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THE JOURNEY TO PREMA

~ A Course in the Science of Bhakti-Yoga ~

Lesson 3

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:

Making the Effort – Uncovering Your Prema
 God's Presence – God Descends
 The Moon of Mercy Rises – The Pañca-tattva
 The Mind – Your First Mantra

- Pocket Aide/Glossary
- Altar Pictures of Pañca-tattva and Śrīla Gurudeva
- Correspondence Course

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His Divine Grace

Śrīla Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja
 (Affectionately called Śrīla Gurudeva)



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THE JOURNEY TO PREMA – LESSON 3

Dear Servant of God,

Please allow us to offer our humble respects to you. All glories to Śrīla Gurudeva. Welcome to Lesson 3. We are glad that you are joining us again as we all travel along on our journey to prema.

One, Two, Three Steps Along the Way...

Before we move into this lesson we would like to spend a few moments to review a few basic ideas and to offer you our congratulations.

In Lessons 1 and 2 we spoke about faith. We've tried to stress the importance of faith so that you'll never give up your faith in the Vedas or in the practice of bhakti. **The Vedas are the source of all spiritual truths and we must maintain our faith in them. If we lose faith in the Vedas and begin to doubt their teachings, our journey to prema will slow down or even stop.**

God has assured us that all of the spiritual gains we make will never be lost, but He has also warned us that we can remain stuck in the cycle of birth and death if we lose faith in the process of bhakti. He says that those that have no faith and are full of doubts are ruined and that they will not find peace or happiness in this world or the next. So, we ask you to please never give up your faith.

The Vedas are the spiritual foundation upon which this course is built. They tell us that faith is both the first step on our journey to prema and the root of a successful life. We believe in you and recognize that you have chosen to continue with us. This is a sign that your faith is growing, so we want to tell you, "Bravo!", and to ask that you keep taking the step of faith.

The second step is the association of sādhus. When you study these lessons or other books we have sent you, worship Śrīla Gurudeva, practice bhakti, and communicate with your pen pal, you associate with sādhus. Following their instructions is just as important as having their physical association and is considered to be part of this step on your journey. We all must practice bhakti according to the circumstances we find ourselves in, so, although you may not be able to physically associate with sādhus, you should take advantage of every means available to you to associate with their teachings, and to follow their instructions as well. Take this step each day.

The Sanskrit term for the third step roughly translates as "perform the activities of bhakti." You take this step each time you hear or read about God, remember Him, or perform any of the many processes of bhakti that we will discuss throughout this course. Failing to take this step will also put your journey to prema on hold, just as losing your faith or having doubts in the Vedas will.

Don't Stop Stepping

We know we've been repetitive on this point, but that is because this is very important and we want to be sure you are able to understand each point completely and follow along with all of the given instructions. Understanding may seem easy, but as we've discussed, when we speak of understanding, we mean knowing something to the point where it affects our actions. So you can't really say you understand this point until you also follow it.

The point is this: we must make these first three steps on our journey to prema every day. Faith, association with sādhus, and practicing the various processes will always be a part of the journey. It's not that at some point along the way we will give these things up and move on to some more important part of the journey.

In many ways, the journey to prema may be different from other journeys you've taken, but in one important way it is the same. You'll never reach your goal if you stop along the way. If we set out from New York, with the goal to reach the West coast, but we stop off somewhere in Kansas, buy a house, move in and

settle down, well, there won't be any swimming in the Pacific Ocean for us. Similarly, we can't set out with a heart covered over by material desires and illusions, with a goal of uncovering the prema hidden there, and then just stop practicing bhakti. If we do, there won't be any swimming in the blissful ocean of prema for us. We must take steps each day, and plant our feet firmly along the way. If we do this, then nothing will stop our progress.

In the first quote from our gurus that we will share this month, we find a discussion on our duty to diligently follow the bhakti path. Here, Śrīla Bhakti Rakṣaka Śrīdhara Gosvāmī first tells us what our mood should be, and he then explains that it is actually offensive to fail to make the effort it takes to move forward on the path that the Lord has given us.

"Our mood must be this: 'The Autocrat (the singular, independent, all powerful controller; The Lord) has chalked out a path and I am exclusively following that path.' If we do not follow, or if we stand still, that is an offense. And if I go in another direction that is also an offense. We must follow the footsteps of the Autocrat. The principle way of the upper life is to follow in His footsteps in a serving mood. This is the real path. All of our illusions will be conquered if we can only try to accept this principle of life. If we do not try for this it is an offense, even to our own selves. And if we do otherwise, then that is also an offense. This is the law above all law. And for our own best interest we must take notice of this."

Keeping these truths in our hearts we must make daily efforts to move ever-forward on our journey to prema.

A Story With Meaning III

Just as we did in Lessons 1 and 2, we're going to share a story that conveys some of the essential truths of the Vedas with you.

Here, Śrīla Gurudeva discusses the fact that although we are all situated in a very dangerous position, most of us choose to ignore this reality, choosing instead to focus their existence on trying to enjoy the minute drops of so-called pleasure that are available in this world. So let's listen as Śrīla Gurudeva tells us a story with a meaning.

The Tiger, The Snakes, The Rats... and A Drop of Honey

"Once a man in a forest heard the sound of a tiger. As he ran in fear, his eyes darted here and there looking for shelter. Finally he came across a 'blind well', a well that is no longer in use. Grass and plants had grown over that well and a tree grew beside it. Taking help from two branches of the tree, the man lowered himself into the well, comforted by the thought that he was beyond the tiger's reach. As he descended the well, however, he saw beneath him many snakes. The snakes raised their hoods and hissed, ready to bite him."

"As he hung from the two branches he realized that his predicament had only increased. At the bottom of the well there were many poisonous snakes waiting to bite him, and at the top a ferocious tiger waited to eat him. He was suffering great anxiety."

"Then two rats – one black and one white – began gnawing at the branches onto which he had held. It was only a question of time before the branches would be eaten through and he would fall into the pit of snakes. To escape this predicament, he had to either climb out and be eaten by the tiger or descend into the well and be bitten by the snakes. Whatever he chose to do, his fate would be gruesome."

"In this very dangerous situation the man suddenly noticed a honeycomb on the branch of the tree. Because the tree was shaking, some honey just happened to be dripping, and it was dripping very close to his face. Taking this opportunity to enjoy, he stuck out his tongue and took that honey into his mouth. He began to relish the flavor, thinking, 'Oh, how sweet! How sweet!' Feeling some happiness, he completely forgot the danger he was

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in.”

“All the components of this analogy represent our own condition. The man in this story exemplifies all souls who are attached to this world. We are in a dangerous situation, as we may die at any moment, and there is no way for us to be saved by our material endeavors. The snakes represent our many problems, coming at us one after another like waves in an ocean. We think, ‘Oh, this is the last of my problems. I will be happy as soon as this problem is solved.’ But sometimes the next wave is larger still; at sometimes many waves or problems come at once – five or six at a time. At the top of the well stands the tiger, representing death, which is waiting for every one of us in this world.”

“The two branches represent the reactions to our fruitive activities – good and bad, pious and impious. We live our lives experiencing the reactions of our pious and impious activities. Combined together, these reactions comprise the duration of our lives, and that duration is being taken away moment by moment. The black rat represents nighttime and the white rat daytime. We are very happy when another day comes and goes, but actually, the coming and going of days only means that the duration of our lives is being gnawed away.”

“Amidst so many problems and dangers, one drop of honey falls on our tongues, and this drop is likened to the momentary happiness we may feel with friends and relatives in this world.”

“All living creatures are making a great endeavor, struggling, to attain real everlasting happiness. However, as the Vedas explain, worldly things cannot give us happiness. Regardless of the position a person may hold, he or she remains unfulfilled. Even if one is wealthy, young, beautiful, educated, famous, and influential, he still looks for something more to make him happy.”

“Even the presidents and prime ministers of great nations remain unsatisfied. Throughout history it has been revealed that rich and powerful persons, like Napoleon and the kings and queens of England, France, and Germany were deeply unhappy despite their seemingly advantageous positions. In modern times we can see this in the lives of Princess Diana and Bill Clinton, to name a few. The little happiness we receive in this world is momentary and mixed with suffering. It is not continuous and eternal, nor is it complete and pure. From the lowest material planet to the highest there are so many types of misery and no real eternal happiness.”

“No soul identifying with a material body can be happy. **This human life is meant for finding a way out of the prison of the body**, which is destined to grow old and die. We want to be happy by satisfying our material bodies, but old age very quickly overtakes us and we lament. The material happiness we receive is not really happiness; it is condensed misery. **We do not understand that the soul, which is different from the body and mind, is spiritual, eternal, and full of knowledge and bliss. We can therefore only be truly satisfied by that which is also spiritual, eternal, and full of knowledge and bliss – the Supreme Personality of God and our loving relationship with Him.**”

We should all learn and contemplate the meanings that are hidden within this story, for the tiger of death is chasing everyone and the snake pit of our material problems is always waiting to consume us.

So no matter where we find ourselves, even if that is within both the prison of this body and the walls of a government’s prison as well, we should dedicate ourselves to moving towards spiritual goals, instead of striving to taste the tiny drops of so-called pleasure in this world.

Prema in Prison?

Some of you may be wondering if it is really possible to obtain prema in prison. Most of our staff cannot give you an answer to

this question that is based on our own experience, because we’ve never been to prison. However, the member of our team that did spend over a decade in prison has personally witnessed inmates who transformed their hearts, minds, and lives by practicing bhakti while in prison. Practicing bhakti in prison may require some adjustments compared to the way it would be practiced elsewhere, but it can successfully be done.

For instance, it is recommended that we personally associate with other devotees, especially with ones that are more advanced than we are. Such devotees can lend strength, encouragement, and guidance. When we cannot obtain their association we should try to personally associate with devotees on any level, but even that is not always available. However, no inmate is ever truly alone in his practice. Śrīla Gurudeva and even the Lord Himself are always present in the lives of those who dedicate themselves to serving them, and this presence can be directly experienced.

In some ways, practicing bhakti in prison can be easier than it is on the streets, as there are many less distractions in life, less things that tend to pull us from the path. Bhakti-yoga is a path that includes leading a very simple and disciplined life, which is just the type of life that most prisons are designed to provide, for the inmates who live there.

All of the processes of bhakti that we have given you so far can be carried out in prison, to one degree or another. Remember, the journey to prema is an inward journey of the heart. We should never let material circumstances stop us from working toward our goal. **All the locks, guards, fences, walls, and barbed wire in the universe can’t keep love trapped in your heart once you’ve decided to give it to the Lord or His servants.** This is a very private journey that you are on. Don’t let any negativity that exists inside a prison stop your progress.

One of the greatest devotees in history once spent some time in prison. While he was there he preached to the other inmates. He told them that they were lucky to be in a situation where they could spend so much time practicing bhakti.

Can prema be obtained in prison? Oh, yes. Life is what we make of it.

Uncovering Your Treasure of Prema

If a treasure of unlimited value was buried in your backyard and you were digging it up, you could only uncover it one shovelful at a time, no matter how badly you wanted it. If you were absolutely positive that the treasure was there, then you would become happier and happier with each shovelful of dirt that you cleared away, because each shovelful of dirt would bring you one step closer to your goal.

The treasure of prema must also be uncovered one step at a time and when we become convinced that it is life’s greatest treasure, and that it does live buried within our heart, then we will also begin to experience bliss as we near our goal of uncovering it.

Prema is an unlimited treasure. The Vedas refer to it as life’s greatest treasure. **When we have absolute, overwhelming, and unconditional love for God, we find joy in every aspect of our lives. Why? Because this love includes total trust in Him and an acceptance that He is fully aware of every single thing that happens. When we have full faith in these truths, we understand that everything that happens to us is part of God’s perfect plan. We become so confident of the fact that God never makes a mistake, that the mind becomes peaceful, no matter what we are facing.** True happiness is built upon this type of peace and understanding.

Prema also includes accepting that God is our greatest friend. Knowing this to be true will also provide us with a sense of peace and comfort.

The Vedas tell us that God’s love for his devotees is even greater than the love that we can have for Him, and yet, in spite of this truth, many still doubt His all abiding love. They see

troubles that exist in this world and they decide that no loving God would allow these things to happen. What they fail to see is that fairness and justice are also qualities of true love.

There is a reason why one person suffers and another does not. We reap what we sow, and, although most of us do not remember the specifics of our past lives, we can be sure that the things we face are rewards and punishments that we deserve and that they are fair and just, based on our past activities. The Vedas teach us this truth, and we should not doubt it, for as we discussed earlier, doubts are dangerous obstacles on the journey to prema.

We must become convinced that prema is our greatest treasure and that it is buried inside our heart. Becoming fully convinced of this fact alone will bring happiness, just as someone becomes happy once they know that a great treasure is buried in their yard. You own it and no one can take it away from you. All you have to do, is make the effort to uncover it.

As we practice bhakti, and receive the mercy of God, the sādhus, and Śrīla Gurudeva, our treasure of prema will begin to be uncovered. As the darkness of ignorance, the dirt of our material desires and illusions are removed from our hearts, all of our ideas about what is important in life will change. We will begin to find joy in things we never focused on before.

The light of spiritual understandings will cause our illusions to disappear. It will become clear to us that many of the things we spent our time on were of no real value, for they produced only temporary results, and totally failed to satisfy the longings of the soul.

The novels you read, crossword puzzles you complete, or songs you memorize are of no value, unless they focus on spiritual truths. The foul shots you make, sit ups you do, or weights that you lift are of no value if your soul gets no attention, because your focus is entirely directed toward your material body, which you'll someday leave behind.

All of our material accomplishments may seem to have value, but they will do us absolutely no good when death knocks at our door. If, however, we accomplish the goal of uncovering the prema in our hearts, that treasure will carry us to God's side when we leave this material body.

The treasure of prema is yours to uncover. If a valuable treasure lied buried in your yard, you wouldn't use a plastic spork from the chow hall to remove a spoonful of dirt a day. You would get the best shovel available and you would dig with all your might. We ask you to please take the practice of bhakti seriously. Don't just practice it here and there, for a few minutes each day and try to uncover your prema a tiny bit at a time. The Vedas tell us that bhakti is the best tool available to uncover your treasure. You should grab hold of the process and practice it with all your heart.

It's Time for Some Nectar

We've covered quite a few subjects so far in this course, but we haven't yet served up much of what is considered to be the real nectar of the Vedas. We've given you some information about the course itself, introduced you to a few Sanskrit terms, and given you some of the basics of what's involved in the science of bhakti. We've also covered the first three steps on the journey to prema and we focused on what a guru is, as well as the methods we can use to connect with one, and we spoke of the importance of these practices.

The things we've covered are important. We hope that their presentation has given you some basic understandings that will help you to build a strong foundation of faith. The information we've given you'll never become old news and the processes we've asked you to follow will not be entirely abandoned, however, as you progress farther along the path of bhakti your focus will generally shift to new ideas and your practices will change according to tastes you'll develop and instructions your

guru will give you.

The number one rule of bhakti, to always remember God, will never change, it will only be customized based upon the specific names, forms, and activities of the Lord that we choose to remember, and eventually to meditate upon. The descriptions of the Lord's names, forms, qualities, activities (pastimes), paraphernalia, and associates of the Lord are the real nectar of the Vedas. It is through hearing and tasting this nectar that we begin to know, know, know Him, and to love, love, love Him. So now, after just a bit of introduction, we'll begin to serve you some of this nectar. All we ask you to do, is get ready to drink it up.

God is Always Present

God is always with us. He is present within us and among us as well. His powers are so unlimited, and His activities are so incredible, that skeptical people make the mistake of doubting the facts about when, how, and where He is present. He maintains a constant presence through some of His forms and energies. In other forms He makes timely visits, according to various criteria, which include the time, place, and circumstances He will appear in.

In one of His forms, He resides in every living creature.

This form lives inside of each being and acts as an observer of each souls activities. Exact descriptions of this form of the Lord, including what He looks like, His qualities, and the purpose of this form are given in the Vedas. Although this form of the Lord appears in unlimited numbers, each one looks the same and serves the same purpose, whether residing in a plant, an ant, or an elephant.

Through another one of His unlimited energies, He is present everywhere, within and without every atom that exists in the material worlds, and within the entirety of the spiritual realm as well. This particular energy of the Lord is formless and has no personality. This formless energy of the Lord is one of the most misunderstood truths in the Vedas. The Vedas tell us that we are only able to understand the level of spiritual truths that we have become qualified to grasp. Because of this factor, some people, who are of a fairly low qualification, believe that this changeless and formless energy of the Lord is the highest form of God.

God is in control of everything. He was the one who arranged for a great teacher to appear in India in order to mislead many people into false beliefs regarding this formless energy of God. He did this because of a specific set of historical events that had taken place. The teachings he gave led to many misunderstandings. They confused his followers because they did not have a firm grasp of Vedic truths.

Over time, a series of great gurus came along, again by God's arrangement, and corrected these misunderstandings by preaching doctrines that were closer and closer to the truest and highest understandings. However, the number of people that still followed these misdirected teachings remained fairly large, even to this day.

A full discussion of when, how, and why the true teachings became distorted, as well as how they came to be restored would require us to provide you with a lot of information that is secondary to the practice of bhakti, so we will save any such discussion till much, much later in this course. We also do this because most of you have never been exposed to any teachings about this formless energy of God.

If, however, you have adopted any beliefs regarding this formless energy of God, you should begin to write to a pen pal immediately so that we can help you to overcome any misunderstandings you may have. These might include such beliefs as: you are "one" with God; that the goal of life is to "merge" into God; or into a "formless consciousness"; or that you actually are God or a God; or even that you can become or realize

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yourself as God by practicing some bogus yoga system.

In response to these ridiculous beliefs, we wish to assure you that **the Vedas tell us that we are not now, and never will be “one” with God. We are eternally separate entities. The goal of life is not to “merge” with God in any sense other than that we are to try to live our lives in a way that is at one with His desires and instructions. And finally, you are not God, you never will be God.** You are composed of the same essential qualities that He is, however the quantity and strength of those qualities that He possesses is unlimited, whereas the amount we possess is tiny and totally limited. Operating under false beliefs is considered to be quite dangerous, so if you accept any of these misunderstandings then we again ask you to please seek out a spiritual pen pal immediately, so that we can help you to overcome these illusionary beliefs.

The proper understanding of this formless energy of the Lord is that it is actually nothing more than the effulgence, the radiating glow, the shining energy that God's most complete, personal, spiritual form creates. Just as one cannot have sunlight without the sun, this formless energy would not exist without the form from which it flows. It does not exist separate from God's personal form.

Both of these aspects of God that we'd just discussed, the form that resides within every living being, and the formless energy that radiates from His personal form, are composed entirely of spiritual essence. They are not in any way composed of matter & they cannot in any way be limited by or affected by matter. Although these aspects of God enter into the material universes, they are ultimately not part of them.

In addition to these aspects of the Lord, He sometimes takes on very specific forms and descends into the material worlds. The names of these forms, as well as their descriptions and the stories of the activities they performed are given in the Vedas. We will be introducing you to many of Them throughout this course.

These forms are known by a Sanskrit term that may be familiar to you, either because of its use in a recent popular film, or because of its use in a certain type of internet activity. Though you may have heard this term used, most of you probably had no ideas of its real source, or of its actual meaning.

The word is **avatār + uh-vuh-tār**, (tār like car) which literally means, **“to come from up to down.”** This word is used when referring to those **forms which the Lord exhibits when He descends from the spiritual world (the “up”) to the material worlds (the “down”).** The avatārs take on whatever form is appropriate for a particular situation. They have ranged from the form of a fish, to a half-man-half-lion, to forms that look like humans. All of these avatārs are expansions from God's one and only original form. We will be introducing you to this form of the Lord in a future lesson. Other types of avatārs will be discussed as well.

Why God's Forms Descend

There are many different reasons why God decides to descend to the material worlds in the form of an avatār. Some of His visits are scheduled, almost like we schedule a yearly visit to the doctor in order to get a check up on our health. Other times He descends out of a desire to intervene in a given situation, such as to protect one of His devotees. He has also told us that there are certain situations which will always bring a visit from Him.

He has said that whenever there is a decline in the practice of religion, and an increase of irreligious behavior, at that time He will descend. When He descends for these reasons He always carries out at least three missions. He protects His devotees, He eliminates the wicked people who are acting irreligiously and disturbing society, and He firmly establishes the principles of religion, which tend to become lost over

great lengths of time.

As we discussed in Lesson 1, the Sanskrit word that is often translated as “religion” has many subtle shades of meaning. In the verse referred to above, the sādhus have determined that religion means both serving God through bhakti, and performing one's duty, based on one's position in society. Since the practice of bhakti is also considered a duty, and all of these duties are determined by God, **the decline of religion can be simply stated as this; failing to act in accordance with God's will.** When He descends, He firmly establishes the rules that we should live by in order to comply with His will. He establishes these rules through both the teachings He gives and the example He sets.

At times, He may also descend simply to fulfill one of His own desires or a desire of one of His devotees. Regardless of the reason for His descent, **there are certain things that are always true about His visits.** We are wise to remember these points as they may help us avoid any doubts about His descent.

The first point is that **all of His descents are entirely spiritual.** They have no material cause and are entirely beyond the influence of matter. The second point is that **the form He descends in is also entirely spiritual.** Although He may create illusions related to a “birth” in this world, He is always entirely unborn, eternal, without beginning, and the cause of all causes. He says that those who try to identify His form with matter or to limit its entirely spiritual nature are fools. The third point we should be aware of is that **God descends by His will alone.** Ultimately, nothing can “make” Him descend, other than His own desire to do so. Keeping these points in mind will help us to avoid misunderstandings related to God's appearances.

God's Most Recent Visit - A Sādhu Calls Out

Over 500 years ago, there was a great sādhu who was living in a small village in India. His name was **Advaita Ācārya + Ud-vie-tuh Āh-chār-yuh.** Advaita is his name. An **ācārya is a person who teaches by their own example.** One day, as he looked at the world, he began to consider the sad condition that it was in. In a nearby city, most of the great scholars of the time had gathered, and this city was considered to be the center of all learning at that time. This great sādhu could see that although these scholars claimed to be educated, they were actually just wasting their intelligence. They spent all of their time on learning, teaching, and debating subjects that had no spiritual value.

Along with this unfortunate situation, many people were caught up in misunderstandings related to God's formless energy, such as those we mentioned earlier. This sādhu, along with a few of his close friends, was among a tiny minority of people who practiced bhakti.

The remainder of society was only interested in trying to satisfy their senses by fulfilling material desires. Some were doing so in the name of so called religion, while others were doing so in entirely sinful ways. They were very focused on serving themselves, and almost no one was interested in serving God. These are exactly the circumstances that we just described as those which precede a visit from the Lord.

When this great sādhu thought about this degraded society, he felt an incredible amount of compassion for the lost and suffering souls who were wasting their rare and valuable human births. He began to feel like he had to do something to change the situation in a way that would cause people to become favorable toward bhakti. While considering what he could do to help the people, who were so desperately in need of help, he began to think in this way. “If God were to appear at this time, He could preach the science of bhakti by practicing it Himself. In this way, He could show by His own example how humanity should live.”

Along with having excellent behavior, he was also a great scholar. He knew that the Vedas said the earth was in a very

degraded age, and that **during this age there was only one way that people could obtain spiritual deliverance. This could only be obtained through the powers of the Holy Names of God.**

Although he was not sure exactly how his prayers might be answered, he decided that he should begin to worship God, while requesting Him to descend. He knew he must do this in a pure state of mind and with great humility. While he was trying to decide the best way to worship God, and make his plea to Him, a verse from the Vedas came to mind. This verse offered him the perfect solution.

The verse says that the Supreme Lord, who is very affectionate to His devotees, sells Himself to a devotee who offers him a **tulasī + too-luh-see** leaf and a palm full of water. (Tulasī is a **very sacred plant** whose special characteristics will be mentioned later in this course.) He thought about the meaning of this verse and he came to understand that the Lord feels that there is no way He can repay someone who makes this offering. He therefore decides that the only way He can even try to repay the devotee is to offer Himself to him.

Having realized the value of this simple offering, He began to worship the Lord in that way. While meditating on the Lord he would offer flower buds from the sacred plant along with water from a holy river. As he did this, he would loudly cry out the Lord's name. His cries were so loud that he could be heard from far away. The Lord also heard him calling and He gladly accepted this great sādhu's sincere prayers and offerings.

Simple Gifts - Great Rewards

Before we move on with this story we would like you to take a few moments to reflect on this exchange between God and His devotee. Isn't it wonderful that God's love for His devotees is so great that He feels indebted to them for the offerings they make, even one that seems so small, some flower buds and holy water. For many, this may be an aspect of God's personality that we never knew existed.

Although God is the all-powerful, supreme controller, He can be purchased by our love. He allows His pure devotee to control Him. This sweet exchange of loving feelings is at the heart of the highest teachings and understandings of bhakti. We should reflect on these types of exchanges between God and His devotees for it is only when we understand, appreciate, and become attracted to God's sweetness that we can truly say that we know who He is. The highest relationships that we can develop with God, after we attain prema, are all relationships with the sweet side of His personality, as opposed to His powerful aspect. We are wise to get to know this side of Him. Remember, to know Him is to love Him.

The Moon of Mercy Rises

A full moon had risen over the lands surrounding Advaita Ācārya's village. But the moon's cooling rays, that should have been shining down on that one special February night in 1486, could not be felt. The moon was hidden in the sky, because a lunar eclipse was in progress. Lunar eclipses are generally considered to be bad omens, so all of the local people were bathing in the holy rivers and calling out the names of the Lord. This massive calling out of God's names not only counteracted all the bad omens, it also foretold of the incredible importance that the calling of God's names would have in the times ahead.

During that night, when God's names could be heard in every direction, in the great city of learning near Advaita's home, a baby was born. This baby was none other than the Lord Himself. He had descended from his eternal abode to answer the call of His devotee. He also came to establish, by His own example, that the proper religious practice for the age would focus on the power of God's Holy Names.

We told you that one of the things God does when He descends is eliminate the wicked; it does not mean that He destroys every sinner. His efforts are aimed at powerful demonic

beings who cannot be killed by anyone but God Himself. These opponents of religion are usually dealt with during historic battles that end with God's victory and the death of these demons.

The form of God that appeared in this age did not act in this way. Although He also dealt with some great sinners, He came filled with such an abundance of mercy and compassion, that He would save even the most sinful of sinners with His all abiding love. During His life, He would pass out the fruit of prema without considering whether a person was qualified to receive it or not.

For these reasons, He is known as the most merciful of all of the avatārs of God. He and His associates broke open the storehouse of prema and gave it out in great quantities, and yet, no matter how much they distributed, the supply never decreased. In fact, it only multiplied. We plan to share many stories of His life with you. When you combine these stories with the things we just told you about Him, you'll begin to understand why we introduced Him as the moon of mercy.

Start Spreading the News

We know that most of you were surprised to hear the news that the Supreme Lord came to this planet just over 500 years ago. You may be feeling shocked at this news, or even doubtful that it is true. Some of you may be thinking, "If God Himself, the Father, the Supreme Lord was actually here that recently, wouldn't the story of His visit be common knowledge? Since many of the other historical events that took place at that time are well recorded, how could a visit by God have fallen through the cracks?"

To answer these questions, we could get into a long description of religious politics. We could talk about how the powers that be do not like the idea of a society of devotees for many reasons, including the effect it would have on free market consumerism. We could discuss how the tightly controlled education systems and media outlets have intentionally avoided this subject. However, we will lay all of that aside as all such topics are only of material consideration. Instead of these reasons for the fact that the awareness of God's descent seems limited, we ask you to consider a more spiritual angle. **When the student is ready, the teacher, the guru, the knowledge, will come.**

The Vedas tell us that we can only understand and practice spirituality to the level of our own qualification. **As more souls take birth on this planet, that are ready to partake of the teachings that the Lord and His followers brought, the teachings will spread accordingly.**

The news of God's recent visit is spreading every day. This is a fact that cannot be denied. If you didn't know about his visit, then you are living proof of this fact. Each time a new person becomes aware of His visit and His message, a prediction that He made while He was here becomes closer to being totally fulfilled. **He stated that His name, and the religious practices based upon His name, would spread to every town and village on earth. His prediction will come true. In due time, there will be no town, no city, no village, no hamlet, no state, no country, and even no prison where He is not known.**

The IPBYS is just one of many societies of devotees throughout the world who are spreading the news about God's most recent visit, His life, and His teachings. One of these teachings was that each one of us has a duty to spread this news. So, although His visit may be news to you, the day will come where everyone will know all about Him, thanks in part to those who are dedicated to following His instructions to spread His story and His Holy Names.

What's in a Name

The little baby that was born on that full-moon night in 1486 stayed on the planet, in a personal form, for 48 years. During that time, He went by quite a few different names. His grandfather

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was an astrologer and he gave his grandson a name after consulting His astrological chart. The name he gave Him means, “He who protects and maintains the entire universe.” He gave Him this name because He saw signs on the boy’s chart that indicated His true identity.

He was also given a name by Advaita Ācārya's wife. She named Him **Nīmai + Nee-my**. She gave Him this name because He was born under a Neem tree, and because Neem trees have protective powers. **This nickname, Nīmai, was the name He most often went by in His early life.**

Later in life, one of His gurus gave Him the name **Kṛṣṇa Caitanya + Krish-nuh Chie-tun-yuh**. In one of His other forms, He also goes by the name Kṛṣṇa. In order to help you keep this clear, we will refer to Him as Lord Caitanya, or Nīmai, when we are speaking of His recent visit, and as Kṛṣṇa when we are speaking of His other form that goes by that name.

Of course, as we mentioned in Lesson 1, God has an unlimited number of names. Most of these names refer to specific forms, and Lord Caitanya had other names as well. Over time, we will introduce more of God's names, but we will keep the number fairly small. Since **He is well aware of all of His names, any of them will get His attention. This potency is one of the most important things about what's in His names.**

There are other important things about His names that we will discuss as this course continues.

Lord Caitanya – A True Avatār

When we introduced you to the word avatār, we spoke of only one of the types of avatārs that are discussed in the Vedas. These avatārs range from descents of God Himself, to souls just like us, that the Lord sends powers to, in order to allow that soul to accomplish a specific mission on His behalf. In these cases, it is God's powers that come from up to down.

In the title to this section we have referred to Lord Caitanya as a true avatār. By that, we are referring to those avatārs who are forms of God Himself, and this section will also refer to these types of avatārs. Other types of avatārs will be discussed in later lessons.

According to the Vedas no one can be accepted as a true avatār unless they meet certain requirements. One of these requirements is that their birth be predicted in the scriptures. They also must perform extraordinary activities, and their body must have certain specific marks and symptoms.

There are many predictions in the Vedas that Lord Caitanya would appear. These predictions also spoke of some of the activities He performed, activities which no one else has ever accomplished, thus they pertain to Him alone.

For reasons that we will discuss in another lesson, Nīmai was born with a golden complexion. One prediction stated that God would appear in golden form and act as a great saint who would spread bhakti throughout the world. As mentioned before, this spread is still taking place, but there is no doubt, based on historical evidence, that Lord Caitanya was the great, golden complexioned saint who put this in motion.

Another prediction gives not only the land of His birth, it gives His mother's name as well. His mother's name appears again in a prediction that says He will appear in this current historical age and that He will begin the mission wherein people would spread a specific type of chanting of God's names. This chanting would be done by groups of people in loud singing voices. He was again predicted to begin this movement, only this time it was also foretold that He would do so in the dress of a devotee of God rather than in a form where He would be more easily recognized as God Himself. Another prediction stated that God would appear and be chiefly engaged in chanting God's name among groups of devotees.

These five predictions all come from different places in the ancient Vedic texts. By fulfilling these predictions, He meets the

first test of a true avatār.

The next test we mentioned was the performance of extraordinary activities. As this course continues, we will tell you many of the events of His life that are recorded in His biographies and we will allow you to judge for yourself if those activities could have been performed by an ordinary person.

In fact, we will take a few moments right now to share with you a taste of the nectar of His activities. The particular activity we will tell you about at this point, is one that He repeated, over and over again, in towns and villages throughout India.

By the time Lord Caitanya reached His late twenties, His fame had begun to spread. During much of this part of His life, He traveled around preaching His message about striving for prema through the practice of bhakti. As He moved about, He was often accompanied by thousands of followers. Often, by the time He would arrive in a town, huge crowds of people had already gathered, hoping to see Him. **Feeling great compassion for these souls, Lord Caitanya would often give everyone who had come to see Him pure love of God, just by looking at them.** The crowds would then laugh, cry, dance, sing, and shout the names of God, while they experienced a greater level of happiness than they had ever known before.

Who but God Himself could possibly enter into the hearts of hundreds of thousands of people, with just a glance of His eyes, and give them prema so easily?

Many descendants of the people who witnessed these miracles still live in the towns and villages where they took place. These descendants still worship Lord Caitanya as God Himself, just as their ancestors did. The stories of Lord Caitanya's visits have been passed down from generation to generation and are known to be based on factual events.

The third test of a true avatār that we listed was that He must have certain types of marks and symptoms on His body. When Nīmai was still a newborn baby, His parents noticed that the lines on the bottoms of His feet formed certain symbols. The Vedas tell us that God's feet are marked with very specific symbols, and the symbols on Nīmai's feet perfectly matched those that mark the feet of God. They were a flag, a thunderbolt, a conch shell, a disc, and a flower.

When Nīmai's parents noticed these signs, they sought out their baby's grandfather, the same one who did His astrological chart. When he saw these symbols he also noted that the body of Nīmai contained thirty-two symptoms that mark a great personality. These bodily parts are also mentioned in the Vedas. They include very specific references to many parts of the body such as large eyes, fine teeth, reddish palms, a raised nose, and a broad forehead and chest.

When His grandfather found that Nīmai had every one of these symptoms, and all of the signs on His feet as well, he predicted that Nīmai would preach the path of bhakti and deliver the souls of everyone in the material worlds.

For all of these reasons, Lord Caitanya is accepted by the Vedas as a true avatār of God Himself.

Lord Caitanya – His Life & Teachings

The life and teachings of Lord Caitanya are extremely well documented events of history. Four major biographies were written about His life and they were all completed within a short time after He left the planet. Of these four books, two in particular have been praised by scholars as outstanding works that depict accurate accounts of His life and teachings.

One of these books was written by a great sādhu, whose mother had known Lord Caitanya. One of the Lord's greatest followers was the guru of this sādhu and he assigned him the task of writing about the Lord's life. In order to fulfill this mission, he traveled to many of the places that had been visited by the Lord. **He conducted interviews with people who knew Lord Caitanya personally, including His mother and His friends**

and followers. These eyewitness accounts of the Lord's activities allowed the author to give detailed descriptions of a large number of events in His life. This book is extremely well written and it paints a vivid picture of Lord Caitanya, His life, and the times He lived in.

The other biography that is so well renowned was written by one of the greatest scholars of the time. His main sources of information were the accounts of the Lord's life that he received, in person, from one of the Lord's closest and greatest devotees, and accounts of the Lord that were written in two diaries that were kept by highly advanced devotees, who spent years living in the Lord's personal company. The relationship between the Lord and the writers of these diaries were incredibly intense. They shared this special relationship because they both possessed understandings of the deepest truths regarding how God relates to His devotees, and also because they are eternally connected to each other in the spiritual world.

The scholar who wrote the second highly acclaimed biography had read the other book about the Lord's life. He considered it to be such a great work that he generally avoided covering subjects that had been discussed in it. The first book focused heavily on events in the early part of the Lord's life and, although it naturally covered some of His teachings, its main focus was on His activities.

The second book covered many events in the later part of the Lord's life. It also went into much greater detail regarding the philosophy and teachings of Lord Caitanya. This second book quoted extensively from the Vedas in order to fully support its conclusions.

During the course of His 48 year visit, Lord Caitanya gave instructions to many of His followers. However, there were two brothers who were special recipients of His mercy. He took the time to give each of them individual and specific instruction on His teachings. He also empowered them to write about His teachings. These teachings contained spiritual truths so advanced that some of them had not been revealed before. These two brothers were both great scholars and they recorded the Lord's teachings in many books. Some of these books are written in very scholarly styles, while others contained pure truths presented in the form of stories, plays, poems, or prayers. These books cover a wide array of subjects that the Lord had taught them about, up to and including the development, and symptoms, of the highest levels of prema.

The author of the second, more scholarly account of the Lord's life had access to many of the works of these brothers. He freely quotes from them throughout his work. This further shows that his book is totally in accord with the direct teachings of the Lord.

The Vedic quotes relied on by this author not only establish that Lord Caitanya is God Himself, but they also show that His closest associates were eternal associates of God, who descended with Him in order to assist Him in His pastimes. He also demonstrated that Lord Caitanya's teachings are one hundred percent in line with Vedic truths.

There were other books that were written by people who were close personal associates of the Lord. One of these books was written by a devotee who grew up with Nīmai, went to school with Him, and remained very close to Him throughout His entire visit. This small book is held in high regard by those who study and appreciate Lord Caitanya's descent. This book contains wonderful stories about their relationship, and other events that are not included in any other book. The author had profound love for the Lord and this sentiment is clearly portrayed, both by his words, and in his writing style.

Lord Caitanya's visit to this material world was from 1486 to 1534. Most of these books were completed by the mid to late 1500's. The latest completion date of these books was that of the second scholarly biography. It was completed in 1615. This book,

as well as most all of the books written about the Lord are still in print today. Many of them have been translated into English.

The translation, publication, and distribution of these types of books has always played an important part in the mission of the Lord's followers. This aspect of the mission was of critical importance to Śrīla Gurudeva. He translated many books himself, and he continuously instructed his followers that these types of books must be distributed. He also instructed his followers to continue to translate these important works and to make them available to others.

Along with this large collection of writings that verify the Lord's visit, there are physical remains from that time that can still be seen today. In a room where He often slept during the latter part of His life, a pair of His shoes and a water pot of His are preserved.

As we mentioned earlier, there are places where the direct descendants of those He gifted with prema still live. In some of these villages, Deities of Lord Caitanya were installed in temples during the time of His visit. Many of those same Deities still exist and They are being worshipped to this day, just as they were over 500 years ago. (Note – A Deity is a form of the Lord which is originally constructed of material elements. It resembles what most would think of as a statue. However once the Lord decides to inhabit this form It becomes fully spiritual. It is an expansion, a form of God Himself. He accepts this form out of kindness so that we can worship Him and make offerings to Him. This form of the Lord will be discussed in more detail in future lessons.)

Along with these physical remains from the Lord's lifetime there are several large and impressive temples that were built by His direct associates. The two brothers mentioned earlier were renounced monks with no wealth or possessions of their own, but, by God's arrangement, they both discovered Deities. They were also able to construct magnificent temples for the Deities to reside and be worshiped in. These Deities and temples, as well as others built by the Lord's followers can still be visited today.

The tombs of many of the Lord's greatest followers, including those of the two brothers, still exist and are considered to be very holy places.

If we take all of this evidence of Lord Caitanya's visit and teachings into account, then we are bound to accept them as historical facts. As this course progresses, we will continue to share His life and teachings with you. By developing faith in Him, and by calling out and taking shelter of His name, we can make rapid advancements on our journey to prema.

Śrīla Gurudeva Speaks on Lord Caitanya's Mercy

We are all very fortunate to live at a time when Lord Caitanya's mercy is being distributed on this planet. As this course progresses we will continue to explain how He delivered the highest and purest secrets of the science of bhakti to us.

In the following quote from Śrīla Gurudeva, he discusses both the fortunate situation that we are all in and the misfortune that will arise for those who fail to take advantage of Lord Caitanya's mercy.

"The flood of full prema was present everywhere during [Lord Caitanya's] pastimes. Everywhere there were waves of that flood."

**[caitanyāvatāre vahe premāmṛta-vanya
saba jīva preme bhāse, pṛthivi haila dhanyā]
e-vanyāyayenā bhāse, sei jīva chāra
koti-kalpe kabhutāra nāhika nitāra**

(Śrī Caitanya-Caritāmṛta Antya 3.254-255)

[Due to the descent of Lord Caitanya, there is now a flood of the eternal nectar of prema. All living entities (jīvas) are floating in that flood. The entire world is now thankful to the Lord.]

[Anyone who does not float in this inundation is [fallen and]

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most condemned. Such a person cannot be delivered for millions of kalpas. (one kalpa is equal to 4,320,000,000 years)]

"Those waves are still going on today, and those who are fortunate can take a bath in the flood. Those who are not taking this bath are very unfortunate. Chāra means 'wretched' and 'fallen'. If you are not taking a bath in that flood of love and affection of Caitanya Mahāprabhu, then millions of your births will go in vain; you'll gain nothing."

"In this human form, at this present time, you are very near to that flood, as only four or five hundred years have passed since [Lord Caitanya's] time. Still, so many waves are coming. Try to take a bath in this, and thus become fortunate enough to very easily attain Kṛṣṇa-prema. We are helping you."

We at the IPBYS Prison Outreach Program are also dedicated to helping you become swept up in the ways of the ocean of prema which Lord Caitanya has brought to this world. We ask you to reflect on both the great fortune you will receive by bathing in this ocean (through the practice of bhakti-yoga), while also considering the great misfortune you will face, for trillions of years, if you deny yourself this opportunity.

While we are wise to consider such truths, and to carefully use the short moments we may have, as we hang in the well of this world, we need not ever feel that we must face our situation alone, for when Lord Caitanya descended, He also brought His eternal associates with Him, to ensure that His mission to flood the world with prema would be a success.

In the next section below, we will introduce you to some of those associates. By learning about them, remembering them, honoring them, and praying to these great personalities, we will gain their mercy and assistance as we all walk along together on our journey to prema.

Three Great Servants of Lord Caitanya

Lord Caitanya had thousands of followers during His time on the planet. The types of relationships that He had with His followers varied widely, from His closest associates, to those who only knew and worshiped Him from afar. As we mentioned earlier, when the Lord descends, many of His associates from the spiritual world descend with Him. Depending on the circumstances of His visit, these eternal associates may have a relationship with Him that is in some way different than it was during a previous visit.

Each of the servants of Lord Caitanya that we will discuss in this section are these types of eternal associates. For now, we will only be discussing the personality and relationship that they had with Lord Caitanya. In future lessons we will reveal other truths about these associates that will provide you with a deeper understanding of their personalities. This knowledge will help you to understand the unique roles they played in the pastimes of Lord Caitanya.

Although these three great personalities all have a different type of relationship with the Lord, there was one factor that they all had in common. Each of them considered Lord Caitanya as their master and themselves as His servant, which is of course a core principle of bhakti.

These three great servants of the Lord are highly advanced pure devotees, which alone makes them worthy of our honor, respect, and worship. When you come to understand the positions they hold in other pastimes of the Lord, and in the spiritual world, then you'll be able to grasp why they are worshiped right along with Lord Caitanya Himself.

The first of these great servants that we'll introduce you to was a very close and dear friend of the Lord's throughout His life. His name is **Gadādhara Pandit + Guh-dād-huh-ruh or Guh-dād-hur (dād like rod) Pun-dit**. Gadādhara is his name, and **pandit is a title a title given to someone who is a great scholar.**

The relationship between Lord Caitanya and Gadādhara Pandit

was so close that Lord Caitanya was even given a name that means, "the life and soul of Gadādhara Pandit." Gadādhara Pandit could not bear to be separated from the Lord. Once, when Lord Caitanya was preparing to go on a journey to visit a holy city, Gadādhara Pandit had requested to be allowed to travel with Him. When Lord Caitanya told him that he should stay behind, and left without him, the pain of separation was so great that Gadādhara Pandit became unconscious and fell to the ground.

The Lord did not leave His dear friend behind because He was unaware of Gadādhara Pandit's love, He did so because Gadādhara Pandit had taken a vow to remain in the holy city where Lord Caitanya lived. This was a special type of sacred vow and it would have been sinful for him to leave that city for any reason. Lord Caitanya wanted to protect His friend's vow, so He told him that he must remain there; in this way, He preserved the reputation of His devotee.

The Vedas tell us that the love that existed between Lord Caitanya and Gadādhara Pandit is very difficult to understand, even for advanced devotees. We are told that we can receive the shelter of Lord Caitanya just by listening to the stories about the incidents that took place between the Lord and Gadādhara Pandit. In another lesson we will also tell you more about the eternal relationship between the Lord and another form of Gadādhara Pandit. This information will help you to understand the deep, complex nature of their friendship.

The next great servant of the Lord that we will introduce is named **Prabhu Nityānanda + Prab-hoo Nit-yā-nun-duh**. Nityānanda was His name, and **Prabhu is a title meaning "master."** This does not refer to a master such as an owner or boss, instead it refers to a **master of a spiritual nature, a leader, a teacher, a mentor.**

The reason that we capitalized the pronoun "His" when we referred to Prabhu Nityānanda was because He is also an avatār of God. This is a very extensive subject that will be dealt with in future lessons. In fact, Advaita Ācārya is also an avatār, and we could have capitalized pronouns that referred to him as well. However, to keep this from becoming too confusing of an issue, we will keep this capitalization to a minimum. For now, it is enough to know that Lord Nityānanda is an aspect of God Himself.

Lord Nityānanda was one of Lord Caitanya's greatest preachers. In fact, He was one of the first two devotees that the Lord sent out to preach to lost souls. He and another devotee were instructed to go door to door and beg for donations, which is a common practice of sādhus in India. Generally, all that is asked for is a little food or water, and the sādhu carries a special pot for them to be placed in. However, when Prabhu Nityānanda was sent out to preach, he was told to ask the people to say the name of God, even just one time, and that this was all he was to beg for.

The relationship between the Lord and Prabhu Nityānanda was also very close, but in a different, more brotherly way than most. The reason for this will come out in future lessons. Prabhu Nityānanda was so incredibly dear to Lord Caitanya that one who receives the mercy of Prabhu Nityānanda automatically attains the Lord's mercy as well.

Devotees who have the same guru are sometimes known as god-brothers. Prabhu Nityānanda had the same guru that Lord Caitanya's guru did, therefore he could be described as being Lord Caitanya's god-uncle. This position would usually have required Lord Caitanya to show special honor and respect to Prabhu Nityānanda. Prabhu Nityānanda was also "older", at least on a material time scale, than the Lord. This was another factor that should have made Him the Lord's superior. But Prabhu Nityānanda never accepted that designation, He always considered Himself to be inferior to Lord Caitanya. The only role He would accept was that of the Lord's servant.

Advaita Ācārya also held these same theoretically superior positions to Lord Caitanya, but he also only identified himself as the Lord's servant.

There are many stories about Prabhu Nityānanda in the biographies of Lord Caitanya. There was also a separate biography written about His life by one of His followers. You'll learn a lot about Prabhu Nityānanda during this course. In fact, before we move on to tell you about the next great servant of Lord Caitanya we're going to share some words spoken by Lord Caitanya Himself, wherein He discusses the exalted position of Lord Nityānanda.

In reading these quotes we should be fully aware of the fact that Lord Caitanya derives a great deal of satisfaction when He praises His devotees, and that His doing so is significant in other ways as well. These truths are expressed in the very same biography of the Lord that we will draw His words from. The author of that book tells us:

"It is the nature of the Supreme Personality of God, Lord Caitanya, to be subservient to the loving devotional attitudes of His devotees. Therefore, the Lord specifically likes to glorify His surrendered devotees. There is a special significance to hearing the Lord glorify His own devotees. The Lord and His devotees like to glorify each other and in this way increase their attachment for one another. I have faithfully presented that which has been given in the Vedic literatures about the relationship between the Supreme Lord and His devotees. Lord Nityānanda has only one thought in His mind. "Lord Caitanya is My Lord in every respect, and I am His devoted servant. Those who consider Me to be the servant of My Lord and master Śrī Caitanya become very dear to Me and they receive My shelter."" (Śrī Caitanya Bhāgavatam)

So here we find that, although He is also the Lord, Lord Nityānanda always thinks of Himself only as a servant, and now, in the following quotes from Lord Caitanya, we will see how He also takes a humble position in praising Lord Nityānanda.

When reading the Lord's words we should be aware of the fact that, although He is God Himself, when He came as Lord Caitanya His heart was, in most cases, filled only with the mood of being a humble servant of the Lord. Lord Caitanya says:

"Now I understand that You, Lord Nityānanda, are the fully fledged manifestation of the Lord's energy. You are non-different from Him. The living entities can get loving devotional service (prema-bhakti) at the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa simply by worshipping You. You purify the entire cosmic manifestation, and Your spiritual nature is inconceivable, incomprehensible, and esoteric. You are the personification of prema and even a moment's association with You can dissolve millions of sins. I can understand that Lord Kṛṣṇa intends to purify and redeem Me by giving Me Your association. It is My great fortune that I was able to see Your lotus feet. And I know that if I worship Your lotus feet, then I will surely receive the love of Kṛṣṇa." (Ibid)

Later, in this same book, Lord Caitanya again tells us about the magnificence of Lord Nityānanda when He says:

"One attains the exalted position of becoming a pure devotee of the Supreme Lord only by Nityānanda's grace. All of you should know that He is the embodiment of Lord Kṛṣṇa's full spiritual potencies. Lord Nityānanda is identical to and is the immediate expansion of Lord Kṛṣṇa. He expands Himself as Lord Kṛṣṇa's bed, ornaments, and other such paraphernalia. His character and pastimes are a mystery even in the Vedic literatures, and yet He is also everyone's maintainer, protector, and friend. All of His activities are full of devotional nectar of Kṛṣṇa. It is easy to attain the highest perfectional love of Kṛṣṇa by serving Him." (Ibid)

By contemplating these direct quotes of the Lord Himself we can begin to grasp the uniqueness of both Lord Nityānanda and

of the relationship that exists between the various moods, expansions, and relationships of the Lord.

The third great servant of the Lord that we will introduce you to is named Śrīvās + Shree-vās. Śrīvās was a good friend of Advaita Ācārya and he was among the few who were practicing bhakti before the time of Lord Caitanya's visit. He and Advaita Ācārya used to spend time together studying the Vedas. They would also sing the names of God while playing musical instruments and dancing. Śrīvās was also a friend of Lord Caitanya's parents. Since he was a member of the priestly class he performed some of the religious ceremonies at the time of Nīmai's birth.

Although many suspected that Lord Caitanya was an avatār of God, Lord Caitanya generally did not display this aspect of His true nature. In public He would deny His divinity and He would tell His followers not to speak of Him as God. Śrīvās was one of the first followers of Lord Caitanya to begin glorifying Him as God by chanting His name in public. When Lord Caitanya came to understand that this was being done, He decided to allow it because His devotees were chanting His name due to their love for Him. **The Lord is so kind, He often gives up His own personal desires in order to satisfy the desires of His devotees.**

When Nīmai was young, He hid His divine nature from almost everyone. He also behaved in ways that upset the local people, especially the devotees. He would intentionally get into arguments with them and showed no real interest in bhakti. But, immediately upon accepting a guru, His entire attitude changed.

Having become a devotee, He now began holding nightly chanting and dancing parties in the courtyard of Śrīvās' house. Later, when the Lord left His home town, He told Śrīvās that whenever Śrīvās chanted the names of God and danced, that He would appear and dance with Him. This shows the special love that Lord Caitanya had for His servant Śrīvās.

The Pañca-tattva

When we take the five individuals that we have introduced in this lesson, and combine them together, they become an especially powerful and merciful aspect of Lord Caitanya's mission. This group is known as **Pañca-tattva + Pun-chuh tut-twuh**. Pañca means "five" and tattva means "truth, reality, or the essence or substance of a thing."

The personalities do not just represent five great truths, they are these five great realities. **Lord Caitanya is the Supreme Lord. Prabhu Nityānanda is an expansion of the Lord. Advaita Ācārya is an avatār in the form of a devotee of the Lord. Gadādhara Pandit is the spiritual energy of the Lord, and Śrīvās is a pure devotee of the Lord.** It can be difficult to separate and understand the nature of these different personalities/ realities, but as this course progresses we will try to give you the knowledge you need to absorb these truths. **Although this is a deep subject, the Vedas assure us that we can come to understand them by the mercy of Lord Caitanya and Prabhu Nityānanda.**

The Pañca-tattva's great significance will continue to be a topic in this course. Since this lesson is nearing its end we will leave this subject for a few moments, and then we will return to it to close out this lesson.

The Mind

The mind is a very important subject. **Understanding the mind, how it affects our lives, and how we can control it, is an important part of yoga.** In our next lesson we will spend a good deal of time discussing the mind, but for now we are just going to spend a few moments discussing the topic of controlling the mind.

There are many different things that we can do to control the mind. Although we did not point this out to you before, in these same terms, many of the practices of bhakti that we have

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discussed are ways we can control the mind.

An important aspect of controlling the mind is limiting its focus. We should learn to be aware of the mind, and to intentionally direct it toward beneficial thoughts. The first rule that we gave you to follow is totally in keeping with this means of controlling the mind, in fact, if we can successfully follow this one rule we can gain total control of the mind. **We are sure that you can see that the mind would be fully controlled if it was always remembering God.**

When we spoke of this rule we gave you a few of the ways in which the Vedas say we can remember God, but since we had given you so few of the other Vedic teachings, we asked you to remember Him in whatever ways you could. We also told you that remembering Him and hearing about Him are parts of the bhakti process. In this lesson we have repeatedly referred to dancing while chanting God's names.

All of these processes can help us to control the mind, but it is the last means we just mentioned, the chanting of God's names that we are going to focus on for a bit. This chanting can be done in several ways, which we will discuss later. Each of these processes are considered to be ways of performing the most powerful of all of the bhakti practices. We will again save a full explanation on why this is so for another time, however, since we are about to give you one of the most powerful chants that exists, we are going to give you some of the teachings on this subject right now. We hope that by doing so you'll begin to learn and practice the process of chanting immediately.

Mantras – Sounds for the Mind

So far in this course, when we were discussing the use of God's names in bhakti, we have used terms like repeating His names, calling out His names, and chanting His names. We are now going to discuss exactly what we were referring to by "His names" and we will discuss a bit about why we should repeat, call out, and chant "His names."

We are slowly introducing Sanskrit terms to you. We will keep the usage of these words to a minimum, mainly because this course is designed to focus on teachings and practice rather than terminology. Therefore, **whenever we do introduce a Sanskrit word, you can be sure it is an important part of the teachings, and we ask you to take note of these words and to learn their pronunciation and meanings.**

The Sanskrit word **mantra** + **mun-truh** comes from two root words. The first of these words means, "the mind," and the second means, "to deliver." So the primary meaning of **mantra** is **"that which delivers the mind;"** more specifically, **"a sound which delivers the mind from the mental platform, from material thoughts, and from material desires."**

When we spoke of gurus, we spoke of true gurus, those who teach bhakti and behave as sādhus. We also talked about bogus gurus. We told you these consist of all others who lay claim to that title. Mantras can also be classified in a similar way. **A true mantra is one that is specifically recommended by the Vedas as part of the bhakti process. It is mostly composed of a name or names of God.** For this reason, a true mantra will not only deliver the mind from material thoughts, but it will also focus the mind on spiritual ones as well. We told you that a true guru never charges money for his teachings. Similarly, **a true mantra is always given free of charge.**

Since true mantras are composed of God's names, the sound vibrations that are created when they are chanted or repeated are not material sounds. They are fully spiritual & filled with God's energies, in fact, they are actually God Himself in a form composed of sound vibrations. A true mantra springs directly from the spiritual plane and repeating or even hearing it will affect positive changes in our hearts and consciousness.

When we chant a mantra we actually practice many different

practices of bhakti at the same time. We will discuss more on this later, but for now we'll point out that **when we chant, we hear God's name, we remember Him, and we speak, chant, or sing His name as well. Each of these separate processes are performed at the same time when we chant a mantra.**

The chanting of mantras is the most powerful of all the bhakti practices. It was an activity that Lord Caitanya took part in and one that many of His teachings focus on. Since we are followers of Lord Caitanya, this course will also cover the chanting of mantras in quite a bit of detail.

The Glories of the Pañca-tattva Mantra

There is a very special mantra that contains the names of all of the members of the Pañca-tattva. This is an incredibly powerful mantra. One of the reasons that it is so powerful is that Lord Caitanya is the most merciful of all forms of God.

One of the reasons why He came to this planet was to deliver prema. He delivered it like no other avatār. He did not care who was qualified to receive this gift or who was not. He freely distributed life's greatest treasure without asking for anything in return.

All of the other members of the Pañca-tattva shared this quality as well. They all had unlimited mercy for lost souls. They never considered a person's past sins, nor their present condition in life, when deciding who to give their mercy to. No one had to do anything to "earn" the mercy of the Pañca-tattva. They needed no reason to give out their gifts. Their mercy is known as causeless mercy. They distributed it totally of their own free will, with no restrictions whatsoever.

Lord Caitanya came in the guise of a devotee, and the other members of the Pañca-tattva were also great devotees, and a true devotee is always full of mercy for lost souls.

When we introduced you to the Pañca-tattva as a group, in the section called "The Pañca-tattva" we told you that each member was the embodiment of a different spiritual truth or reality. Therefore, the mantra containing all of their names is that much more powerful, because it invokes all of these personalities and the truths that they embody as well.

One thing that the Vedas tell us, and that we should always be aware of, is that **it is possible to be offensive toward God.** The Vedas tell us specific things that we can do to offend God, and we have to try to avoid these things. **Some of these offenses are specifically related to the chanting of mantras,** for example, we should never consider that powers and glories that are associated with God's names to be exaggerations. If we commit these offenses regarding mantras then we will not receive the benefits that those mantras normally bestow upon us.

The Pañca-tattva mantra does not accept our offenses. In fact, if we chant it before we chant other mantras, it can protect us from offenses we may commit regarding the other mantras as well. This subject will be discussed in more detail in later lessons. For now, it is enough to know that **the Pañca-tattva mantra is exceptionally powerful and merciful, and it is a mantra that all practitioners of bhakti should learn.**

This mantra is the first one that we are giving to you, and we beg you to please take the time to learn it. We have told you that memorization is not a large part of this course, but some things should be committed to memory, at least as best as you can. If you cannot memorize the mantra then you can read it over and over again.

Learning the Pañca-tattva Mantra

We know that the words and names in the Pañca-tattva mantra are totally unfamiliar to most of you, and that their pronunciation can be difficult to learn, but you should not let these things stop you. You should put in an honest and sincere effort to learn this powerful mantra.

The old saying, "practice makes perfect" is extremely true when it comes to learning a mantra. We have put the Pañca-

tattva mantra on the pocket aide for this lesson so that you can keep it with you and refer to it over and over again.

For many of us, trying to learn this mantra from start to finish, as one long statement, is very difficult. We suggest that you learn it one section at a time, as it is broken down below. Once you can say the first section perfectly, repeatedly, and without any hesitation or difficulty, leave it alone. Then go to the second section and work on it till you have mastered it. Then leave it alone and move to the third section, and so on, until you have each of the individual parts down pat.

Once you have accomplished this goal, string the first two sections together and master that. Then the first three sections, and so on until you are finally able to repeat the entire mantra without any difficulty. **Take your time, there is no hurry, but don't waste your time either. Put in time throughout each day and be determined to succeed.**

Another tricky little system that can help you to learn how to string the mantra together, once you can pronounce the individual words, is to look at just the first letter in each word as they follow each other. This small reminder will allow you to easily say the complete mantra without having to read it. This will greatly increase your ability to memorize it.

Of course, these are only suggestions. Some of you may prefer to learn it longer blocks, some in shorter, or some may prefer to learn each single word before stringing any together. It can also be very helpful to write the mantra down repeatedly. It doesn't matter what system you use, just use the one that works best for you. **We beg you to please learn this mantra.**

We also ask you to learn what you are saying as well. Although the sound vibration of the mantra will be effective, even if you don't know what it means, it will help you to memorize it if you do. It's easier to remember words and sounds that have meaning than it is for sounds that just seem like gibberish.

We ask you to learn who it is that you are addressing. You can review the sections of this lesson where we discuss each member of the Pañca-tattva and in that way you can become familiar with each name, and be able to identify it with a personality as well. Below, you'll find a picture of the Pañca-tattva. You can study this picture as you learn this mantra. In that way you'll become even more familiar with the personalities in the Pañca-tattva. **We want you to learn the pronunciation of the mantra, the personalities it addresses, and its meaning as well.** We stress again that there is no time limit. If you learn one word a week and it takes you six months to string them all together, that's fine. Practice makes perfect.

The Pañca-tattva Mantra

The mantra contains the names of the members of the Pañca-tattva and a few other words as well. The pronunciation and translation of the names and other words are given below. So, without further ado, we now ask you to draw your attention to the center of your heart and to focus your love on the Lord, as we present to you, the Pañca-tattva mantra!

- (Jaya)	Juh-yuh
Śrī Kṛṣṇa	Shree Krish-nuh
Caitanya	Chie-tun-yuh
- Prabhu Nityānanda	Prub-hoo Nit-yā-nun-duh
- Śrī Advaita	Shree Ud-vie-tuh
- Gadādhara	Guh-dād-huh-ruh, or Guh-dād-hur
- Śrīvās	Shree-vaś
- ādī gaura	āh-dee gow-ruh
- bhakta vṛnda	b-huk-tuh vrin-duh

- **Jaya** means "All glories to..." This word is not technically part of the mantra, but is usually used, especially when the mantra is sung by a group of devotees
- **Śrī** means many things like opulent and beautiful; it is a **title of honor** used before the names of great personalities

- **ādī** means "all"

- **gaura** means "golden" and refers to Lord Caitanya
Note + "au" is like "ow" in cow

- **bhakta vṛnda** means "those in the devotional line of"

So the mantra translates as, "All glories to Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya, Prabhu Nityānanda, Śrī Advaita, Gadādhara, Śrīvās, and to all the devotees of Lord Caitanya."

Note + When Sanskrit mantras are sung, the exact and correct pronunciation of words is sometimes difficult to maintain. So if you hear a mantra and it does not sound exactly like you thought it would, just understand that some individuals may pronounce words in slightly different ways.

Our Final Requests - For Now

You now have your first mantra to practice and learn. As you practice it, you should incorporate it, and the personalities in it, into your daily bhakti practices. You can say prayers to the members of the Pañca-tattva, individually or as a group, and you can worship them and make offerings to them as well. You can do this in the same way that we instructed you to pray to, worship, and make offerings to Śrīla Gurudeva. (see "Serving the Guru by Making Offerings to Him" in Lesson 2)

In just three lessons, you have already received some of the most basic teachings in the science of bhakti, and you have also received some advanced truths as well. As you continue to conduct your own experiments in this science, you'll be able to determine for yourself if the proof of the pudding is in the taste.

Are you developing a taste for, or at least a desire to taste the fruit of prema? Are you reviewing the lessons and doing your best to always remember God? Are you committed to honoring Śrīla Gurudeva every day? Will you dedicate yourself to learning about the members of the Pañca-tattva and to memorizing the mantra that honors them?

Our final request is that you make an effort to do all of these things to the best of your ability. **Reach out to Lord Caitanya with an open and loving heart.** We want you to begin to feel a strong desire to uncover the treasure of prema that lies in your heart.

We ask you from the top, the bottom, and the middle of our hearts to please put in the effort it takes each day to take at least one more step on your journey to prema.

**We pray that you always remember God,
that your heart is filled with His mercy,
and that your soul is engaged in serving
His servants and Śrīla Gurudeva.**

**We are, the servants of God's servants,
The International Pure Bhakti Yoga Society
Prison Outreach Program
All glories to Śrīla Gurudeva!**

Pocket Aide Note

The final picture, at the lower-right of the pocket aide, depicts Lord Caitanya on a jeweled road. The road was constructed by a great devotee upon him hearing of the Lord's travels to the holy city. Since he had no material wealth, he began to construct within his thoughts a very attractive road for the Lord to traverse. He bedecked the road with jewels, upon which he then laid a bed of stemless flowers. He mentally decorated both sides of the road with flower trees, and at intervals on both sides he placed lakes of a transcendental nature.

As we covered in Lesson 2, you can use these ideals to assist you in creating your offerings. The Lord accepts the attitude of His devotee and sees how much he is prepared to serve Him. For a pure devotee, it is the same whether he materially constructs a path or constructs one within the mind.

Please carefully separate the top and bottom halves of the final page. Use the pictures on your personal altar and use the pocket aide to help your studies.

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POCKET AIDE – LESSON 3**Pronunciations & Definitions**

Avatār + uh-vuh-tār - “From up to down” Forms of God that descend from spiritual to material worlds. Includes people empowered by God to perform specific duties for Him

Ācārya + āh-chār-yuh - One who teaches by his own example

Tulasī + too-luh-see - A sacred plant

Nīmai + Nee-my - Lord Caitanya’s early name

Pandit + Pun-dit - A great scholar

Prabhu + Prub-hoo - “Master”, but only in a spiritual sense. Leader, teacher, mentor

The Pañca-tattva Mantra

- (Jaya) Juh-yuh
 - Śrī Kṛṣṇa Shree Krish-nuh
 - Caitanya Chie-tun-yuh
 - Prabhu Nityānanda Prub-hoo Nit-yā-nun-duh
 - Śrī Advaita Shree Ud-vie-tuh
 - Gadādhara Guh-dād-huh-ruh or Guh-dād-hur
 - Śrīvās Shree-vās
 - ādī gaura āh-dee gow-ruh
 - bhakta vṛnda b-huk-tuh vrin-duh
- + “a” like “a” in about, “ā” as in water, “ai” as in aisle, “au” like “ow” in cow, “i” as in pin, “ī” like “e” in me, “o” as in go, “u” as in rule

Pañca + Pun-chuh - Five

Tattva + tut-twuh - Truth, reality, the essence or substance of a thing

Mantra + Mun-truh - “That which delivers the mind”, Sounds that deliver the mind from the material plane. Mantras are composed of God’s name(s) with other added words.

Memorization Aide

Practice learning the Pañca-tattva mantra while using only the first letters as an aide.

J S K C P N S A G S A G B V

Pañca-tattva Mantra - Meaning Of

Jaya - “All glories to...”

Śrī - A title of honor and respect

ādī - All

gaura - Golden / refers to Lord Caitanya

bhakta - A devotee, who practices bhakti-yoga

bhakta vṛnda - Those in the devotional line of

Pañca-tattva Mantra - Translation

“All glories to Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya, Prabhu Nityānanda, Śrī Advaita, Gadādhara, Śrīvās, and all of the devotees of Lord Caitanya”



Artwork courtesy of The Bhaktivedānta Book Trust International, Inc. (www.krishna.com) Used w/ permission

Śrī Advaita Ācārya Prabhu Nityānanda Śrī Caitanya Gadādhara Pandit Śrīvās



His Divine Grace

Śrīla Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa Mahārāja
(Affectionately called Śrīla Gurudeva)

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

Correspondence Course – Lesson 3

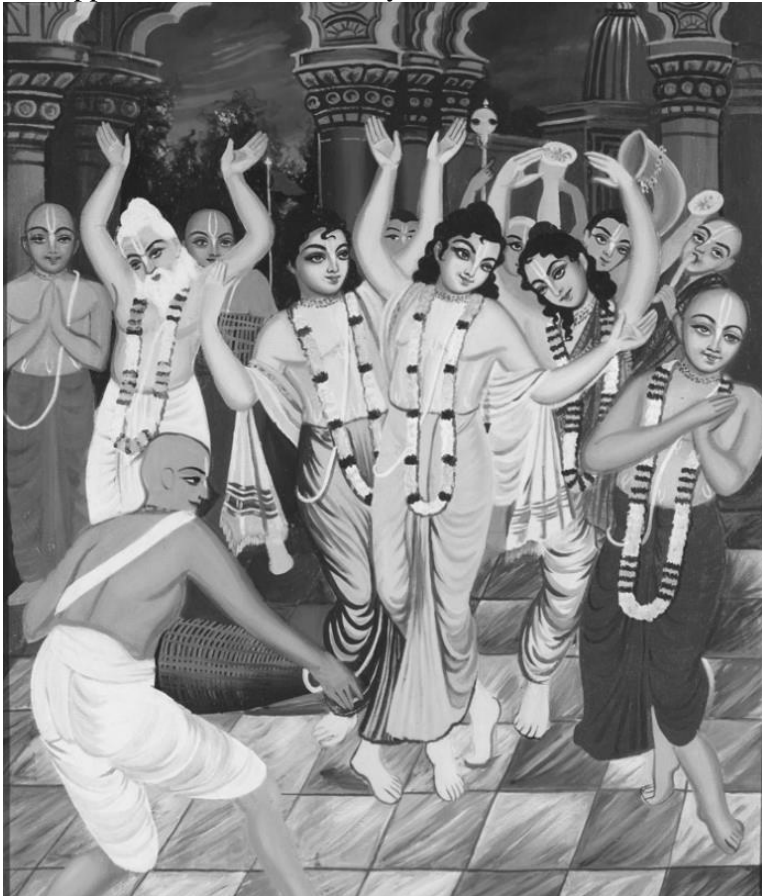
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1. What can happen if we lose our faith?
2. What are the first three steps on the journey to prema?
3. Do you feel that you have begun to take your journey to prema seriously yet?
4. If you answered, “No”, to question 3; what’s keeping you from doing so? If you answered, “Yes”; what are some of the changes you have made in your activities?
5. What is the real nectar of the Vedas?
6. What is an avatar?
7. Name some of the reasons that God descends to this world.
8. Name the missions God carries out when He descends.

9. Name three things we should always remember about God’s descents to this world.
10. In God’s most recent visit to this planet, who called out to Him, begging Him to come?
11. Why did this sādhu feel that a visit from God was necessary?
12. How can we purchase God?
13. In What year was Lord Caitanya “born”?
14. What was taking place the night of His “birth”? (Name at least two things)
15. Name something that distinguished Lord Caitanya from other avatars of the Lord.
16. How long did Lord Caitanya's visit last?
17. What name did Lord Caitanya go by in His early life?
18. Name some of the predictions given about the appearance of Lord Caitanya.

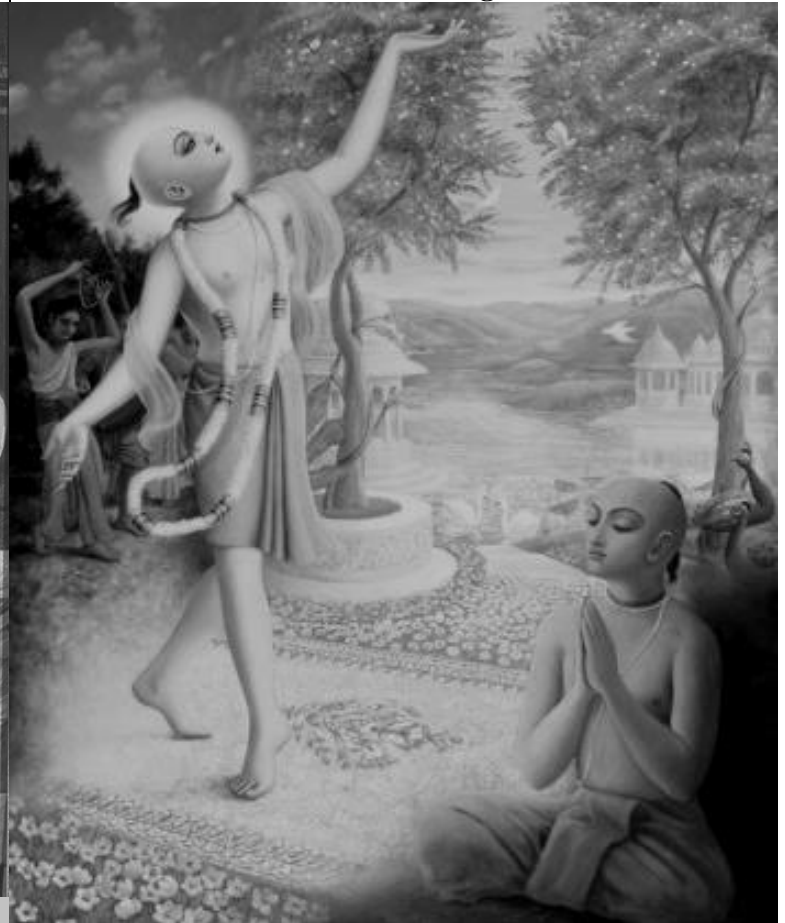
19. What are the three tests of a true avatar?
20. Lord Caitanya’s grandfather was a great astrologer. What did the name that he gave to Lord Caitanya mean? And what did he predict about the Lord’s future activities.
21. What aspects of the evidence of Lord Caitanya’s appearance most impressed you?
22. Besides Advaita Ācārya, name the other three associates of Lord Caitanya that we discuss.
23. Give at least two details about each of these three personalities.
24. Give the meaning of “Pandit”.
25. Give the meaning of “Prabhu”.
26. By standard social customs, who was superior – Lord Caitanya or Advaita Ācārya?
27. What does Pañca-tattva mean?
28. What is a mantra?
29. Name at least two benefits of chanting a mantra.
30. What was the minimum qualification needed to obtain the mercy of Pañca-tattva?
31. What does jīva mean?
32. What does gaura mean?
33. For you; what was the most important thing you learned from this lesson? Why did you pick this 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 address found on the bottom of Page 1.



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The Pañca-tattva, chanting mantras and playing percussion instruments such as drums and hand cymbals.



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Lord Caitanya on the Jeweled Road