again in later lessons as well.

We understand that this process is likely going to be a challenge for you, so we ask you to enthusiastically accept that challenge with a firm determination to meet it and conquer it. Simply put, Sanskrit is the language of the Vedas, so please make a sincere effort to learn these words.

Keeping this Course with You

At the end of this lesson you’ll find a page that we have designed for you to keep in your pocket. Just fold it up along the lines and it can travel with you, for use as an easy reference. Its purpose is to help you remember Sanskrit words, their pronunciation, and other important teachings.

By having this paper with you during those times where prison life requires you to just plain wait, you can make valuable use of that time. You may be waiting in medical, standing in the chow hall line, or any other place where you have a free moment, with little for the mind to do. No matter where you are, you can pull out the pocket aide and take the mind to a higher state of consciousness.

Time is a very precious thing. No amount of money can buy time. The world’s richest man cannot live more than 24 hours each day, and each one we live brings us closer to our final day. We should not waste a day, nor a single moment.

We hope you’ll use these pocket aides to keep the mind on the lesson, and ultimately, on God. These pocket aides are an easy way to keep this course with you, whenever carrying around a lesson, or even part of a lesson is difficult to do.

Some Suggestions and Requests

As we did in Lesson 1 we once again ask you to review this lesson as often as possible. Hopefully you’ll memorize the Sanskrit words we introduce you to, as they will appear again and again. The pocket aides should help you to do this. However, there are many aspects of this course that are not meant to be memorized. We present them so that you’ll have some general knowledge of truths to support your development of deeper understandings.

You may also want to start a study notebook so that you can write down things that strike your interest. Sometimes writing things down in your own words may help you remember them. Or, perhaps you may just want to underline things in your lessons so they will be easy to find when you review them.

We also ask you to reflect on the teachings as they apply to your own life and experiences. Your life is unique and you may find one teaching of more interest and value, while another student benefits from the teaching you found of less interest.

Some of the teachings will probably become clear to you the moment you read them, causing a change in your heart, or an increase in your faith or in your desire to learn and practice more. Others may not become clear to you until you take some time to reflect on them or apply them to your life. And some may clarify themselves when you are not really focusing on them at all, striking you with new understandings when you least expect it.

There’s a famous saying, the Lord works in mysterious ways. Someone may say or do something, or an event may take place that seems totally unrelated to these teachings, and you may find yourself seeing it in a way that you would never have seen it before you began this course. Stay on your tip toes and try to be

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aware of the way God is working to help you along on your journey to prema. The Lord is very merciful and He can choose to give you spiritual insights or touch your life in profound ways at any moment He chooses.

Have a Pen Pal, Please

In our initial questionnaire we asked if you would like a spiritual pen pal. If you said you would like to have one, but have not heard back from us yet, we can assure you we are doing all we can to connect you with one as soon as possible. If you said you did not want one, we encourage you to reevaluate this decision and request one.

We will not pressure you to write. You may write as often or as seldom as you choose, however once a month seems to work well. That allows you to ask any questions you may have on that month's lesson and it also allows the prison program volunteers to regulate their response schedules.

Having a spiritual friend can be of great benefit to you. Surveys have shown that people who had someone to learn from and relate their experiences to as they practiced bhakti-yoga were much more likely to take the process seriously, and to stay on the path, than those who only read books about it. We will do all we can by way of the written word to encourage and inspire you, but this course is aimed at a very general audience. Sharing your own specific questions, and receiving answers and encouragement from someone you know by name can make a lot of difference. So, even if you didn't originally ask for a pen pal, but you later decide you would like one, just let us know.

Help Us Help You

In the questionnaire we also asked you if you had any comments about the course. Since you had only seen Lesson I you may not have had any. If however, you come upon anything you wish to tell us, please let us know what it is. This course is a work in progress. We are always interested in what you have to say and we are open to any suggestions you may have as to ways we can improve the course or better serve you in any way.

Increasing Your Faith

In Lesson I we told you about the important role that faith plays in our journey to prema. We discussed two of the definitions that we will use for this word. **Faith in the Vedas; also, an honest hearted faith in God's existence, which causes us, by our own free will, to make an attempt to reach the Lord.** We also showed you how it was likely that you already possessed this second type of faith. In this lesson's welcome section we said that you asking us to send more lessons indicates that your faith in the Vedas is already growing.

We ask you to become familiar with these two meanings for the word faith. Once you know what to look for, you can begin to examine your heart to see if your faith is increasing. We want you to increase the strength of your faith, because, **if your faith becomes strong enough, nothing will stop you from making progress on your journey, until you reach life's ultimate goal.**

Since the second type of faith mentioned above is based on your own beliefs, desires, and efforts, it is up to you to reflect on the ingredients of this faith and to work on increasing those ingredients. **The more you learn to see God in everything, the more faith you'll have in His existence.** The more you become convinced of His existence, the more your desire and efforts to reach Him will increase.

You can increase your faith in the Vedas by associating with spiritually advanced, saintly souls and by performing the processes of bhakti-yoga. When we associate with saintly souls we see the peace and joy that they experience. This can cause us to have faith in the Vedas, because it is by living according to the Vedic recommendations, that they have attained their blissful state. We will also learn great truths in their association. By coming to know and accept these truths, our faith in the Vedas, which are the source of these truths, will increase. Exactly what we mean by, "associating with these saintly souls," will be discussed a little bit later on in this lesson.

Since it is our faith that will carry us along on our journey to prema, it is wise of us to increase its strength whenever we can. Going back to our analogy about needing faith to board an airplane, we can understand that if we were to totally lose faith in the plane during its journey, we might just choose to grab a parachute and bail out. We should increase our faith so that we do not abandon our practice of bhakti-yoga before we reach our final destination.

Some students may have difficulty even believing, much less having faith in some of the descriptions of God's forms and His activities as they appear in the Vedas. In answer to those who may find something they come across to be unbelievable, we ask them to consider this. God has unlimited powers. The Vedas tell us that hardly anyone will ever fully understand all His activities, or why He performs them in the way He does. However, if we can just accept that He does have unlimited powers then we can learn to have faith, even in the most incredible stories from the Vedas. We can accept God's incredible capabilities if we can accept the simple logic of the following statement.

**The only thing that is impossible,
is for something to be impossible,
because God can do anything.**

Until your faith in the Vedas fully matures, we ask you to have faith in the medicine, the processes of bhakti-yoga, as we prescribe them to you. When we go to a doctor and he writes a prescription for us to take, we only take the medicine because we have faith that he knows what is wrong with us, and that the medicine he tells us to take will help to cure us. We may not understand what is wrong with us, what the medicine is, or how it works, and we may not even be able to pronounce its name, but if we have faith in the doctor we will take it anyway. Similarly, even if you do not understand what is wrong with you, what bhakti-yoga is or how it works, and even if you just can't pronounce the Sanskrit words in this course, we ask you to please put faith in the medicine. Please take the medicine by honestly and sincerely trying the processes we recommend. When followed with faith, these processes can cure us of our material miseries.

What We Mean by Saintly Souls

Several times in this course, we have used the term "saintly soul." Exactly what we mean by this term is probably unclear to you, so, we will now tell you what we mean by it, because saintly souls play an important role on the journey to prema.

There is a Sanskrit word, **sādhū**, + **sād-hoo** (sād like odd) that we have been translating as "saintly soul." This is only a bare bones concept of what is really meant by the Sanskrit word. We are now going to give you a complete definition of what the word **sādhū** means and from this point on we will use the word **sādhū** to identify a person who possesses all of the following profound qualities.

The word **sādhū** comes from a root word that means "to go straight to the goal" (like an arrow), or to succeed. **A sādhū is one who is straight-forward and speaks the truth no matter the circumstance.**

The Qualities of A Sādhū

For the purposes of this course, the term **sādhū** will refer to a **highly advanced practitioner of bhakti-yoga**. A true **sādhū** must not lack any of the following traits. A **sādhū** sees all beings equally, knowing that each is a spirit soul, whether they are trapped in the body of a bug, a thief, or a king. He is fully peaceful because his intellect is fixed on God. He has no anger, toward anyone or about anything. He is a well-wishing friend to all souls. He never considers the faults of another, therefore he never criticizes anyone. He is firmly established in a loving relationship with the Lord.

He considers prema to be the highest goal of life, and he does not consider any other object to be worthy of attaining. He has no attachment for people who are absorbed in material enjoyment, nor for wife, children, wealth, or home. He has no desire to

accumulate wealth beyond what is necessary to maintain his body. He considers his body to be a possession of the Lord; therefore he takes care of it and uses it in God's service. A true sādhu will never take any type of intoxicant, not even tea, coffee, or tobacco.

When we said that associating with saintly souls would increase your faith in the Vedas, it was sādhus, those who possessed all these characteristics, who we were referring to. We can associate for millions of years with so-called holy men, if however, they are not true sādhus, associating with them will not increase our faith, or help us attain prema.

In addition to possessing these qualities, a sādhu must perform certain functions as well. One of the great sādhus that we rely upon, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura (30 in Lesson 5) tells us about these functions.

The function of the sādhu is to remain in touch with the Lord twenty-four hours a day. The function of the sādhu is to remove the fear and anxiety of those who take shelter of him or associate with him and to bring them happiness. The function of the sādhu is to make the people of this world who are averse to the Lord inclined towards Him. The activity of the sādhu is to deliver conditioned souls like us from the clutches of māyā + mā-yā (like mop/yacht). (Māyā is the Sanskrit term for the illusions which entrap us in the material worlds. This term will be fully discussed in Lesson 6.)

The function of the sādhu in delivering us from the prison house that māyā keeps us in, is further discussed in this way:

How can we be relieved from the influences of māyā? Our religious scriptures instruct on this. It is only possible when we are able to get the association of a sādhu who is himself free from māyā.

This quote explains our need for the assistance of a sādhu who is outside of the prison of illusions, for only those who are thus situated can help us in our escape.

While all of these qualities and functions of the sādhus should cause us to understand why we should begin to seek out their association, we want to further illustrate this point by referring you back to the last two **bold** statements above.

Along with the definitions of faith that we have already shared with you, the Vedas also tell us about **the symptoms of those who have faith**. One of these symptoms is given simply as **a desire to serve the Lord**, and another tells us that **the hearts of those who possess faith strive only to acquire love for the Lord and opportunities to increase that love**.

Thus we can see that the sādhus, by turning our aversion for the Lord into an inclination for Him, play a critical role in increasing our faith as well.

Our teachers have given us many more instructions on these truths, and later in this lesson we will share more of their words on the role that sādhus play with you, but, before we do that, let's take a closer look at what faith is and at the vows we will take and the attitudes that will arise in our hearts as our faith develops.

The Symptoms of Highly Developed Faith

The Vedas also describe the symptoms of those who possess highly developed faith. Those who possess this high level of faith fully devote their lives to the service of the Lord.

These symptoms are described as follows. **The first two symptoms involve the taking of two very serious vows.** Those who take these vows promise that they will **only accept things that are favorable for the practice of bhakti-yoga** and that they will **reject all that is unfavorable to the practice of bhakti-yoga**.

The third symptom of highly developed faith is **complete trust in the Lord as one's only protector**. This causes them to think, "The Lord is my only protector. I cannot gain anything from practices that are not designed to keep me under His shelter."

The fourth symptom of this type of faith is **total dependence on the Lord**. This means that they deliberately accept Him as

their only maintainer. This dependence causes them to think, "I cannot obtain anything from my own efforts. I cannot even maintain myself. I will serve God as far as I am able and He will take care of me."

Submitting themselves entirely to the Lord, in full surrender, is the fifth symptom of this level of faith. "Who am I? I am His. My duty is to fulfill His desires." This is their state of mind. **The sixth symptom, humility**, causes them to feel, "I am wretched and insignificant. I possess no material wealth."

For those of us who are beginners on the path of bhakti-yoga, it may be hard to imagine possessing these symptoms of faith. These symptoms generally only develop over time, as we sincerely practice bhakti-yoga, but we can obtain them. If you study these symptoms, and contemplate how it is that they are signs of deep faith, you'll be able to understand them. This will enable you to recognize them as you develop them.

Even if we have not yet developed these signs of faith, we can take the vows mentioned as the first two symptoms and begin to follow them to the best of our abilities. For example, time spent in pursuit of material pleasure, doing things like watching movies filled with violence or reading books filled with descriptions of sex, are unfavorable to the practice of bhakti-yoga, so we can begin to intentionally avoid these things. We can spend the time that would have gone to those activities reading these lessons, remembering God, or practicing the many processes of bhakti-yoga that will be discussed in this course. **Our spiritual life is the most important part of our lives**, and doing things to increase our faith is far more important than watching television or finishing a crossword puzzle.

Faith Grows With Effort

Every one of us in the IPBYS Prison Program have personally experienced that our faith in the Vedas, as well as our faith in the fact that bhakti-yoga is the only means to reach prema, has grown over time. The Vedas tell us that the only way to increase our **bhakti, our performance of loving service to God**, is to perform bhakti-yoga. Bhakti-yoga is the cause of bhakti. Bhakti-yoga is the process we use to reach the goal, and, since upon attainment of prema our bhakti increases, it's also part of the goal itself.

In the **Holy Qurān** we also find a passage that discusses the fact that our faith can increase, and in doing so it mentions the destructive nature of harboring doubts.

Yea, those believe, their faith is increased and they do rejoice. But in those whose hearts there is a disease – it will add doubt to their doubt, and they will die in a state of unbelief. (S.9 A.124-125)

The Vedas similarly condemn the negative effects of doubt, telling us:

Those who are ignorant, faithless, and who have a doubting nature are ruined. A skeptic cannot achieve his well-being in this world or the next, nor can he ever achieve happiness. (Bhagavad-Gītā 4.40)

In a later lesson we will further explore the dangers of doubt, but before we move on to discuss the ways that we can increase our faith, we'll share one more quote about the opposite effects of doubt and faith. Here we find this truth discussed in the **Holy Bible**.

Without faith it is impossible to please Him (the Lord): for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him. (Heb. 11:6)

Keeping these truths in mind should help us to both remain steady in our faith and to do all we can to increase it as well, and, if we wish to do this, we simply need to...

Practice Bhakti-yoga & Associate with Sādhus

The Vedas give us **two specific ways that we can increase our faith. They are; contact with the acts of bhakti-yoga, and associating with sādhus**. Faith is the only thing that is required for us to be eligible to practice bhakti-yoga. In fact, God has told us that faith is the root of everyone's spiritual life. Someone may

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ask why one person may have a great deal of faith from early on in his life and another may struggle to develop even the slightest faith. The answer is that one's level of faith is dependent upon how much one was exposed to acts of bhakti-yoga, and the association of sādhus in his past lives.

The first item in the development of faith, contact with acts of bhakti-yoga, refers to participating in the processes of bhakti-yoga. This can include a wide variety of activities from cleaning a temple, to making offerings to God, to saying prayers, to observing spiritual fasting, to participating in holy festivals. These activities begin to develop our faith, even if they are performed accidentally or without faith, because God is very merciful to anyone who performs acts of bhakti-yoga. This is true even if their motive was not pure.

God tells us that there are four kinds of men who begin to worship Him. There are those who are distressed and worship Him for relief; those who are inquisitive and worship Him desiring knowledge; those who desire to enjoy the material worlds, and thus they worship Him to attain wealth in the form of land, gold, etc.; and there are those who have pure hearts, and who worship Him solely because they are attached to God. God tells us that this fourth type of worshipper is very dear to Him.

These first three types of worshippers perform impure bhakti-yoga, because it is mixed with desires for personal gains. And yet they are still considered great souls, because they have gone directly to God to fulfill their desires. By fulfilling these desires, God shows His quality of being affectionate to those who worship Him. Through performing these acts of bhakti-yoga the faith of these worshippers will grow and be purified. In that way they will eventually come to the point where they serve God strictly for His pleasure.

The Vedas also tell us that we can develop our faith by associating with sādhus. They are the only ones who can give us full knowledge of spiritual truths and the proper means to execute bhakti-yoga. By associating with sādhus we develop faith in them and we ask them questions about the mysteries of life. When we hear their intelligent answers our faith in them, and our faith in Vedas, where all of their answers come from, is sure to increase.

Strong faith will carry us through any difficulties we may come up against during our journey to prema. These sādhus can strengthen our faith. Therefore, associating with them is known to be the best of all things we could possibly do with our time. For souls like us, who are trapped in the worlds of material desires, illusions, and miseries, our only hope for deliverance begins with faith and the association of sādhus.

The value and importance of associating with wise and holy men who live regulated lives is also stressed in other scriptures as well. In the Dhammapada, **Lord Buddha** tells us:

A man of intelligence should only associate with those who have realized the truth, who follow the proper path, and who have given up their thirst for sense pleasure. (Verse 208)

In the **Holy Qurān** this teaching is express in this way:

O ye who believe! Fear God and be with those who are true. (in word and deed) (S.9 A.119)

And in the Holy Bible we find instructions to avoid the association of unbelievers, which is of course the same teaching that we've been discussing, only given from another perspective. The **Holy Bible** says:

Be yet not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what community hath light with darkness? (II Cor. 6:14 KJV)

In a later lesson we will further explore this same truth from a Vedic standpoint when we compare the effects of good and bad association, but for now we'll return to our focus on both the value of and the need for the association of sādhus.

In Lesson 1 we gave you a very basic definition of bhakti, telling you that its literal translation is "to serve." In that same lesson we also said that, over time, we would be sharing deeper

and more complete meanings of words with you, and, in order to share our next quote on the value of associating with sādhus, we will need to also share another meaning of bhakti with you.

Bhakti also refers to a natural, loving, and affectionate mood toward the Lord which causes us to feel a strong desire to serve Him.

This quote expresses the role that the association of sādhus plays in the development of this mood.

Bhakti is awakened when one associates with bhaktas (those who already possess this loving mood and who have dedicated their lives to serving the Lord). *Bhakti is attainable by keeping the company of pure bhaktas* (sādhus). **The person who possesses bhakti can manifest it in the heart of every soul. Unless and until we get the association of such a devotee, this is not possible.**

The acquisition of this love-filled mood is essential to our spiritual advancement, and, in this next quote, **Śrīla Gurudeva** (introduced later in this lesson) speaks on the necessity of association in attaining this mood.

Without the mercy of elevated devotees (sādhus), bhakti cannot be obtained by any other method. *To say nothing of developing a loving service mood toward the Lord (Kṛṣṇa-bhakti), one cannot even obtain freedom from repeated birth and death and material attachments* (Lesson 6) *without this association. The association of sādhus is the root of bhakti. By the association of the Lord's supremely independent devotees, and as a consequence of the mercy obtained from them, one obtains great fortune, and this great fortune manifests as an eligibility to attain bhakti.*

The meaning of 'great fortune' is that by associating with sādhus in one's previous life, and by the mercy obtained from them, a very deep impression is formed on the mind or heart. When this impression is nourished again in the present life, it arises in the form of faith. This faith is the cause of the awakening of bhakti. (This is because faith causes us to seek out the association of sādhus.)

According to the philosophical conclusion previously mentioned, association with sādhus is the passageway which brings one face-to-face with the Lord. By the influence of this association, the living entity, who is averted from the Lord, becomes turned toward the Lord. Furthermore, by that association, faith, a taste for serving the Lord, and prema arise one after another. (Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu-bindu)

With these facts in mind we should seek out the association of sādhus, and, in doing so, we should also ask ourselves, "What does it mean to associate with sādhus?"

When the Vedas speak of associating with sādhus, they do not mean sitting around watching TV with them, taking them shopping, or going out to have a few beers with them.

Associating with sādhus means to seek them out, to stay with them, to offer our respect to them, to ask them questions about spiritual truths, to serve them, to perform bhakti-yoga under their guidance, and to follow in their footsteps. By following in their footsteps, we mean, to do as they do in every way. To truly associate with the sādhus we must do as many of these things as we can, and do them sincerely. When the sādhus see that we are sincere they will bestow their mercy on us and our faith will increase.

The association of sādhus is the second step on the journey to prema. Since you've taken the first step, the step of faith, you should plant that foot firmly on the path to prema by increasing your faith. You have already begun to associate with sādhus as well, since you sought out this course, which contains the teachings of the great sādhus. Hopefully, by associating with sādhus through this course, you'll begin to experience for yourself an increase in your faith. Now you must boldly and confidently plant that second step, association with the sādhus, by following through with the various aspects of association that we have listed above.

It is very important for us to understand that this association is not an option. If we choose to avoid this association, we will not make spiritual progress.

This truth was expressed in some of the quotes that we've already shared with you, where Śrīla Gurudeva told us that bhakti can only be attained by the association of sādhus, and that this association is the root of bhakti. **This next quote of his mentions the necessity of this association.**

If you follow the instructions to associate with pure devotees, Śrī Kṛṣṇa will arrange everything for you. Don't fear. Kṛṣṇa has created you. He is the supreme controller so why should you have any fear? All problems will be solved by following this instruction and Kṛṣṇa will manage everything.

If you want unalloyed service to Kṛṣṇa, have courage in your heart, be bold, and make an effort to associate with qualified devotees of Kṛṣṇa. (In the Vedas) the importance of this association is stressed, not only once, but three times: sādhu-sanga (the association of the sādhus), sādhu-sanga, again sādhu-sanga. "sādhu-sanga sādhu-sanga – sarva sastre kaya lava matra sādhu-sanga sarva siddhi haya"

(The verdict of all revealed scriptures is that by even a moment's association with a sādhu one can attain all spiritual success.)

What is the meaning of this verse? It is that unalloyed service to Kṛṣṇa can be attained through sādhu-sanga, and following this instruction is our first duty.

We should note this word "duty." By this instruction we are required to seek out the association of sādhus.

While we must understand the positive aspects of this association, we should also be aware of the negative effects of failing to seek out and attain it. This truth is discussed by Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura (30) when he tells us:

If one does not regularly engage in discussions on the name, form, qualities, and pastimes of the Lord, in the form of hearing and chanting in the association of sādhus, his faith will gradually dwindle, then vanish altogether.

So this association is critical, at both the beginning of our journey, as it develops our faith and provides the root of our bhakti, and it remains critical throughout our journey, as it maintains our faith, which forms the foundation of the path we travel upon.

The value of associating with sādhus is irreplaceable. The Vedas tell us that we have been wandering around in the worlds of birth and death since a time without beginning. Sometimes we take births which are full of material pleasures. Other times we take births which are full of material pains. We are told that **when the time of our release from this cycle of births and deaths approaches, we will attain the association of sādhus.**

Through this association, we get to hear descriptions about God, such as His names, forms, qualities, activities, and associates, which act as medicine for our hearts. By repeatedly hearing and remembering these topics we will accelerate our progress along the path to prema.

Now that you have attained the association of sādhus, you should feel great relief. You have reason to rejoice, because your chance to escape your material miseries is approaching. You should do all you can to increase your faith and to associate with sādhus, even at the cost of missing a game of cards, or a chance to look at a magazine. It's time to get your priorities in order and to make the best use of your time. **A human life is a valuable thing. A human life which includes the association of sādhus provides us with a rare, blessed, and golden opportunity to make spiritual advancement. We must get serious about our lives.** Otherwise, just like sand slips through the hourglass, this lifetime of opportunity will slip away from us.

We Must Serve Somebody

God has told us that **the only true purpose our soul has is to eternally serve God.** All of our soul's qualities are designed to serve this purpose.

It is by God's arrangement and design that a soul is able to

provide the energy that keeps material bodies alive.

The only difference between a living body and a corpse is the presence of the soul. When the soul leaves the body, it "dies." The materials that made up the body may still be completely intact, the organs, the fluids, the tissues, and the bones remain as they were, but there is nothing to supply them with the energy they needed to function. Without the life force provided by the soul, the material parts that make up the body cannot keep it alive.

So the soul is serving God, by keeping the body alive, in accordance with His design. Since this function of the soul generally goes on without our having to think about it, most of us do not recognize how the soul is serving in this way.

When we use this lump of matter to do things that we have to think about doing, like eating meals, we falsely believe that we are the master of our life force, the soul. We create an illusion, wherein we think of the soul as our servant. In this deluded state we use the soul to serve material desires. Until we come to understand the spiritual truths involved, we will continue to use the soul to serve the material senses, which include the mind.

When the body becomes hungry, we use the soul's energy to gather food and feed it. At the same time, we usually serve the tongue and the sense of taste by eating those things we enjoy, even if it is unhealthy to do so. When we want to hear music we serve the sense of hearing. Of course this list goes on, and on, and on, and in every case, we are directing the energy of the soul to serve the material desires and senses.

Since the soul's natural quality is to be in a loving relationship with God, most of us develop desires to have companions, whether they be friends, spouses, children, or even just a pet. As part of these relationships, we expand the services we ask our soul to perform beyond just serving ourselves. We include serving others as well. We help a friend fix his car, we buy our spouse a present, we take our child to the park, or we get a chew toy for our dog.

At work we may have to serve a boss or two, and even if we own our own company we have to serve our customers. Some of us may further expand our horizon of service by giving in charity, thus serving those who benefit from our donation. Or some may serve their countrymen by joining the military.

The point is this. **We cannot make it through life without serving.** We are forced to serve the stomach, or the body will "die" of starvation. Most of us will also choose to serve ourselves by satisfying our senses and desires. We will probably also decide to serve a friend, a spouse, a child, our parents, or a goldfish, but there's no denying the fact, **we must serve somebody.**

The Choice is Yours

Imagine being offered a job where you are told the position is only temporary. You are to work for several bosses who are also in temporary positions. There is no guarantee as to what you'll earn, but you find out that doesn't really matter anyway, because when you leave the position, everything you earned will be taken away from you. Your coworkers are not to be trusted because most of them will be selfish people, who are only looking out for their own best interests. They will do whatever it takes to get ahead, no matter what it costs the next man. Just to put the icing on the cake of this list of disturbing things, you are asked to really put your heart into serving your bosses, even though none of them have the authority to give you a permanent job or any type of promotion or raise.

Now, imagine you meet someone who offers you a much better job. It's a permanent position that cannot be taken from you. There's lots of room for advancement and you can stay there as long as you wish. There is only one boss, and His position is permanent as He is the owner of the company. Your wages will include built-in raises and everything you earn is yours to keep. Your coworkers will all be friendly, merciful, and kind, and they will be dedicated to helping you succeed, no matter what the cost

Staple

to themselves. Your boss will have full authority to promote you whenever He sees fit, and if He sees that you are sincerely serving Him, you'll be rewarded with a treasure of eternal and unlimited love and happiness.

The fact is this. Both of these positions are available, and it's up to you to choose which of these bosses you want to serve. Your material life is a temporary position that will end when the soul leaves the body. If you choose to serve the senses, a spouse, children, or a cat, you'll be serving bosses who are also in temporary positions.

There is no guarantee what you'll earn working for these bosses. Spouses often have affairs, leaving behind a broken heart as their only payment for past services. Children may turn their love away from parents as well, and cats have been known to bite the hand that feeds them, and even if their hearts stay true, these relationships are sure to end at the graveside.

Most everyone has heard the old expression – you can't take it with you when you go – yet few understand just how true this is. If they did, they would not dedicate all of their service toward obtaining temporary things.

The second position you can choose to have in life is the one that is offered by the sādhus. If we choose wisely we can begin to serve God in this life and we can continue this service as long as we wish, even after the soul leaves the material body. We will earn advancement on our journey to prema and even if we do not reach that goal in this life, we are guaranteed to pick up where we left off in our next life. The ingredients of spiritual advancement, like faith and spiritual understandings, are things that you can take with you when you go. When you work in God's service your coworkers will be others who follow the path of bhakti-yoga. The sādhus who will supervise and guide you'll always have your best interests at heart. They are full of mercy and they will do everything they can to help you complete your journey to prema.

By serving God, you work for a boss who has full authority to promote you into whatever position He chooses. In later lessons we will discuss the wide variety of services provided by God's pure servants, and we will tell you how you can attain these various positions based upon your own personal tastes for the type of relationship you wish to have with God. The one thing that all of these servants have in common is that they experience the eternal bliss of prema. So, who do you want to serve? The choice is yours.

Servant of the Servant of God

We have told you several times now that you are a servant of God. This is true whether you have fully accepted it or not. The Vedas tell us that some of us remember this fact, and some forget it, but still, we are all servants of God.

Since you are a servant of God and you are allowing us to serve you, we are actually servants of the servant of God. Part of the definition of bhakti-yoga that we gave in Lesson 1 was favorable and voluntary service of God. However, if you think about it, God does not actually need anything that we offer Him. He is fully self-satisfied and filled with complete happiness.

God has many qualities. Of all these qualities, the one that is considered to be His most outstanding is His affection for those who have devoted their hearts to Him. As an extension of this, He has directed us to serve His servants, instead of serving Him directly. This is partly because of the fact that His servant may actually need our assistance, whereas He does not. Since it is His direct instruction to act as servants of His servants, we are also serving Him, by following His orders, when we serve you.

Servant of the Servant of the Servant of God

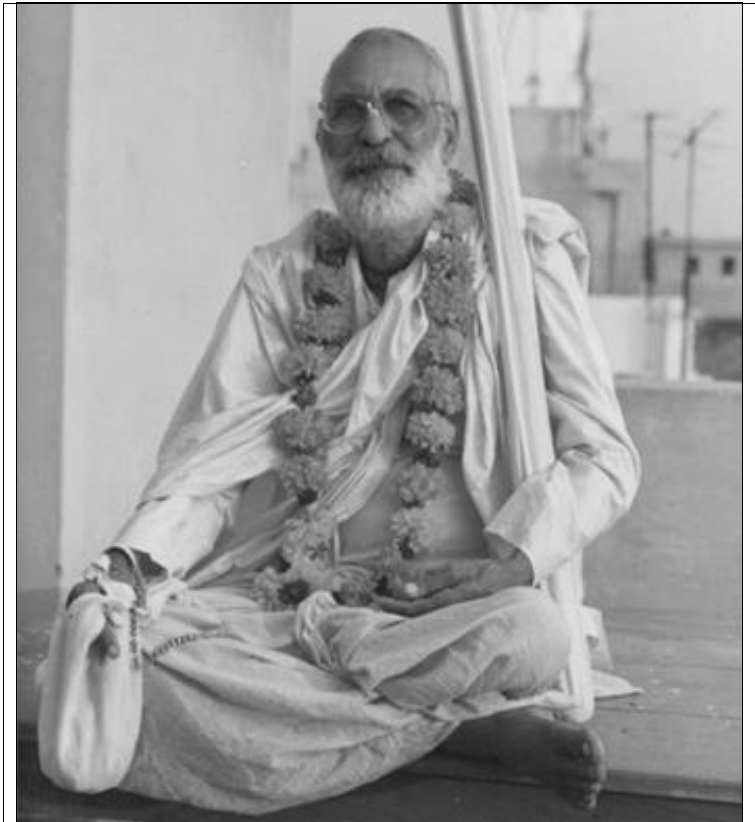
We are serving you because we have made the decision to dedicate ourselves to serving a great servant of God. The Vedas tell us that one of the duties we must fulfill in our life is to seek out a **sādhū who can teach us spiritual truths**. Such a teacher is known as a **guru**. + **goo-roo**. Having found a guru, we should offer our most sincere and fully humble respects to him/her. We

should ask him/her questions about spiritual subjects, and serve him/her in whatever way he/she directs us to.

We at the IPBYS all serve a great guru who was the founder of our society of devotees. As this course progresses, we will tell you many things about him; such as the fact that he was born into a family of **devotees; people who, through the practice of bhakti-yoga, devote their lives to serving God**. Such a birth is rare, and it shows that he was an advanced soul even at birth. He became a great scholar of the Vedas, and he translated many books, on very advanced teachings, into modern languages, so that others could understand these higher truths.

At a very young age, he gave up a good position in worldly society. He renounced all connections with his family in order to dedicate his life to the service of his guru. He led an exemplary life of service, and he spent many years as a traveling preacher in order to spread the message of love of God to fallen souls.

His picture and his name appears below and on the bottom of the first page of each lesson. The second name listed there, the one that he is affectionately referred to by, is **Śrīla Gurudeva**. + **Shree-luh Goo-roo-dave**. **Śrīla**, is a title of honor and respect, which can be translated in many ways, one of which especially applies here; "**knower of the Vedas**." (Note: when pronouncing Śrīla the final "a" sound is pronounced. In Gurudeva the final "a" sound is usually dropped.)



His Divine Grace

Śrīla Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja
(Affectionately called **Śrīla Gurudeva**)

In keeping with instructions that were given by God, Śrīla Gurudeva has told us to also become preachers. He gave this instruction not only because it is God's instruction, but also because his guru, who was a servant of God, asked him to serve in this way. Therefore, by serving him we become a servant of a servant of God. **This position, that of being a servant of a servant of a servant, is actually the attitude we should strive to develop.** It is only through this humble attitude of service that we will be able to enter the higher realms, and the deeper moods of bhakti-yoga, that will be introduced later in this course. If we can adopt this humble attitude it will help us along during each and every step of our journey to prema.

A Short Note on Sexism in this Course

In the last section we used what many people in today's society consider to be some of the necessary forms of gender neutral pronouns, him/her and he/she. From this point on we will no longer do so. When we use masculine gender pronouns such as he and him, we are referring to both males and females.

In Vedic histories, the "father" of mankind was named **Mānu**. + **Mā-noo** In Sanskrit, the word for mind is **manas**, + **muh-nus** which indicates the **human capacity for rational thought**. The word "man" descends from these words. It is not a sexist word. It applies to all members of the human race.

The website for "Hodge's" Harbrace Handbook", which is accepted as an authority on English usage, says that the use of masculine pronouns, instead of gender neutral forms like he/she, him/her, one, and "a person," is fully acceptable and complies with proper English usage. Therefore, in order to avoid excessive literary awkwardness, this course will use masculine gender pronouns to refer to both sexes.

The Vedas contain many examples of female sādhus and gurus. There is no room for any sexism as far as who is qualified to make spiritual advancement or to attain prema. In fact, as you'll learn in lessons to come, the person who possesses the purest and most complete prema of all, usually resides in a female form.

The Guru

The word **guru** that we mentioned above, in referring to a **teacher of spiritual truths**, is a Sanskrit word that best translates as, **"he who removes darkness, or ignorance."** This ignorance refers to that which leads to our material desires and illusions. These desires and illusions are what lead us to make so many mistakes in our lives. When the darkness we live in is removed from our lives, we begin to think, feel, and act in completely different ways. We begin to live in the light of spiritual knowledge.

The same Vedic verse that tells us to seek out a guru, to offer respect to him, to ask him questions about spiritual subjects, and to serve him by any means that he directs us, also assures us that **a true guru can enlighten us and remove our ignorance**. This means he can give us instructions on all spiritual truths, from the most basic to the most profound.

There is another interesting aspect of finding a guru that we wish to share with you. God is aware of all our thoughts, all our needs, and the sincerity of our desires. When He sees that we are sincere in our desire and efforts to seek out a true guru, He will send us one. As another old saying goes, when the student is ready, the teacher will come.

There are many teachings related to how we can recognize a true guru, how we should serve him, and that there are actually many types of gurus. Although we will not cover all of these teachings at this point in the course, we will tell you some things you need to know about the guru.

The Qualities of a True Guru

A true guru must have many qualities. One quality that is absolutely necessary is a complete understanding of all spiritual truths. No one can give out something they do not possess, so if the guru does not possess these understandings, he will not be able to pass them on to you.

He must also possess all of the qualities of a sādhu that we listed in the section, "What We Mean by Saintry Souls." In that section we said a sādhu must practice bhakti-yoga. A guru cannot simply teach us about bhakti-yoga as though it is just another subject to be learned about. He must practice it. If we find that someone is posing as a bhakti-yoga guru, but not practicing what he preaches, he is never to be accepted as a true guru.

A guru must practice and teach bhakti-yoga, not one of the bogus forms of so-called yoga, like the stretching exercises we mentioned in Lesson 1.

In recent years it has become fashionable to use the word "guru" to refer to anyone who teaches about any subject, or who

claims to have mastered any field of knowledge.

You might hear someone referred to as a cooking guru or a business guru. These are all nonsense uses of the word guru. **Guru only applies to those teachers who can remove the ignorance that covers the prema in your heart.** In this course, the word guru will be used to refer to true gurus, unless otherwise noted.

A true guru never says, "I am God," or "I can make you God." He is always humble and he only considers himself to be a servant of his own guru. His interest in your life should be based upon keeping you on the path that will lead you to prema.

He must be of unquestionable character and morally sound. A guru who commits sinful activities cannot be accepted.

A guru must have total control of the urges of the genitals. This means that he must be celibate, not just physically but mentally as well. Celibacy allows for sex with your spouse for the purpose of having a child, but does not allow for any other type of sex. This even includes masturbation and thoughts of having sex.

A guru must have total control of the urges of the stomach. This means that he eats neither too much nor too little, and that he will only eat food that has been first offered to God.

He must have total control over anger. Although a true guru may sometimes appear to express anger toward a certain student, in order to make a point, this is actually done with total control. This can usually be witnessed by the fact that, as soon as he has made his point, the "anger" disappears.

A true guru totally controls the urge to speak. He never talks about useless material subjects like sports scores or celebrity gossip. His words are reserved for relating spiritual truths, and, at times, for discussing issues related to things like management. He discusses this in order to ensure that the temples he oversees are being run properly or that spiritual books are being widely distributed.

One of the guru's most amazing qualities is that he has total control of the mind. Controlling the mind has been said to be more difficult than controlling the wind, yet God said it is possible through constant practice and detachment. Therefore, the guru has full control over the mind. He has abandoned all attachments to everything but his service. Without control of the mind, he cannot possibly control the genitals, the tongue, the urge to speak, the stomach, and anger. Controlling the mind is an extremely hard thing to do, but a true guru has this ability.

We are instructed to test someone before we accept them as our guru. This can be done by asking them about spiritual subjects. **The guru should be able to satisfy you with direct and convincing answers that are totally in line with the teachings of the Vedas.**

We must also understand that there is no room for "new" teachings. **Śrīla Prabhupāda** confirms this when he tells us:

The bona fide guru, who has heard all the Vedic knowledge from his undisturbed guru, never presents anything that is not mentioned in the Vedic literatures.

However, **a true guru will also teach according to time, place, and circumstance**, using language & examples that will help the student to understand the original Vedic teaching.

As we make progress on our journey to prema, our practices will become very tasty. In this next quote, **Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura** (30) tells us about another quality of a true guru in regards to this increase of taste.

If my taste for serving Śrī Kṛṣṇa increases day by day, then I shall be blessed indeed. He who engages us in activities that increase this taste is certainly a true guru.

The most important test of all, however, is that he must be able to help people on their journey to prema. **Śrīla Gurudeva** confirms this truth when he tells us:

If someone is not able to give prema, then he is not really a guru at all. Being capable of bestowing Kṛṣṇa prema (pure love for God) is the primary attribute of a genuine guru.

Staple

If a guru has been shown to be effective in leading people to prema then we should understand that he is accomplishing his most important function. Even if we think we can detect a lack in one of the other qualities, as long as it is not severe, we must consider that we are not qualified to pass judgment. We should also be aware of the fact that, as practitioners of bhakti-yoga, we should not be looking to find faults with or to criticize others. Still, the ultimate test of a guru's qualities is always to be based upon his ability to lead others on a successful journey to prema.

From Guru to guru to guru

As discussed above, the knowledge that a true guru passes on to you is never based upon his own ideas or imaginary things. A true guru will only repeat the exact teachings he heard from his guru, who was also teaching exactly what he heard from his guru. In this way, teachings remain unchanged from generation to generation. **Śrīla Prabhupāda** (#32 in Lesson 5) confirms this point when he says:

Anyone who is following the ācārya + ā-chār-yuh (like odd/car/young) (one who teaches by the example of his own behavior), whatever he says is correct, because he does not manufacture. He says what he has learned from the ācāryas. So that is the position of guru, he speaks only what he has heard from an ācārya.

The unbroken nature of how this knowledge is passed on is explained as follows:

The relationship between guru and disciple is eternal, and the succession of bona fide gurus and their disciples, and the flow of divine knowledge, therein, is also, therefore, eternal. In fact there is no division between the relationship of a single guru and his disciple and the entire succession of gurus. Rather, they are as inseparable as a body and its limbs.

By telling us this, Śrī guru ensures us that our relationship with them will connect us with the eternal chain of truths that binds all followers of Śrī guru together.

Over time there will be many true gurus, and yet, from another angle of vision, there is only one guru. If we read the written teachings of various gurus in an unbroken chain of gurus, we should find that everyone conveyed the same message. If we find changes or inconsistencies in the teachings then we should be very careful, for the chain may well have been broken somewhere along the line. There may be very slight variations of how truths are expressed due to the time, place, and circumstances that the guru was in, but if there are consistent and distinct changes from the teachings of the former gurus, then it is best not to trust that chain of gurus. The key issue is never the language used, or the terms of expression, it is the teaching. **If the teaching remains unchanged, the chain is unbroken.**

For example, when we were discussing faith in the first lesson we used the analogy of needing faith to board an airplane; this example could not have been used 100 years ago. But, for a course written in modern times, such an example is easily understood and perfectly okay. In fact, the guru should do all he can to help the student understand the teaching.

This course is designed for inmates and we want to do all we can to make it interesting and effective. One of the contributors to this course spent over ten years in prison. We hope his insights regarding what prisoners experience, and his input as to how to present these teachings to you, will allow us to use examples or terms that will hit home with you, thus giving you a better opportunity to identify with or absorb a teaching.

God is the Original Guru

In this course you'll never be taught anything that was not originally taught by God. In the Vedas, God tells us that He is the original Guru. The spiritual truths that this course is based upon have always existed. God passed these truths down to us from **Śrī + Shree** Guru to guru to guru. **God is Śrī Guru, with a capital "G."** (Śrī is a term of honor and respect similar to Śrīla. It is often used to denote an even more exalted level of personality. It

includes qualities like beauty, fame, majesty, and wealth.)

Over the great course of history, the teachings given by Śrī Guru/God go through periods where, due to the influence of time, these teachings seem to get lost. When that happens Śrī Guru descends to restore the teachings to their original state. In this way, the teachings remain unchanged.

As you study these lessons you may notice that we sometimes use the phrase, "The Vedas say," and sometimes we say "God says." This is not because there is any difference in their teachings. When we spoke of the Vedas in Lesson 1, we said this term would refer to books written by a great sādhu who was directly inspired by God, as well as to books written by sādhus of more recent times. We said that as long as the teachings were consistent, we would keep it simple by referring to all these books as the Vedas.

Within these books there are many places where God's own words are recorded. Over time we will introduce you to some of these books and show you why, especially in regards to God's most recent visit to this planet, it can be reliably determined that **God actually said these things.** In any case, when we refer to a statement as being something God said, it is because that is the way it is recorded in the Vedas.

Śrī guru is God's Representative

Śrī guru is God's direct representative. Since he delivers the most important and sacred knowledge about God, and he does so on His behalf, he is to be given great respect.

For example, the President of the U.S.A. represents his country. When he goes to another country he is given great respect. He is greeted by the highest officials and treated with honor. Speeches are made by diplomats stating their thanks for his visit and praising him. He is given the best places to stay and served the finest meals. Special gifts are also presented to him.

This is all because he represents the U.S.A., a country that has incredible power. If a country disrespects the United States they risk facing serious troubles. The United States could use its military or its economic power to damage another country.

On the other hand, if a country treats the President well, listens to his suggestions, and works to please him, they may receive military aid or economic benefits. It is due to the fact that the President represents this country's power that he gets such great respect.

If Barack Obama was not the President of the United States, but was instead just an ordinary citizen, he would not be given the great respect he now receives wherever he goes. He would not be met at the airport with a red carpet. The leaders of countries would not be there to greet him. Speeches would not be made about him.

Barack Obama as a regular citizen would not represent the power of the United States. Barack Obama as the President, does.

The true guru represents God's incredible and unlimited powers. His entire life is dedicated to God's service. All of his thoughts, words, and actions represent God's teachings.

God is famous for His great mercy, but He has also shown time and time again that He will not hesitate to protect His devotees. To disrespect Śrī guru is to disrespect God. We should be willing to honor Śrī guru in the same ways we honor God.

Śrī guru's Most Important Power

The true guru's heart is filled with mercy for the fallen souls. **His ability to distribute this mercy is his most important power.** Through his mercy he can give us knowledge that will remove us from the worlds of darkness and ignorance. He can give us the process we can use to overcome our material desires and illusions. He can help us attain prema. **Without the guru we won't reach this goal.** It is only by the guru's mercy that we can be delivered from the miserable cycle of births and deaths.

Śrī guru's mercy knows no bounds. He does not consider who is qualified to receive his mercy and who is not. He follows his guru's order to save the lost souls.

If you were drowning in the ocean, or trapped in a burning

house, and a lifeguard or a fireman saved the temporary, material body you reside in, you would be incredibly grateful. By the power of his mercy, which is a power he has been given as God's representative, the guru can save your eternal soul. Our gratitude for Śrī guru should be boundless.

Taking Shelter of Śrī guru

One of the most important processes of bhakti-yoga is to take shelter of Śrī guru. This means to put your faith and trust in his teachings and to follow his instructions. When we take shelter of a guru we begin to learn how human life is meant to be lived. The teachings of Śrī guru protect us. They give us shelter from the miseries of this life and they can help us to avoid the suffering of future births as well.

Our ability to make judgments as to what is the best way to live our lives is limited by the fact that we have imperfect senses, which include the mind. The mind is the part of us that is responsible for making decisions. Because of its imperfect nature, it often makes the wrong decision. It decides to do things that keep our prema deeply buried in our hearts.

When we are under the shelter of Śrī guru we can rely on his guidance to help us control the mind. If we follow his instructions we will find ourselves making better decisions about how to lead our lives, in a way that is pleasing to God.

We cannot reach our goal unless we take shelter of Śrī guru. When Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura was asked, "How will we attain Kṛṣṇa-prema (pure love for God)?" he said this:

The only means to attain that eternal welfare is to accept the shelter of the lotus feet of Śrī guru who is very dear to Lord Kṛṣṇa. That Śrī guru must be served with determination, and conviction, and love, and one must hear about the proper moods and means of serving the Lord from him...

As long as the living soul does not come completely under the guidance of that most worshipable being, Śrī guru, the Lord will not become the object of his vision. Those who are not aware of the qualities of Śrī guru, such as the fact that every aspect of him is entirely spiritual and not in any way a product of this world, and of his position as one's spiritual master, and of his exceptional intimacy with the Supreme Lord are totally unqualified to gain entrance into the spiritual realm where all true and pure service to the Lord takes place. Only by the mercy of Śrī guru shall we come within the close proximity of that transcendental entity.

Taking Instructions from Śrī guru

Although this process, taking instructions from Śrī guru, can be seen to fall entirely within the process of taking shelter of guru, it has been listed separately by the sādhus. If we had the answers to all of life's questions we would never feel confused about anything, but we don't have these answers. A true guru does have these answers, and, after we take shelter of him, he will share them with us.

If we need to ask a question or get information about a legal matter we go to see an attorney. For medical knowledge we turn to doctors. We do this because these people are experts in their field of knowledge. **For answers to life's most important questions, questions about spiritual subjects like the soul, God, and our relationship with Him, we should turn to the guru for answers, because only a true guru is an expert in these subjects.**

Even when we begin to develop faith in the Vedas there may very well be times that certain points are confusing to us. The guru is the person we can turn to for clarification.

We have told you that the most important rule is to always remember God. Śrī guru considers it to be his responsibility to teach you the various ways of following this rule. He will give you instructions on how to focus your consciousness on God.

We are very well aware of the fact that you may find the idea of having to take your spiritual instructions from a guru to be a

bit strange. However, we also think that we may be able to present this idea to you from a slightly different viewpoint in order to help you understand that this idea is actually quite reasonable.

The mind often tends to reject things that it is not familiar with. Since the idea of following a guru falls into this category, we may feel like it is not a good idea, or we may feel that it is not something that we could ever see ourselves doing. However, if you were to look at this entire idea in terms and concepts that you are more familiar with, then the idea of accepting a guru might look entirely different to you.

Jesus Christ was a guru. He instructed all of His followers to comply with one of the most basic teachings of bhakti-yoga, to love the Lord with all their hearts. In a similar way, although their teachings may be for people at different levels of spiritual growth, **Moses, Saint Paul, Muhammad, and even Lord Buddha can all be seen as gurus.** Since these teachers did not practice and preach bhakti-yoga, they are not true gurus in that sense, but for the purposes of our discussion, calling all of these great leaders gurus is perfectly fine. We say this because the point we are going to make is this: all religions have gurus, even if they do not call their leaders by that particular word.

Generally speaking, the Christians accept that the writers of the Bible were divinely inspired, thus they accept their writing to be infallible truths. They are therefore willing to follow preachers (gurus) who speak those truths and all others who follow them as well. This is also true of why the followers of Islam accept the Qurān and why they are willing to follow the imams.

Surely no Christian would tell you that he can reach the kingdom of God without following the instructions of Jesus Christ (his Guru), and the same principle applies for the Muslims and the words of Muhammad (their Guru).

So if we look at the idea of following a guru based upon this wider view of religious beliefs, then perhaps we will find it easier to get beyond the fact that the word guru, and the idea of taking shelter of and instructions from a guru is strange to us. Ultimately though, no matter how strange the idea may be, it is something that we must come to both accept and to make a part of our spiritual lives.

The Vedas tell us that until such time as we accept a guru and serve him properly, we will not understand the teachings they contain. They tell us that we have to serve Śrī guru with just as much bhakti, as much love and devotion, as we have when we serve the Lord, and that if we fail to do so the truths of the Vedas will remain out of our reach.

All of us should have a very strong desire to learn the truths of the Vedas. By discovering those truths, we will develop great faith in them, which will then in turn drive us forward on our journey to prema.

To learn these truths we must both take instructions from Śrī guru and serve him with love. Some of the ways that we can do this will be discussed in the following sections.

We must try to grasp all of these truths about Śrī guru, for Śrī guru holds the key to our success.

Serving Śrī guru

Another way we practice bhakti-yoga is by serving Śrī guru. In explaining what it means to serve Śrī guru, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura tells us this:

Serving Śrī guru consists of assisting him in his service to the Lord and blissfully following his instructions without any hesitations or doubts. (Periodical – Rays of the Harmonist)

Additionally, as was mentioned in the long quote in the section on taking shelter of Śrī guru, serving him is not an option. As Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura teaches us, it is a necessary part of the bhakti path.

Nothing other than the service of Śrī guru can be beneficial or auspicious for the living entity. There is no means of deliverance for the soul bound by māyā (the illusions that keep us imprisoned in this world) other than serving Śrī guru. (Ibid)

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Śrī guru will take many things into account in assigning you various types of services to perform. He may ask all of his students to perform some services, while other instructions that he gives may be tailored to fit an individual student. On this point, **Śrīla Gurudeva** tells us,

The expert guru knows how to engage his disciple's energy in the transcendental loving service of the Lord, and thus he engages a devotee in a specific devotional service according to his special tendency. (Ibid)

We must have total confidence in him. Understanding that he is an expert judge of time, place, and circumstance, we must never doubt that the services he instructs us to perform are designed with our best interests in mind. We must perform the services that he assigns to us with great enthusiasm.

We should always serve Śrī guru with love and humility. We should consider serving him to be our very life's breath. In explaining the humility aspect of how we are to relate to Śrī guru, **Śrīla Gurudeva** tells us:

The relationship we have with Śrī guru requires us to have a respectful attitude towards him. Śrī guru is worshipable for us and he is much greater than us; there is a very far distance between me and him. He is very intelligent and I am very insignificant. He is endowed with all opulence, and I am a conditioned soul. (Ibid)

Because Śrī guru has dedicated his life to bringing people to God, God considers him a very dear servant. In fact, **God has told us that there is no servant more dear to him than those who explain spiritual truths to qualified souls.** If we can just understand this simple fact, then we should be very happy to serve someone that is so dear to God.

Serving Śrī guru by Making Offerings to Him

Another way that we can serve Śrī guru is to make offerings to him. This practice may seem unusual to some, but if we look at it clearly we will be able to see that it is no different from some common practices that we all are familiar with. So we ask you to take a close look at the intent of the practice and not just the acts involved. When you do this we think you'll understand why we make offerings to Śrī guru.

When you offer something to Śrī guru, he in turn offers it to his guru. In this way the offering works up the chain of gurus until it reaches God. Since he will use any material objects you could offer him to serve God or His servants, all of your offerings become fully spiritual in nature.

Although there may be times where Śrī guru is greatly appreciative of a material offering, because it allows him to fulfill the instructions of his guru, it is ultimately not the material objects in themselves that he is most interested in. **The most important part of making Śrī guru an offering is that it be made with love and affection,** for these are the things Śrī guru is most interested in. We all know the old saying, **it's the thought that counts.**

How to Make Offerings to Śrī guru

There are many ways we can make offerings to Śrī guru. Some of the methods described in the Vedas are very elaborate and require the rules involved in making the offerings to be strictly followed. We do not expect you to practice these types of offerings. Instead of trying to introduce elaborate rituals to you, we will explain some very simple ways you can make offerings to Śrī guru. We will show you practices that can easily be performed, even in a prison setting.

The first method we will discuss may be difficult to practice in some prison settings. If you are housed in an open style dormitory where there is no privacy at all, and you are not willing to deal with the reactions and comments of other inmates, then the second method we will discuss will be better suited for you. The second method is so personal and private that it can be carried out without anyone else being aware of it, not even a roommate or bunkie.

To perform the first type of offering you should start by

preparing a clean flat surface to use as an altar. The space need not be large; it only needs to be big enough to set your offerings on. You can use a table, a window sill, or even a spot on your bunk, Śrī guru will understand that you are limited in your options.

Place the picture of Śrīla Gurudeva from the address page of your lesson at the head of the altar. You can stand it up, tape it up, lean it up against the wall, or make whatever arrangement you can. If there is no way to make it stay upright, you can just lay it down flat. You should now approach Śrīla Gurudeva with humility, respect, love, and affection.

The next step may be difficult to perform for many reasons; lack of space, concern about others opinions, or even just your own reservations. If you cannot, or do not want to physically perform it, you should at least do so in your head. What you are going to do is what we have meant whenever we have spoken of paying respects. In Vedic society, we show respects to those in higher positions in society, such as elders or priests, by performing a certain type of act. The Sanskrit term for this act translates as, "falling flat like a stick."

This is what you are to do. For males, lie on the ground, face down, with your arms extended over your head and your palms flat on the ground. You may do this facing Śrī guru or with him to your side, whatever your situation requires. For females, kneeling, place your head on the ground and extend your arms in front of you, also palms down.

While in this position, say the following prayer. Again, you may do this out loud or in your head.

"I offer my most humble and complete respect to Śrī Guru, my guru, and all true gurus, who have used the torchlight of spiritual knowledge to open my eyes, which were blinded by the darkness of ignorance."

After saying this prayer you should rise to your feet, physically or mentally. You then take whatever it is you have to offer to Śrīla Gurudeva and place it before his picture.

The minimum suggested offering is some water. You can use anything that is clean to offer the water in. For example, the cap off of a soda bottle would work just fine because you don't need to offer any large or specific amount. If possible, you should use something that you only use for offerings. For example, if you can keep an extra cup, that would work, but using the cup you drink out of is not recommended. However, you have to arrange your offering according to time, place, and circumstance, so if the only way you can offer water, which should be included in every offering, is to use your own cup, then you may do so. Just be sure that it is clean.

You may also offer a flower, a piece of fruit, or even some blades of fresh grass. You only need to leave these things on the altar for a few minutes. Then, after you thank Śrīla Gurudeva for allowing you to take his leftovers, you should drink the water and eat whatever food you offered. You can also offer something from the canteen, like a bag of candy. If you do offer something like this, you can distribute the offering/candy to other inmates once the offering is complete.

Prison life greatly limits what you can physically offer, so just do the best you can. However, you must be sure to never offer anything containing meat, fish, eggs, liquor, chocolate, garlic, or onions, and do not offer coffee or tea. No matter how much or how little you offer, the key thing is to offer it with love and affection.

If you are in a situation where you cannot, or do not want to physically offer things to Śrīla Gurudeva, for whatever reason, then you can simply offer things mentally. Since there is no limit to what you can offer mentally, these offerings should be of the finest ingredients. We spoke of showing respect to the President because of what he represents and we told you that Śrīla Gurudeva represents God. I'm sure you've never heard of the President going to a dinner in a foreign country and sitting down to a meal of hot dogs on a piece of

white bread, with some canned beans on the side, all served up on a paper plate, with a plastic fork to eat it with.

So, when you make your mental offering, make it very nice. You can serve fresh, cool water in a nice sparkling glass, several kinds of fruit, a few slices of warm bread, just out of the oven, with some creamy butter on the side. Or, how about a nice blueberry muffin. Or maybe you want to offer him a fruit salad you mentally made, containing pineapples, apples, some orange slices, bananas, mangos, and pears, with a sprinkle of coconut. Whatever you offer or prepare, try not to mentally taste it. You shouldn't offer it because you like the taste, you should offer it to please Śrīla Gurudeva.

You can also offer a beautiful garland, which is a necklace of flowers. Imagine stringing together roses, gardenias, and other fragrant flowers. Then picture yourself humbly bowing down to him, then placing it over his head & around his neck.

Although this process may seem strange to you, try it anyway. People constantly bring gifts and offerings to someone they love. And there are traditions where we offer things to people who are not physically present. For example, it is a common practice for people to bring flowers or wreaths to offer to loved ones at cemeteries. The loved one can't physically accept the offering, but it's given in a mood of love, and it is considered to have been offered to and accepted by the deceased.

You can also offer prayers to Śrīla Gurudeva. You should not pray for material things like cars, money, tastier food in the chow hall, or a better bunkie. It is more appropriate to offer him prayers of praise by simply thanking him for his mercy or for the spiritual knowledge you are receiving. **And it is acceptable to request spiritual things.** You can tell him that you want to take shelter of him and ask him to instruct you through his prison program. You can ask him to guide you in serving him. You can beg him to help you control the mind, so that you can stay on the path of bhakti-yoga. You can ask him to help you give up your material desires, to overcome your illusions, or you can ask for any other type of spiritual blessing. You can make your prayers short or long, just be sure they are sincere.

If you try these processes of making offerings to Śrīla Gurudeva you may be surprised at your results. Highly advanced sādhus like Śrīla Gurudeva possess spiritual powers that they can use to affect your heart. Śrīla Gurudeva is one of the sweetest, kindest, most loving and merciful gurus in history. He will be fully aware of every offering you make to him and he will bestow his blessings upon you. There is a good chance that you'll feel a strong spiritual connection with him through your offerings.

Two Ways of Connecting with Śrī guru

The Vedas recognize two ways in which we can have contact with Śrī guru. The first is association with his physical form. While this may come as a surprise to you, Śrīla Gurudeva left the body he was in some time ago, but that does not mean that he has died. Indeed, he is no longer physically present in this world, but his soul still lives on and can be witnessed in his books, in his instructions, and in the hearts of his followers and others whose lives he touched. He is always here and we can continue to serve him and receive his mercy.

With that, you may wonder how you can relate to Śrī guru in all the ways we've discussed. How can you take shelter of a person who has passed on? What are you to do if you want to ask him a question? The answer to your concerns lies in the fact that Śrīla Gurudeva has instructed all of his followers to be gurus.

The second way to connect with Śrī guru, is association with his teachings, and this is an equally effective way of receiving his mercy.

Most of his followers will not be the type of guru that he was, one who takes on students directly, they will be the type of guru who teach the same message he taught. He gave us this instruction because God, in His last visit to earth, also instructed everyone to become teaching gurus, so that the whole world could be delivered from ignorance and illusions. Therefore, you

can ask Śrīla Gurudeva questions by requesting a pen pal and directing your questions to him. His answers will follow the teachings of Śrīla Gurudeva. This requirement: that we must pass on the same teachings that we received, was explained in the section "From Guru to Guru to Guru." The answers to your questions will be the same as those you would receive from any guru in a chain of true gurus because spiritual truths never change.

Śrī guru is Your Link with God

The purpose of bhakti-yoga is to establish a connection with God and it is through Śrī guru that this link is established. In the definition that we gave you for bhakti-yoga we also said that this connection must be based upon a relationship with God. The various types of relationships we can have with God, as well as how Śrī guru is involved in helping us establish those relationships, are very deep subjects that will be dealt with in future lessons. However, it is important, even at this point in this course, for you to realize that without the assistance of Śrī guru, these relationships will not develop. This is one of the main reasons we should respect and honor him.

There is a very famous prayer to Śrī guru that was written by one of the greatest gurus in the chain of gurus from which the IPBYS draws its teachings. The last verse in this prayer tells us that we receive the mercy of God through, and directly due to, the mercy of Śrī guru. **Without the mercy of Śrī guru, we cannot make any spiritual advancement.** This same prayer tells us that we should offer our humble respects to Śrī guru at least three times per day. Therefore, we should always respect and honor, serve and try to please Śrī guru, for Śrīla Gurudeva tells us:

When Śrī guru is pleased the inclination to serve him increases more and more. This good fortune stands alone as the topmost good fortune and the only true reward.

If we want bhakti, we must leave all aspirations and desires other than to please the bona fide guru.

Having told you all of these things about Śrī guru we pray that you understand and accept that Śrī guru is an absolutely necessary part of a successful journey to prema.

Hearing is One of the Processes of Bhakti-Yoga

Hearing about God's names, forms, qualities, activities, and associates is one way of practicing bhakti-yoga. It is an extremely valuable process for it helps us to follow the number one rule of bhakti: to always remember God. Not only do we automatically remember God while we are hearing about Him, but, by knowing about His names, forms, activities, and qualities we will also have more things about Him to remember, and there will be more things that will remind us of Him. For example, in his original form He lives in a rural village and His family's business is the raising and milking of dairy cows. Once we hear this, we are likely to remember Him when we see a cow or even when we drink a glass of milk. So, **the more we know about God, the more likely we will be to remember Him.**

In Lesson 1 we used some old song lyrics to explain how we usually learn to love someone by getting to know, know, know them. As you hear about God's wonderful and incredible activities, and His amazing qualities, you'll find out that it's pretty tough not to love Him. Śrīla Prabhupāda also expressed this truth when he says, ***"Simply by hearing about the Lord one develops love for Him. That is the gift of the Lord."***

It is also through hearing that we learn spiritual truths that remove the darkness of ignorance from our lives. Some people are already beyond a need to acquire certain types of spiritual knowledge. For them, simply focusing on the Lord's boundless mercy, His beauty, His activities, or His incredible love for His devotees will be enough to compel them on their journey to prema. But for most of us, some understanding of other aspects of His creations and energies will be a part of our path, and we learn of these truths by hearing about them.

Of course all of the gurus in our line have also taught us about the importance of the hearing process, so please pay close

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attention as we share their words with you. Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura tells us:

“It is imperative that one hears about the Lord and what He ordains. Only then can one speak about the Lord and what He ordains...It is therefore necessary to constantly engage in hearing discussions on the Lord so that we do not end up deprived of service to Him” (Periodical – Rays of the Harmonist)

In this next quote, Śrīla Gurudeva speaks on both the necessity of hearing and on the negative effects of not hearing.

If you are not hearing you are actually committing an offense because (the Vedas) are advising you to hear and you are not obeying. So you MUST hear!

There is one medicine for cleansing the heart. What is that? Descriptions of the Lord are the medicine for the conditioned soul undergoing repeated birth and death. Therefore who will cease hearing such glorifications of the Lord except a butcher or one who is killing his own self? (Lecture: Published in “The Essence of All Advice”)

The power and importance of hearing is shared by Śrīla Prabhupāda (32) when he tells us:

One begins spiritual activity by hearing. Hearing is the most important method for advancement, and one should be very eager to hear favorably about Kṛṣṇa. Giving up all speculation and fruitive activity (works performed for the purpose of enjoying the results), one should worship and desire to attain love of God. That love of God is eternally existing within everyone, it simply has to be evoked by the process of hearing. (The Teachings of Lord Caitanya)

And further, in discussing the benefits of hearing, he tells us:

Simply by giving aural reception to this literature, the feeling for loving devotional service (bhakti) to Lord Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of God, sprouts up at once to extinguish the fire of lamentation, illusion, and fearfulness...When people promptly glorify the Supreme Personality of God, or simply hear about His powers, the Lord personally enters their hearts and cleanses away every trace of misfortune, just as the sun removes the darkness or as a powerful wind drives away the clouds. (Lecture – 6 Sept 1976)

Of course the literal meaning of hearing is to collect sound vibrations with the ears, therefore, if possible, you may want to consider reading these lessons aloud, either to yourself or with another inmate. But of course we have to be practical, so, if you cannot do this, you can rest assured that you will also receive benefits simply by reading. This truth is expressed in these excerpts from a letter which Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura wrote to a devotee who was concerned that he was unable to physically hear the words of Śrī guru.

When you are on your own, you should always read devotional literatures written by other devotees. This will, in itself, enable you to reap the benefits of listening to discussions on the Lord from the lips of devotees. Since you are always endeavoring for your spiritual welfare, the Lord is manifesting all of His narrations, the message of God, within your heart through the medium of the devotional literatures.

This world is but a place where the Supreme Lord examines us. To excel in that examination one must hear glorification and discussions of the Lord performed by His devotees. And you are hearing these through the medium of devotional literatures.

If we constantly beseech Śrī guru and the Lord for their mercy, while we read and discuss spiritual books and periodicals of our great gurus, then we can achieve the same benefit we would achieve by listening to discussions on the Lord directly from the mouths of devotees. (Periodical – Rays of the Harmonist)

We should carefully note the fact that we are to seek the mercy of Śrī guru and the Lord when we are reading spiritual literatures, for ultimately, it is only their mercy we seek, and it is only their mercy that will allow us to absorb these truths.

Śrī guru Gives Knowledge

The Vedas tell us that we should not hear about spiritual truths from ordinary men. **Śrī guru carries a special potency so that he can convey knowledge to us in its pure form.** When Śrī guru sees our humility and serving attitude he shares his knowledge with us. This knowledge carries with it all of the benefits we’ve mentioned so far in this course. Śrī guru will even tell us about spiritual truths that go beyond any questions we could ask, because most of the spiritual realities that he knows about are beyond anything we have ever tried to analyze or imagine.

The Boat of Knowledge Can Save Us

Many prisoners feel that they may be rejected by God because of the sins they have committed. During this course we will give you several reasons why that is not true. The first we will share with you is something God has told us. He has said that **even if we are the most sinful of sinners we will be able to cross over the ocean of sins that we have committed by taking shelter in the boat of knowledge that Śrī guru provides for us.**

Spiritual knowledge is extremely purifying so we are wise to absorb as much of it as we can. There are many verses in the Vedas that tell us about the importance of spiritual knowledge. One such verse tells us that **those who seriously inquire into the highest truths will come to know God.** They will do this by giving up their material attachments, by gaining spiritual knowledge from the Vedas, and by performing loving service to God according to what they have learned.



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In this painting, Śrī guru is sharing spiritual knowledge with his disciple. “Just try to learn the truth by approaching a guru. Inquire from him submissively and render service unto him. The self-realized souls can impart knowledge unto you because he has seen the truth.” Bhagavad-Gītā Chapter 4, Verse 34. More information on the Bhagavad-Gītā will follow in Lesson 6.

One guru who wrote a commentary on this verse tells us that **we cannot come to perfectly know God unless our loving service is based on a foundation of Vedic knowledge.** This is because without this knowledge, our concepts of who God is and how we are to serve Him will be nothing more than incomplete products of our imagination.

Of course other scriptures also stress the importance of acquiring knowledge. **Lord Buddha** stresses that one must learn

the teachings of the scriptures when he says:

He who does not know the true doctrine will never attain a state of perfect wisdom. (Dhammapada, Verse 38)

In the **Holy Bible** we find that knowledge/wisdom is also highly praised, for it states:

The excellency of knowledge is that wisdom giveth life to them that have it. (Eccles. 7:12 KJV)

Through knowledge shall the just be delivered. (Prov. 11:10 KJV)

Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. For the value of it is better than the value of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies; and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her. (Prov. 3:13-16 KJV)

The Vedas contain vast quantities of knowledge covering a great range of subjects. As this course progresses we will concentrate on those subjects that most pertain to bhakti-yoga, but some other topics will also be covered. In this way, you'll have a better understanding of how bhakti-yoga fits in with the Vedic teachings as a whole.

In another lesson we will share some things about a great illusion that most of us accept as reality, until we come to learn the truth about who we really are. Before receiving this knowledge we believe that we are the material body and we identify ourselves almost entirely with things concerning it.

Knowledge related to the mind's influence in our lives and our need to control it is also something we will discuss. If we do not learn to control the mind, our journey to prema is sure to be a bumpy one.

A Story With A Meaning II

Once again, before we say good-bye, we're going to share a little story with you. And once again, some of the subjects we'll cover will only touch on things that will be brought into the light in later lessons. Even still, the points we'll share are valid and we hope they'll help you to understand a few important teachings.

This little story is full of analogies. We hope that putting these truths into such simple terms will be able to help you "see" how valid they are.

The "Prison House" of the Vedas

Throughout this course we will refer to the worlds of material desires and illusions as a prison or prison house. Some of you may have thought we used this term just because it fit so well in a course designed for inmates. However, this is not the case at all.

There is a Sanskrit word that is used to describe those worlds where the majority of people choose to serve almost anyone besides the Lord or His representatives, the gurus. The direct translation of this word is "difficult to get out", and the sādhus have translated this concept into the English term, "prison house", which is very appropriate indeed.

So when we speak of escaping the prison that we have put ourselves in, due to our selfish choices, we speak in the same terms that the Vedas have used.

Shine the Light, Won't You Shine the Light

Before we begin our story, let's set the scene. Last month we spoke of a borderland existence where we all made a choice. At the time when we made that choice we were not fully aware of the sufferings that choice would lead to, but now, thanks to the mercy of Śrīla Gurudeva we can learn how to make choices that will remove the material desires and illusions that cover over our prema and keep us trapped in a prison house.

Our light little story begins as a lost and wandering soul makes a transition that all of us have made countless times before. We want you to play the part of this lost soul.

Imagine yourself losing consciousness. When you awaken you don't know who you are, where you are, how long you were out, or how you got there. Although you can't remember any details of your past, you do have vague mental impressions about some of the things you experienced. For example, you know you're afraid of heights, but you don't know why. (This scene takes

place every time your soul leaves one material body and enters a new one.)

You're in total darkness (the world of illusion) and you're afraid to move because you have no idea of what dangers are out there or what the next step may bring.

Fortunately for you, one of the impressions you kept was a bit of faith in the Lord. Believing that He will supply what you need to help you solve your troubles, you crouch down and begin to feel around on the ground in front of you. And sure enough, what do you find, a flashlight! (the Vedas)

Now you feel like you will be able to discover who you are, where you are, and how to escape the darkness you are in.

When you try to turn on the flashlight you find out that you have two problems. The first one is that it's a very complicated flashlight with lots of switches and buttons, so you can't quite figure out how to use it. The next one is that it doesn't have any batteries.

Feeling even more faith in the Lord you feel confident enough to take a few steps as you search for a way to understand the flashlight. After a little wandering a very important person reaches out to you, Śrī guru.

You ask him if he is also lost and afraid and he tells you no, he is not. He says that he knows who he is, where he is, how he got there, and how to get out.

When he says this you realize that even though you thought he was in the same situation as you, he is not on your level at all.

You show him your flashlight, ask him if he has any batteries for it, and if he can tell you how to use it.

He says yes, and he explains that the batteries that will keep your path lighted will at first be weak, but if you constantly charge these batteries (by practicing bhakti-yoga) they will provide all the light you will need, but, if you stop charging them your light will go out.

He gives you some instructions on how to operate the light and soon it's putting out a dim glow, so off you go, into the darkness, to see what you can discover on your own.

The man says, "Wait! There's more to learn," but you feel independent and confident now so you set off.

As you walk along doing some of the things that he said would charge the batteries (calling the Lord's name and remembering Him) the light begins to get brighter, but you can still only see a little bit at a time.

As you slowly move forward, guided by your imperfect senses you discover that your journey is far from over, for you are not free at all. You are trapped in a prison, and that in this prison, things are not always what they seem to be (worlds of illusion).

Realizing you may never find a way out, all by yourself, and with only one light, you begin to call out, looking for others who are trapped in this prison.

Soon you find there are many there. Some have flashlights but don't know how to use them, so you share what you know (preach about the Lord) and thus everyone's light becomes brighter. Others have lights much brighter than yours and much more information about how to escape this prison (the sādhus), so you begin to follow them.

As you continue to charge your batteries (chant, worship the guru, etc.) some of the obstacles you face begin to disappear (step 4 on the journey to prema), and you now practice with great faith and determination (step 5).

Finally you arrive at a switch that turns on all the lights in the prison (full surrender to the guru) and when you turn it on everything looks different (you see the world through the lens of the Vedas).

Unfortunately for you, thinking that you will soon be out of prison, you begin to contemplate all of the things you can do to enjoy yourself once you're back on the streets.

Thinking that you see everything clearly now, you feel you no longer need a puny little flashlight with some batteries that need to be constantly charged, so you cast it aside (stop following the

Staple

Vedas and the guru and stop your bhakti-yoga practices). After all, those things will just keep you from having a good time.

But suddenly one day the lights go out (as your soul leaves your material body, again) and you're plunged back into darkness (again). When you wake up (take birth) you only have a few vague memories, but you don't know who you are, where you are, or how you got there. What you do know is you're afraid to take a single step, not knowing what dangers it may bring. Sounds like you've been there before, doesn't it?

The choice is yours. Illusions or Answers. Darkness or Light. Captivity or Freedom.

We sincerely pray that you will take the teachings of this course seriously by practicing the experiments it recommends.

At this point in your life the Lord and Śrīla Gurudeva are showing you great mercy. They've given you the light of the Vedas and a guide to help you understand them, as well as the first teachings about how to keep your own light shining bright as you walk along the path of bhakti-yoga on your journey to prema.

Review & Closing

You've made it through another lesson. We've tried to present it in a way that was both informative and filled with so a few simple concepts that are easy to understand.

We started by reminding you of the number one rule of bhakti-yoga and that it's a rule we cannot possibly over-emphasize.

ALWAYS REMEMBER GOD! In your next lesson we will start to relate more information as to what the Vedas say about Him and we will tell you about His most recent visit to this planet. In fact, many future lessons will spend more time telling you about His names, forms, qualities, and activities, so that you'll have more ways of remembering Him.

We told you about the pocket aide that you'll find at the end of this lesson and we suggested that you use it as an easy way to keep this course with you. These aides will become a regular feature of this course. They are a very simply and extremely effective way of helping you to learn the teachings of this course.

We gave you some suggestions and requested you to do some things to help you get the most out of this course. Things like regularly reviewing the lessons, making a notebook, reflecting on the teachings and being aware of how you are experiencing them in your life, and building a relationship with a pen pal.

Since **faith is the foundation of bhakti-yoga**, we again mentioned its importance and we told you the things that will help you increase your faith. One of the important points we made was that we must accept that God's powers are unlimited, and therefore, anything He chooses to do is possible. We must not begin to develop doubts about the teachings of the Vedas. God tells us that those who doubt His teachings will not find happiness in this world or in the next.

Since **one of the ways we can increase our faith is to associate with saintly souls**, we spent some time telling what qualities these sādhus possess and we later told you what is considered to be the proper way to associate with them. Out of all the unlimited number of thing we can do with our time, **serving and associating with sādhus is known to be the best of all activities**. We also told you to rejoice because the Vedas tell us that **the fact that you have begun to associate with sādhus means that you are approaching the end of your imprisonment in the cycle of birth and death**.

The symptoms of those who possess highly developed faith were given. We also asked you to try to practice developing the first two symptoms of this level of faith. We suggested you to **give up some of the things that are unfavorable to bhakti**, like spending hours watching the television, **while you replace that time with doing more things favorable to bhakti**, like remembering God or making offerings to Śrī guru. We also told you that if we want our faith to grow we need to put forth some effort into helping it do so.

Next, we showed how **we all have to serve somebody**

because service is the nature of the soul. We explained why the best choice that we can make is to decide to serve God. Then we told you that God directs us to serve Him by serving a servant of His servant.

We gave you a tiny introduction to Śrīla Gurudeva and the guru principle. Then, after we told you that sexism does not exist in this course, we spent a good deal of time discussing the guru's role in bhakti-yoga and how we are to view his role in our journey to prema. We told you about the qualities of a true guru, how gurus are part of an unbroken chain of teachers that started with the original Guru, God, Himself. We explained why **Śrī guru, as God's direct representative, deserves the same respect we would show to God and that the guru's ability to distribute God's mercy is his most important power.**

Some of the aspects of Śrī guru principle are actually very important processes of bhakti-yoga and we told you about them and how you can practice these processes. We spoke of taking shelter of a guru, taking instructions from him, and serving him. Then we went into quite a bit of detail about making offerings to him. We did this because making these offerings is such an important practice. We pray that you'll immediately begin to do this service to Śrīla Gurudeva.

We know these practices may seem unusual to most of you, and many of you may find it uncomfortable at the start, but please try to do it. Even if all you can do for now is look at Śrī guru's picture, mentally offer him a few nice things, and ask for his mercy and guidance, you need to at least begin to practice the process of taking shelter of Śrī guru.

We probably surprised to learn that Śrīla Gurudeva had left the body he was in, but we told you that you could still associate with him by following his teachings or through association with one of his students by having a spiritual pen pal. Śrī guru's power and mercy cannot be kept in check simply because he is not physically present.

After telling you about the extreme value of hearing about God, which is one of the most important processes of bhakti-yoga, we made one last point about Śrī guru. We told you that he can give us knowledge about spiritual truths that we cannot receive from an ordinary man.

Then, shortly before this final review, we told you that even if we are the most sinful of sinners, the boat of spiritual knowledge can carry us across the ocean of sins we commit. Based on this promise of God alone, we should be enthused to study these lessons and to never lose hope in our lives. No matter how dismal our situation appears to be, Śrī guru and the Lord are always there. They are patiently waiting to pull us out of the prison of illusions and material desires that we all volunteer to enter, and remain in, when we choose to serve ourselves instead of God.

The final thing we shared with you this month was a story about being lost in the darkness and finding a light, but losing it before taking advantage of a golden opportunity. Now that you have that light, we pray that you will keep it charged and make full use of the mercy you have received.

We thank you for continuing your studies. We assure you that you are in our prayers. We encourage you to take the science of bhakti-yoga seriously and to stay on the path, by practicing the processes we've given you, each and every day. Finally, we pray your soul becomes eternally engaged in serving God, and all of His servants, especially Śrīla Gurudeva.

Help Us Spread Our Message

As of now, the costs for our prison program are being covered almost entirely by members of our team. Our goal in reaching out to others is to expand our financial support structure so that we can expand the number of inmates that our program reaches. The lessons average about 16 pages and cost about \$1.25 per month, including printing and postage.

Donations allow us to not only maintain support for current inmates, but expand our program so that more inmates will be able to receive the message and the mercy of God.

One of the ways we do this is by sending letters to prison chaplains. These letters contain flyers which advertise and encourage inmates to sign up for our program. This costs about \$1.75 to send out and includes a letter of introduction, a copy of Lesson 1, and some colorful flyers for them to post.

As an inmate, we understand that your funds may be limited, or that you may have none at all. However, if you would like to give back, know that we sincerely appreciate your support, and that your contributions will help us strengthen our program, while allowing you to also participate in our service.

In addition, while you may not have the ability to contribute dollars, there are alternative ways of sending your support, such as mailing in a few stamps, or contacting a family member and asking them to make a donation on your behalf, through the prisonseva.org website.

**May God bless you with His mercy,
and may you always remember Him.
We are, the servants of God's servants,
The International Pure Bhakti Yoga Society
Prison Outreach Program**

Sanskrit Pronunciation Guide

This is a general guideline which gives only an approximation of proper pronunciations. For those with internet access, a more thorough guide, with audio examples, can be found at gaudiyakirtan.com/pronunciation. **Note:** In Sanskrit, there is no accentuation. Instead, there is a flow of long and short syllables, with the long syllables held twice as long as the short syllables.

Sanskrit Pronunciation – Consonants

- c** - like **ch** in **chip** **ñ** - like **ng** in **sing**
ñ - like **n** in **sing**. **ñ** - like **n** in **punch**
ś - like **sh** in **shy** **jñ** - as **gy** (hard “g” like **go**)
ś - like **sh** in **shy**; also given as halfway between **s** in **so** and **sh** in **shy**
ṭ - like **t** in **tub**; with tongue against gums behind upper teeth
v - like **v** in **vine**; also, **when following s, t, or v** like **w** in **swine** or **twine** (Also note that in Bengali, the “v” is written and pronounced as a “b”, thus you may sometimes see words like **Bṛndāvana** (as opposed to **Vṛndāvana**) by devotees who speak Bengali.)

When a consonant is followed by an “h”, as in **Bhagavad-Gītā**, the “h” sound is immediately pronounced, but almost as if it is just a heavy release of breath. The examples given are the “kh” in **look hard**, and the “bh” in **rub hard**.

- ph**-like **ph** in **stop hard**
th-like **th** in **not hard**; also given as a soft sound, like the **th** in **thus**, but with the tongue against the back of the upper teeth.

Sanskrit Pronunciation – Vowels

- a** - like **a** in **about/yoga**
ā - like **a** in **father/far** but held longer
ai - like **ai** in **aisle**; like **ie** in **tie** but held longer
au - like **ow** in **cow**; like two short sounds, uh-ooh
e - like **e** in **café**; like **ay** in **day** but held longer
i - like **i** in **pin**
ī - like **e** in **me** but held longer
o - like **o** in **go** but held longer
u - like **u** in **push**; also given as, like **u** in **rule**
ū - like **u** in **rule** but held longer
ṛ - like **ri** in **rip**; also given as, like **ree** in **reed**
ḥ - like **ah** in **aha!** or **oh** in **oho!**; the vowel repeats before then after the **ḥ** when written, but the second sound is not often pronounced when spoken

1. Name at least 3 ways you practiced the number one rule in the Vedas in the month between Lesson 1 and Lesson 2.
2. For you personally; what was the most effective tool you used to follow the number one rule?
3. How important is time to you? Why do you feel that way?
4. Based on the last two paragraphs in, “Some Suggestions and Requests”, has your view on anything that happened to you changed since you started this course? If so, how and why?
5. Name two ways you can increase your faith.
6. Try to say a few words about why the activities named above will increase your faith.
7. Can you name something that is impossible?
8. Which of the qualities of a sādhu do you find most impressive?
9. What are the six symptoms of highly developed faith?
10. Of these six symptoms, which do you feel will be the hardest to develop?
11. Have you made an effort to follow either of the first two symptoms? If yes, what have you done?
12. If you answered, “Yes”, to question 11, have you felt a positive change for having made this effort?
13. What short definition for “bhakti” have we given here?
14. What determines how much faith we have?
15. Name the four reasons that people begin to worship God?
16. What does it mean to, “associate with sādhus”?
17. What are the first two steps on the journey to prema?
18. Can you go through life without serving anyone?
19. What does a true guru do?
20. Which of the qualities of a guru do you find most amazing?
21. What is one way that we can tell that someone may not be a true guru?
22. When are “Śrī” and “Sṛī” used?
23. Why should we honor and respect the guru?
24. Try to say a few words about the importance of taking instructions from a guru.
25. Have you begun to make offerings to Sṛī Gurudeva?
26. If you answered, “Yes”, to question 25, what are you offering to Him?
27. Do you have any trouble accepting the truth that we cannot make spiritual advancement without the mercy of a guru? If you said, “Yes”; what troubles you about this teaching?
28. Why is it so important for us to gain spiritual knowledge?
29. For you; what was the most important thing that you learned from this lesson? Why did you choose that particular teaching?

You may participate in this course or use these questions for self-study. You may start this course at any time by sending your answers to our Alachua team, the address can be found on the bottom of Page 1.

Staple

POCKET AIDE - LESSONS 1 & 2

Remove this aide from the lesson.

Fold it in various ways along the lines.

Keep this aide with you for easy reference.

Lesson Two**The Guru Prayer**

I offer my most humble and complete respects to Śrī Guru (The Lord), my guru, and all true gurus, who have used the torchlight of spiritual knowledge to open my eyes, which were blinded by the darkness of ignorance.

The Symptoms of Highly Developed Faith

- 1) Taking a vow to only accept things that are favorable to practicing bhakti-yoga
- 2) Taking a vow to reject everything that is unfavorable to practicing bhakti-yoga
- 3) Having complete trust in the Lord as your only protector. "The Lord is my only protector. I cannot gain anything by practices that are not designed to keep me under His shelter."

Lesson One - Definitions**Veda** - The total of all knowledge.

Scriptures containing spiritual truths.

Prema - Pure love of God.**Faith** - An honest-hearted faith in God's existence that causes us, by our own free will, to make an attempt to reach the Lord; faith in the Vedas**Religion** - A state of mind or way of expressing love for or trust in God, and one's will and effort to act according to the will of God.**Yoga** - To link up to; to connect with. A spiritual discipline designed to connect us with God.**Bhakti** - (Direct meaning) To render service; (Broader meaning) A loving mood that causes a strong desire to serve the Lord**The Symptoms of Highly Developed Faith (cont.)**

- 4) Depending totally on the Lord by accepting Him as your only maintainer. "I cannot obtain anything from my own efforts. I cannot even maintain myself. I will serve God as far as I am able and He will take care of me."
- 5) Submitting yourself entirely to the Lord in full surrender. "Who am I? I am His. My duty is to fulfill His desires."
- 6) Having total humility. "I am wretched and insignificant. I possess no material wealth."

Bhakti-yoga - Serving God by favorably & voluntarily engaging in a spiritual discipline wherein every action is performed solely for His benefit, and where the only goal is to connect with God via a relationship with Him that is based on loving service.

Lesson Two - Definitions**Sādhū** - A highly advanced practitioner of bhakti-yoga who possesses all of the listed qualities.**Bhakti** - Performing loving service to God.**Devotee** - A person who devotes their life to God by practicing bhakti-yoga.**Śrīla** - A title of honor and respect, often meaning "a knower of the Vedas."**The Qualities of A Sādhū**

A sādhū is a highly advanced practitioner of bhakti-yoga. He sees all beings equally. He is peaceful. His thoughts are focused on God. He has no anger. He is a well-wishing friend to all souls. He never considers the faults of another. He does not criticize anyone. His loving relationship with God is firmly established. He considers prema to be the highest goal of life with no other object worthy of obtainment. He is not attached to materially minded people, nor to family, wealth, or home. The only wealth he wants to acquire for himself is what he needs to maintain the body. He considers the body to be God's property; therefore he takes care of it and uses it only to serve God. He does not take any intoxicants, not even coffee, tea, or tobacco. He eats no meat, fish, eggs, onions, or garlic.

Gurudeva - The name of the great guru who the members of IPBYS serve.**Guru** - A teacher of spiritual truths.

A sādhū who can help us remove the darkness, the material desires, & illusions, that cover our prema.

Manas - The mind. The human capacity for rational thought.**Śrī** - A title of honor or respect. A personality who possesses such qualities as beauty, fame, majesty, wealth, and advanced spiritual understandings.**Ṭhākura** - A title of honor and respect**Word Pronunciation**Lesson One**Veda** + vay-duh**Prema** + praim
or pray-muh**Bhakti** + b-huk-tee**Hare** + Huh-ray**Kṛṣṇa** + Krish-nuh**Rāma** + Rā-muhLesson Two**Sādhū** + sād-hoo**Guru** + goo-roo**Śrīla** + Shree-luh**Gurudeva** + Goo-roo-dave**Mānu** + Mā-noo**Manas** + muh-nus**Śrī** + Shree

Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa - Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare - Hare Rāma Hare Rāma - Rāma Rāma Hare Hare

The Qualities of A True Guru

A true guru has all of the qualities of a sādhu. He practices and teaches bhakti-yoga. He is humble and has all the other symptoms of highly developed faith. He never says, “I am God”, or, “I can make you God.” He only considers himself to be a servant of his own guru. His interest in the lives of his students is to keep them on the path to prema. He is of unquestionable character and morally sound. He does not commit sinful activities.

Keeping IPBYS Informed

Now that you have shown the faith to request this course, we will continue to send it to you. **If, however, you should decide that you no longer wish to receive it, please inform our Durham team members.** Our resources are limited and our staff makes special efforts to personally raise the funds that allow us to send these lessons to you, so please be sure to contact us if you ever decide to no longer study or participate in this course. Thank you.

The Qualities of A True Guru (cont.)

He totally controls the urge to speak, talking only about spiritual truths or his services to God and his guru. He totally controls the mind. He can answer all spiritual questions directly and convincingly. He totally controls the urges of the genitals, and the urges of the stomach. He eats neither too much nor too little. He only eats foods that were offered to God. His teachings are 100 percent in line with the Vedas and the teachings of his guru. He is expert in helping others on their journey to prema.

Keeping IPBYS Informed

If you are scheduled to be released, please let us know a couple of months ahead of time so that we know when to send your final lessons.

If you desire to continue the course once you are released, it will be available on our web site.
www.changeaheart.com

If your address or the rules for mailing you things changes, please keep us informed of these changes as soon as possible.

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Sanskrit Pronunciation – Consonants

Only those that are pronounced in a different way than in English are shown here.

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